

PHL 232 H1F: Knowledge and Reality

Instructor: Robbie Matyasi

May-June 2019

Course description

Welcome to *Knowledge and Reality*!

This course is an introduction to some key issues in two central areas of contemporary philosophy: epistemology and metaphysics. Epistemology is the study of knowledge; metaphysics is the philosophical study of the nature of reality. In the epistemology section we will cover topics such as skepticism, the nature of epistemic justification, reliabilism, contextualism, and truth-tracking accounts of knowledge. In the metaphysics segment we will discuss causation and causal explanations, the nature of time, metaphysical questions concerning material objects, free will, and the possibility of time travel. We will also cover some basic concepts of logic that are necessary to engage with these topics and that will prove to be useful in your future as a student of philosophy and a critical thinker.

The course has no textbook: all readings will be made available electronically through Quercus. I expect you to do the readings closely and attentively *at some time*—you may find it helpful to skim them first and read them in detail after the lectures, whatever suits you best. The readings will be supplemented by a logic primer and lecture handouts summarizing the main arguments and directing your focus to the most essential parts of the readings. The handouts supplement the readings, but you cannot substitute doing the readings by just reading the handouts.

Assignments and exams

All exam material will come from the handouts and the logic primer. Both essays are mainly concerned with arguments found in the readings.

- Mid-term Exam: 22 May (20%)

The mid-term will cover the epistemology section of the course.

- Short Essay: due 2 June (20%)

350–500 words

The short essay is asking to reconstruct an argument from an excerpt selected by me from the readings covered at that point.

- Long Essay: due 14 June (30%)

1000–1500 words

The long essay is asking to (i) reconstruct and (ii) critically evaluate an argument from an excerpt selected by me from the readings covered at that point.

- Final Exam: exam period in June (20%)

The final will cover the metaphysics section of the course.

- Tutorial participation (10%)

Determined by the TA.

Topics and Reading

6 May Introduction: basic logic, skepticism, tripartite account of knowledge

Reading:

- Logic Primer (sections 1-3)
- Plato, *Theaetetus* (excerpt)

8 May Problems with the tripartite account; justification

Reading:

- Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”
 - Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry* (selection)
-

13 May Truth-tracking

Reading:

- Logic Primer (sections 4-5)
 - Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (selection)
 - Sosa, “How to Defeat Opposition to Moore”
-

15 May Reliabilism and contextualism

Reading:

- Goldman, “What is Justified Belief?” (selection)
 - Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge” (§1–7, 10, 11, 14, 16)
-

20 May No lecture today! (Victoria Day)

22 May Midterm in class

No tutorials today!

27 May Hume on causation

Reading:

- Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (selection)
 - Morris & Brown, “David Hume” (sections 5&6)
-

29 May Causation and counterfactual dependence

Reading:

- Lewis, “Causation” (selection)
 - Fine, “Critical Notice of *Counterfactuals* by David Lewis”
-

3 June No lecture today!

5 June Causal primitivism

Reading:

- Strawson, “Causation and Explanation”
-

10 June Time

Reading:

- McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time”
 - Shoemaker, “Time Without Change”
-

12 June Persistence

Reading:

- Ney, *Metaphysics: An Introduction* (chapters 3&6)
 - Lewis, “Survival and Identity”
-

17 June (Make-up Monday) Persistence continued; Time travel

Reading:

- Ney, *Metaphysics: An Introduction* (chapter 9)
- Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel”