

General Philosophy

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Week 5: Analysis of Knowledge, Part I

The 'justified true belief' account of knowledge

Mandatory readings:

Read the following two papers:

- Steup, M., 'The Analysis of Knowledge', *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*.
- Ayer, A. J., *The problem of Knowledge*, Penguin (1990), ch. 1 (pp. 7-35).
- Gettier, E., 'Is justified true belief knowledge?', *Analysis* 23 (1963), pp. 121-123.

Additional optional readings:

- Any of the papers in part I of Bernecker, S., and Dretske, F. (eds.). *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology*, OUP (2000).
- Williamson, T., *Knowledge and Its Limits*, OUP (2000), Introduction and chapter 1 (especially pages 1-5, and pages 27-33).

Writing assignment:

Complete *both* of the following tasks.

Task 1: Complete a reading assignment (see separate instructions) with respect to either Ayer's or Gettier's paper.

Task 2: Write an essay (1000-1200 words) answering the following questions: "What is the "justified true belief" account of knowledge? Is each of the three components necessary for knowledge? Is the presence of all three components sufficient for knowledge?"

Week 6: Analysis of Knowledge, Part II

Amendments to the standard account

Mandatory Readings:

Read at least one of the first two papers (Armstrong and Goldman), and the third paper (Bonjour).

- Armstrong, D., 'The Thermometer Model of Knowledge', in Bernecker, S., and Dretske, F. (eds.). *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* OUP (2000), pp.72-85.
- Goldman, A., 'A Causal Theory of Knowing', *Journal of Philosophy* 64 (1967), pp.357-372. Reprinted Bernecker and Dretske (eds.).
- Bonjour, L., 'Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980), pp.53-73. Reprinted Bernecker and Dretske (eds.).

Additional optional readings:

- Any of the papers in part I or II of Bernecker, S., and Dretske, F. (eds.). *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* OUP (2000).

Writing assignment:

Task 1: Complete a reading assignment with respect to either Armstrong, Goldman or Bonjour.

Task 2: Write an essay (1000-1200 words) answering the following questions:
“What is the main difference between *externalist* accounts of knowledge, such as those proposed by Goldman or Armstrong, and *internalist* accounts such as that defended by Bonjour? How do the two approaches to knowledge relate to the standard JTB account of knowledge? How do they attempt to address the problems with the JTB account? Do they do so successfully?”

Week 7: Free Will, Part I

The compatibility of free will and determinism

Mandatory readings:

Start with Conee and Sider's introduction. Then read van Inwagen's paper, and at least one (preferably both) out of Hume and Ayer.

- Conee, E., and Sider, T., *Riddles of Existence*, OUP (2005), chapter 6.
- van Inwagen, P., '[The incompatibility of free will and determinism](#)', *Philosophical studies* 27 (1975), pp. 185-99. Reprinted in Watson, G. (ed.), *Free Will*, OUP (1982).
- Ayer, A. J., 'Freedom and Necessity', in Ayer, A. J., *Philosophical Essays*, Macmillan (1954), Chapter 12. Reprinted in Watson (ed.).
- Hume, D., *An Enquiry concerning human understanding*, section 8. ('Of liberty and necessity').

Writing assignment:

Task 1: Complete a reading assignment with respect to either van Inwagen, Ayer or Hume.

Task 2: Write an essay answering the following question: 'Is free will compatible with determinism'?

Note:

You should begin your essay with a paragraph or two which explains what claim you are going to defend, and what the structure of your essay is going to be. You should conclude your essay with a paragraph or two of summarising what you have said and what conclusions you have reached. You should try to make your essay as clear as possible both in structure and in content. In particular, if you use complicated or technical words, try to explain what you mean by them.

Week 8: Free Will, Part II

Free will and moral responsibility

Mandatory readings:

- Watson, G., 'Introduction' in Watson, G.(ed.), *Free Will*, OUP (1982).
- Frankfurt, H., 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility', *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969), pp. 829-839. Reprinted in Watson (ed.). (but only in the second edition).
- Strawson, P.F., 'Freedom and Resentment', Watson (ed.).

Additional optional readings:

- Bennet, J., 'Accountability', by in van Straaten, Z. (ed.) *Philosophical Subjects*, Clarendon Press (1980). [This could help particularly with Strawson's paper].

Writing assignment:

Complete *both* of the following tasks:

Task 1: Pick one of the primary readings (i.e. Frankfurt, Strawson), and complete a reading assignment with respect to it.

Task 2: Write an essay answering one of the following questions:

- (1) Consider the debate about whether or not free will is compatible with determinism. Is the outcome of this debate important to the question of whether we are morally responsible for our actions?
- (2) Some cases of coercion or uncontrollable action are standardly taken to be good grounds for claiming that someone is not morally responsible for their actions. Is there any tenable way to distinguish between these cases and cases where determinism fixes the courses of our actions?

Again, pay attention to the tips on essay structure given as part of the previous week's assignment.

Reading Assignment

Introduction

Although this assignment requires you to hand in written work, its main purpose is to help you learn how to read philosophy papers. Philosophy papers can often be very difficult to read: their structure is often very complex, and it is not always clear what is the main aim of the paper, which positions the author is defending and which she or he are merely introducing in order to later reject, which arguments are used to defend or reject which claims, and so forth. The fact that all these things are hard to figure out might sometimes be due to the fact they you have not had enough practice with reading philosophy papers, and other times it may simply be the fault of the author for not making these things clear enough. But either way, it is your task as a *reader* to try and figure out what the author was intending to communicate. (Your job as a *writer* on the other hand, includes communicating your thoughts as clearly as possible, so as to make your readers' task easier.)

Assignment

Write a 1 to 2 page (not longer, please!) report on the paper which includes the following sections:

- 1. Title** of the paper, and where it was published.
- 2. Author** of the paper
- 3. Aim:** in one or two sentences, describe what the *main* aim or point of the paper is. This might be for example to defend a certain position (which one?) or to point out a certain problem that has previously been ignored (which problem?).
- 4. Outline of paper:** In a brief and schematic form, draw an outline of the main subpoints and arguments in the paper. Note that you might want your outline to follow the *logical* structure of the arguments rather than the order in which they appear in the paper. Remember to be brief: you don't need to cover every point mentioned in the paper. The whole point of the outline is to ignore the details, and bring out or the main points of the paper and the manner in which they are organised.

Here's a very rough idea of what your outline should look like:

- I. The author defines the two main terms that will figure in the paper, X and Y.
- II. The author presents the view that all Xs are F, but rejects it using two main arguments:
 - (a) The claim that all Xs are F entails the absurd conclusion some Zs are F – which is implausible.
 - (b) The claim that all Xs are F only seems true in the first place because it is mistakenly confused with the claim that all Ys are F.
- III. The author defends the view that all Ys are F using the following arguments... (and so forth).

- 5. Question or objection (bonus):** Pick **one** question or objection you have regarding the paper and describe it in not more than 2-3 sentences. This can be something you don't understand in the paper (e.g. 'I don't understand what the author means when she says P' Or 'Does the author in the end defend the claim P or reject it? It is not entirely clear from the paper'). Alternatively, it can be one point which you thought was weak or unconvincing in the paper (e.g. 'The author rejects the claim that all Xs are F on the grounds that it entails that all Zs are F- which according to her is absurd. But I don't find the latter claim to be so absurd – so I found this argument unconvincing').

Good luck! ☺