

General Philosophy

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OVERVIEW

These tutorials will cover four areas in philosophy, thereby preparing you to sit the General Philosophy exam as well as further sharpening your philosophical skillset.

Week 1: Free Will

Week 2: Personal Identity

Week 3: The Analysis of Knowledge

Week 4: Scepticism

WORK TO BE UNDERTAKEN

Write: You will produce 4 essays of a length between 1500-2200 words. **You are expected to write an essay for Week 1.**

- Most papers/chapters listed below are available online via SOLO. Email me if you have difficulty getting hold of any.
- **NOTE: Essay writing is a skill.** As well as discussing philosophical material, tutorials will include specific feedback on your writing. Some things that I, and examiners, will be looking for:
 - A **clear and informative introductory paragraph** in which you spell out what you will conclude in answer to the essay question and the material you will discuss in order to reach that conclusion. This should be about four sentences long.
 - Use of **own examples** to illustrate key points.
 - Spelling out philosopher's arguments in **premise/conclusion form**, wherever possible.
 - A **conclusion that follows from the material** discussed in the main body of the essay. Conclusion of essays should be thought of as akin to conclusions of inductive or deductive arguments.
 - Avoid terms such as '**some people might argue...**' and similar phrases. For one, the fact that a view 'might' be argued for is not sufficient reason to take that view seriously (some people might, and in fact do, argue that the Queen of England is a bloodsucking alien lizard). Secondly, what examiners (and I) care about is what *you* think, not 'some' people.
- **NOTE: Examiner comments on things you should avoid:**
 - "[There is a] tendency to **list** objections to a view in the manner of a shopping list, without taking the time to **explain** the nature of each objection or to consider **whether it was effective**. The best candidates [show] a capacity to deploy only the material **relevant** to their arguments; to clearly and carefully set out each objection or line of thought; and to bring their own critical skills to bear in evaluating these objections."
 - "The most frequent weaknesses... were the perennial ones: failure to engage with the **details** of the question asked; the tendency to try to include superficial discussion of as much material as possible rather than **selecting material that would help with the particular foci** of the questions; and failure to display a **firm grasp of key concepts**. Another common negative feature of answers was candidates' **unwillingness** to come down on one side of the argument or another, preferring instead conclusions which had the form: if one thinks approach x is correct then yes, if one thinks approach y is correct then no. Whilst it **is** clearly possible to reach the well-argued conclusion that one was not

in a position to provide a determinate answer, it was rarely the case that candidates did this.”

Read: Some weeks you may read your essay aloud in the tutorial. This helps focus attention on your writing and the structure of your essay.

Discuss: We will discuss issues that you directly write about in your essay, as well as broader topics/issues raised by your essay.

POLICIES

- **Email me a copy of your essay either the morning before our tutorial (for an afternoon tutorial) or the evening before our tutorial (for a morning tutorial).**
- There are no ‘silly questions’ and tutorials are not formally assessed. Be **bold**. Be inquisitive.
- If you miss a tutorial, or arrive late, no compensating tutorial can be arranged. It *may* be possible to reschedule a tutorial in advance, but such requests will not necessarily be granted.

Week 1: Free Will

Conee, E. & Sider, T. (2014). *Riddles of Existence*. OUP, New Edition. “Chapter 6: Free Will.”
****Background reading.**

Hume, D. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Section 8: “Of liberty and necessity.”

- Available online: <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/authors/hume>

Ayer, A. (1954). “Freedom and Necessity.” In his *Philosophical Essays*. Macmillan.

- Available online: http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.101522!/file/Ayer-freedom-necessity.pdf

Van Inwagen, P. (1975). “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism.” *Philosophical Studies* 27: 185-99.

Essay question: Should we be compatibilists about freedom?

Week 2: Personal Identity

Noonan, H. (2003). *Personal Identity*. Second Edition. Routledge. “Chapter 1: An Initial Survey.” 1.1-1.8 only

Locke, J. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Book II, Chapter XXVII: “Identity and Diversity.”

- Available online: <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/authors/locke>

Reid, T. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. Essay 3: Memory, Section 6 “Locke’s Account of our Personal Identity.”

- Available online: <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/authors/reid>

Olson, E. (1997). “Was I Ever a Fetus?” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (1): 95-110.

Essay question: Were you ever a fetus?

Week 3: The Analysis of Knowledge

Hetherington, S. (2011). "The Gettier Problem." In Bernecker & Pritchard, (eds.) *Routledge Companion to Epistemology*. Routledge. ****Background reading - sections 1-6, 11 and 14 only.**

Gettier, E. (1963). "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23: 121-123.

Goldman, A. (1967). "A Causal Theory of Knowing." *Journal of Philosophy* 64: 357-372. ****Don't get too bogged-down with the various depictions of causal chains.**

Bonjour, L. (1980). "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5: 53-73.

Essay question: TBC

Week 4: Scepticism

DeRose, K., and Warfield, T. (eds.). (1999). *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*. OUP. Chapter 1: "Responding to Skepticism." ****Background reading - sections 1-3 and 6 only.**

Nozick, R. (1981). *Philosophical Explanations*. OUP. "Knowledge and Skepticism." pp.172-178 and 197-211. ****A challenging chapter. Be sure to follow why Nozick introduces condition (3) (the 'variation condition') and (4) (the 'adherence' condition).**

- Reprinted in Bernecker and Dretske (eds.), *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology*. OUP, 2000 (in which case, read: pp.347-353 and then pp.354-365, skipping the section "Ways and Methods").
- Also reprinted in DeRose and Warfield (eds.), *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*. Oxford UP, 1999 (in which case, begin on p.159 "Conditions for Knowledge" and read to end of chapter).
- A useful commentary is to be found in Bernecker (ed.) *Reading Epistemology*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2006. pp.21-26.

Moore, G. E. "Proof of an External World," "Four forms of Scepticism" and "Certainty" all reprinted in Sosa and Kim (eds.) *Epistemology: An Anthology*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Essay question: "I know that I have hands. Therefore, I know that I am not a brain in a vat." Discuss, with reference to Nozick and Moore.