

Philosophy 513/Topics in Recent and Contemporary Philosophy: Common Sense and Philosophical Revisionism

Princeton University
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Mondays 7-9:50(ish), Marx 201

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...In this age of post-Moorean modesty, many of us are inclined to doubt that philosophy is in possession of arguments that might genuinely serve to undermine what we ordinarily believe...In so far, then, as the pretensions of philosophy to provide a world view rest upon its claim to be in possession of the epistemological high ground, those pretensions had better be given up.

--Kit Fine, "The Question of Realism" (2001)

At an early stage in his Meditations, Descartes claims that, having suspended his commitment to views that he uncritically inherited in his youth, all of the potential objects of belief have for him been placed on equal footing: in a very strong sense, everything is 'up for grabs'. This Cartesian ideal of strict neutrality is repudiated, with varying degrees of explicitness and in diverse ways, by a number of influential movements within contemporary philosophy. The plan for this seminar is to critically examine some of these trends and grapple with issues that emerge in the ensuing dialectic. Topics include the following: Attempts to resist revisionary conclusions in metaphysics, epistemology and ethics by appeal to common sense and ordinary practice--to what extent could philosophy compel us to change what we ordinarily think about what the world is like, what we know, or what we are morally obligated to do? Moorean responses to radical skepticism; the Problem of the Criterion and Chisholm-style 'particularism'; the method of reflective equilibrium as employed in moral philosophy and elsewhere; 'conservative' accounts of belief revision (Quine, Harman, Sklar) and their critics. Select historical episodes from the common sense tradition, e.g., the rise and fall of the paradigm case argument within ordinary language philosophy. The role of prior probabilities within Bayesian epistemology and concerns about the arbitrariness of one's starting point; varieties of dogmatism and the Kripke-Harman dogmatism paradox; the epistemic significance of alternatives to our present ways of thinking that no one has yet been sufficiently imaginative to think of .

1. 1/31. **Overview.**

2. 2/7. **Kripke's Dogmatism Paradox.**

Saul Kripke, "Two Paradoxes of Knowledge", unpublished lecture (pp.12-18 only).

Gilbert Harman, selection from Thought (pp.148-149 only)

Roy Sorensen, "Dogmatism, Junk Knowledge, and Conditionals" The Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 38, No. 153 (Oct., 1988), 433-454. Available via JSTOR.

[Also: Tom Sorell, "Harman's Paradox", Mind, New Series, Vol. 90, No. 360. (Oct., 1981), pp. 557-575.. Available via JSTOR.]

3. 2/14. **Moore's Defense of Common Sense**

Scott Soames, "Common Sense and Philosophical Analysis"; "Moore on Skepticism.." (pp.1-23 of his Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century, Vol 1: The Dawn of Analysis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

William Lycan, "Moore Against the New Skeptics", Philosophical Studies 103 (2001), pp. 35-53. Available online from Kluwer.

[Relevant Background: G.E. Moore, "Hume's Philosophy Examined"; "Proof of An External World"; "A Defense of Common Sense"]

4. 2/21 **Paradigm Cases and Moorean Facts**

(i) The Paradigm Case Argument.

Keith Donellan, "The Paradigm Case Argument", in Paul Edwards (ed.) The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, vol.6. (New York: MacMillan) pp.39-45.

Norman Malcolm. "Moore and Ordinary Language", in The Philosophy of G.E. Moore, vol.I, ed. P.A. Schilp (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1942), 343-368.

Scott Soames, "Malcolm's Paradigm Case Argument". Chapter 7 of his Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century, Vol. 2: The Age of Meaning.

(ii) Moorean Facts

Thomas Kelly, “Moorean Facts and Belief Revision” manuscript.

5. 2/28. Challenges to Dogmatism

Roger White, “Problems for Dogmatism”, forthcoming in Philosophical Studies.
Available from his website at

<http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/white/papers/dogmatism.pdf>

[Relevant Background: James Pryor, “The Skeptic and the Dogmatist”, Nous 34: 517-549, Available via EBSCO or Synergy.]

Crispin Wright, “Wittgensteinian Certainties”. Available from his website at:

http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/wright/papers/Wittgensteinian_Certainties.pdf

[For an alternative view on ‘transmission failure’ see Pryor, “What’s Wrong With Moore’s Argument?” Available from his website at

<http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/new/research/papers/Moore3.pdf>

6. 3/7. The Problem of the Criterion and Reflective Equilibrium (I):

(i) The Problem of the Criterion.

Roderick Chisholm, “The Problem of the Criterion”, pp.1-25, 37-38.

(ii) Reflective Equilibrium.

Nelson Goodman, “The New Riddle of Induction”, chapter 3 of his Fact, Fiction, and Forecast (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp.59-83.

[Steven Stich, “Reflective Equilibrium and Analytic Epistemology”, chapter 4 of his The Fragmentation of Reason (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990) pp.75-100.]

Monday, 3/14. No Class (Spring Break)

7. **3/21. The Method of Reflective Equilibrium in Moral Philosophy: Rawls, etc.**

John Rawls, excerpt from A Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp.48-51 only.

Thomas Scanlon, "Rawls on Justification" in The Cambridge Companion to Rawls, edited by Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.139-153 only (i.e., through Section I only).

Objections from Brandt, Lyons, Hare.

8. **3/28. Conservatism**

(i) Sklar.

Lawrence Sklar, "Methodological Conservatism", The Philosophical Review, Vol.84, No.3 (July 1975), pp.374-400. Available via JSTOR.

(ii) Harman. (The list of Harman readings will be trimmed at some point.)

Gilbert Harman, "Skepticism and Foundations," in Steven Luper, ed.The Sceptics: Contemporary Essays (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2003), pp. 1-11. Available on his website at <http://www.princeton.edu/~harman/Papers/Published.html>

Gilbert Harman, "Epistemology and the Diet Revolution", pp.210-213 only. In Michaelis Michael and John O'Leary-Hawthorne (eds.), Philosophy in Mind.

Gilbert Harman, "Three Trends in Moral and Political Philosophy," pp.1-6 only. Value Inquiry, **37.3** (2003), [published 2004]. Available on his website at <http://www.princeton.edu/~harman/Papers/Published.html>.

Gilbert Harman, "Positive versus Negative Undermining in Belief Revision", Nous 18 (1984), pp.39-49. Available via JSTOR.

Gilbert Harman, Change in View, chapters 4 and 5.

9. 4/4. How (if at all) should one's past views influence one's present views?

David Christensen, "Diachronic Coherence and Epistemic Impartiality", The Philosophical Review, Vol. 109, No.3 (July 2000), pp.349-371. Available via JSTOR.

Richard Foley, "Past Opinion and Current Opinion", chapter 5 of his Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 131-156.

10. 4/11. The challenge to our present views from unconsidered possibilities

Lawrence Sklar, "Do Unborn Hypotheses Have Rights?" reprinted in his collection, Philosophy and Spacetime Physics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp.148-166.

Thomas Kelly, "Evidence, Dogmatism, and Belief Polarization", manuscript.

Bas Van Fraassen, "Why I Do Not Believe in Inference to the Best Explanation". Pages 142-149 of his Laws and Symmetry, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[Also: Peter Lipton, "Is the Best Good Enough?", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, XCIII, pp.89-104.]

11. 4/18. A Case Study (I): Could it be that all of us are constantly acting immorally?

Shelly Kagan, "Against Ordinary Morality", pages 1-15 of his The Limits of Morality, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

David Lewis, "Illusory Innocence?" reprinted in his Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.152-158. (This is Lewis' review of Peter Unger's Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence.)

12. 4/25. A Case Study (II): Skepticism About Moral Responsibility

Gideon Rosen, "Culpability and Ignorance" Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 2003 103: 61-84.

Gideon Rosen, "Skepticism About Moral Responsibility" in Philosophical Perspectives, Dec.2004, Vol. 18, p.295-.