

PHIL 503: Seminar in Epistemology
Fall 2018

Instructor: Brian Miller

Seminar meetings: Wednesdays 2:30-5:00 in HUM 227

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Office hours: by appointment

Course Description

Historically, many epistemologists have understood evidence/ reasons for belief as non-factive: a visual experience as of a red sock is good evidence that the sock is red, regardless of whether that experience is veridical or hallucinatory. On this picture, you and your mental-state duplicate who happens to be a brain in a vat are also epistemic duplicates.

Recent decades have witnessed a factive turn in epistemology: a turn towards conceiving of evidence/ reasons for belief as being importantly constrained by facts about your environment. On this way of thinking, you and your BIV duplicate are not epistemic duplicates: your environment really does include the cat on the mat, so perceptual experience as of the cat on the mat is accurate, and your belief that the cat on the mat is true. Your BIV duplicate's environment does not include a cat on a mat, so its experiences are inaccurate/ beliefs are not true. As a result, claims the factivist, the BIV lacks evidence that you possess, and has less rational beliefs.

This semester we'll examine three related manifestation of factive turn. First is Williamson's knowledge-first programme, on which one's evidence consists in all and only the propositions that one knows. Since knowledge is factive, those propositions must be true. The second is Dancy's theory of reasons, no which only facts can serve as reasons for belief and action. The third manifestation is disjunctivism, of which there are two main types. *Metaphysical* disjunctivism is the thesis that facts about the environment can serve to individuate subjectively indistinguishable experiences, e.g. it might distinguish between your cat-on-the-mat experiences and those of your duplicate. In contrast, *Epistemic disjunctivists* hold that you are in a better epistemic position than your BIV duplicate, but they needn't make any claims about differences in your mental states. Clearly epistemic and metaphysical disjunctivism are natural allies, though they can come apart.

Course Objectives

The objective of this course is to gain a deeper understanding of the factive turn in epistemology.

Attendance Policies

I will not be taking attendance, but if you find yourself missing a seminar meeting without a very good reason you might want to reconsider your priorities.

List of Required Texts

All texts will be provided electronically via Canvas: canvas.rice.edu.

Evaluation

Each student will write three papers of not more than 2000 words, one paper for each of our three versions of factivism (Williamson's, Dancy's, and Pritchard's), each worth 1/3 of your final grade. The word limit is strict, but the paper topics are flexible as long as you talk to me about it first and you have a reasonable proposal.

First essay due September 30

Second essay due November 4

Third essay due December 2

Note: 2000 words is very short, and my expectations are high. You will need to be pay particular attention to the structure and word choice. No wasted words, no digressions. Your goal is to establish some substantial thesis, and every word of your essay should further that goal. Some exposition of your opponent's view might be necessary, but keep it to a minimum. My advice is to write a 5000 word essay and then start editing. Seriously: no wasted words.

Why this unorthodox grading scheme?

First, concision is a virtue. Someday an editor will demand that you cut 3000 words from your beloved 10,000 word article and you'll be in no position to argue; get some practice now. Second, some journals only accept shorter papers (e.g. *Analysis*, *Thought*). Third, and most important, is that an excellent 2000-word paper can easily turn into a publishable 7000-word article. Many published articles are build around a single insight, idea, or argument, one that can be expressed in just a few pages. Once you have your central idea clearly and concisely stated, adding the other fifteen pages of stage-setting and context are easy. By writing a short paper you can focus your efforts on your one big idea, and by writing three short papers there's a good chance you'll come up with an idea worth developing further. Ideally you'll come out of this semester with the nucleus of a future publication or conference presentation.

Rice Honor Code

Rice takes its honor code very seriously. All work completed in this course is subject to the Rice Honor Code pledge, which reads:

On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this assignment.

So what's authorized?

Citation Cite anything you'd like.

Extent of collaboration I encourage you to discuss relevant materials with anyone you'd like, and in particular I'd encourage you to discuss them with myself and with your colleagues in the seminar. I

encourage you to solicit feedback on your written work and on your presentations from anyone you'd like. Philosophy is a collaborative enterprise. But write your own essays and abstracts.

Multiple submission The resubmission of your own work by that has been used in identical or similar form in fulfillment of any academic requirement at this or another institution is prohibited. Nonetheless, overlap between what your present time-slice is thinking and that of some past you-slice is inevitable. If you're unsure, talk to me about it.

Notes Sharing class notes with other students in the class is generous, and I encourage it.

Sources All types of sources are permitted in your research. Cite appropriately.

If you're unclear about any of this, please talk to me about it.

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. Instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Honor Council, and maximum penalties will be sought. For information regarding what constitutes plagiarism, see: honor.rice.edu or talk to me.

Students with Disabilities

1. Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.
2. Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this course is encouraged to contact me after class or during office hours. Additionally, students will also need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.
3. If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me to discuss your needs. Additionally, you will need to register with the Disability Support Services Office in the Allen Center.
4. Just as university policy requires me to accommodate all documented disabilities, it prohibits me from accommodating any undocumented disabilities. It also prohibits me from retroactively imposing accommodations. For example, if your disability is first documented halfway through the semester I will not be able to make grade changes or other accommodations for any work completed earlier in the semester. To avoid these issues please be sure to document your disability with Disability Support Services as early as possible.

Syllabus Subject to Change!

This syllabus is subject to change. Reasonable notice will be given. Any changes will be announced in class and/ or posted to Canvas.

Course Materials

All readings will be made available through Canvas.

Tentative Schedule:

The following schedule will be revised as we go along. Any changes will be announced in class and/or via Canvas. Please complete the readings for the date listed.

Date	Topic	Primary Reading	Secondary Reading
8/22	Introduction	Kelly - Evidence	none
8/29	Knowing as a mental state	Williamson – KAIL Introduction (read quickly), Ch. 1 (read carefully)	KAIL ch. 2,3
9/5	E=K	Williamson – KAIL ch. 9	Kail ch. 4.1-4.5
9/12	Knowledge First	Littlejohn – How and why knowledge is first	Littlejohn – The unity of reason
9/19	Knowing as a mental state?	Smith – The cost of treating knowledge as a mental state	Fricker – Is knowing a state of mind?
9/26	E=K and Perceptual Justification	Brueckner – E=K and perceptual knowledge, Williamson – Reply to Anthony Brueckner	Millar – Reasons for belief, perception, and reflective knowledge
	>>>>>>>>>>	First essay due 9/30	<<<<<<<<<<<
10/3	Practical Reasons	Dancy – Practical Reality (selection)	none
10/10	Practical Reasons	Dancy – Practical Reality (selection)	none
10/17	Practical Reasons	Dancy – Practical Reality (selection)	none
10/24	Practical Reasons	McDowell – Acting in light of a fact	Drake – Motivating reason to slow the factive turn in epistemology
10/31	Practical Reasons	Comesaña and McGrath – Having False Reasons	Schroeder – Having Reasons
	>>>>>>>>>>	Second essay due 11/4	<<<<<<<<<<<
11/7	Disjunctivism	Byrne and Logue – Either/ or	none
11/14	Disjunctivism	Pritchard – Epistemic Disjunctivism Part 1	none
11/21	Disjunctivism	Pritchard – Epistemic Disjunctivism Part 2	none
11/28	Disjunctivism	Pritchard – Epistemic Disjunctivism Part 3	none
	>>>>>>>>>>	Third essay due 12/2	<<<<<<<<<<<