

PRESENTATIONS

Pick topics from the list below. E-mail me your top three choices, in order, by the second class meeting. [Note: **you may not write any paper for the course on the topic of your presentation.**]

The readings we have contain many considerations—many meandering thoughts, various arguments and sub-arguments, etc. I want you **to present the argument from the paper that I have picked out for you**. For example, if you pick the Frank Jackson reading, you must present on the knowledge argument as it involves Mary in the black and white room. You can read other work if you find it helps, but the focus of your presentation must be on the assigned reading. If you're confused about what I want you to talk about, ask me.

In your presentation, do the following:

- (A) Clarify any terminology that is needed to understand the argument.
- (B) Present the argument in premise and conclusion form, including any “tacit” premises (obviously this may require interpretation). Explain the author’s justification for each premise (such as it is). Strive for concision.
- (C) State and defend a thesis about the argument as follows: identify what you think is the weakest aspect of the argument (the weakest premise, tacit premise, etc.) and either defend it from an objection or attack it. Be thorough and persuasive, and be prepared to defend your conclusions.
- (D) Prepare a *handout* for your classmates that summarizes this information. Avoid long blocks of text in this document. E-mail it to me at least 2 hours before class so that I can copy it for you.

You will “talk through” the handout in (D) during the relevant class. You may have an “annotated” or elaborated version of your handout for yourself, **but you may not simply read large tracts of prepared text out loud**. I’m guessing that about something in the ballpark of 10-20 minutes (more or less, depending on the argument) will be required to do all this.

As stated on the syllabus, other core students are expected to participate in your presentation by asking questions, providing constructive suggestions, or giving friendly, searching criticism. (**Combativeness is frowned upon, as is monopolizing discussion.**) You should accordingly be prepared to field questions and comments during your presentation.

Note that (except perhaps for Chalmers) there is no minimal pre-requisite knowledge required to do these readings. So you can, and should, start reading and thinking about your topic well ahead of time. This will avoid the “crunch” near the end of term when two papers and a presentation are due in rapid succession.

TOPICS

“Liberalist” Pitfalls of Functionalism

“Troubles with Functionalism”

Preview: Block presents a quick pair of examples (one involving homunculi-headed “agents”, another involving a functional reorganization of the citizens of China) and argues that functionalists must attribute mental states to these entities that they do not have.

Functional Inversion and Inverted Spectra

“Inverted Earth”

Preview: Block presents a thought experiment meant to improve, in certain ways, on traditional appeals to inverted spectra. The idea is that instead of inverting what you experience while holding your environment fixed, we can invert your environment while holding your experiences fixed. He uses the thought experiment to construct arguments against functionalism and representationalism about qualia. You will present on the argument as used *against functionalism*.

The Knowledge Argument

“Epiphenomenal Qualia”

Preview: Jackson argues, very roughly, that not all information is physical, because even if one has all the physical information, one can still lack information about what it’s like to see something red. This is meant to be a problem for materialism. Focus on the example involving Mary and the black and white room. This is the only argument for which it might be helpful to look at other sources, since the argument goes by very quickly, and since it’s a hard to think about in a vacuum. You might begin with the Stanford Encyclopedia entry.

Zombies and Materialism

“The Two-Dimensional Argument Against Materialism”

Preview: Chalmers argues, very roughly, that because phenomenal zombies (entities like us physically, but without conscious experiences) are conceivable, they are possible, and that the possibility of such zombies entails dualism (or “Russellian Monism”). [Understanding this paper to some extent requires a decent understanding of “two-dimensional” semantics, elements of which we’ll review in discussing Kaplan and Stalnaker.]

Dogmatism

“Problems for Dogmatism”

Preview: There will be up to two presenters for this session. Roger White presents three challenges to a dogmatist position in epistemology, according to which it's appearing to you that p defeasibly justifies you in believing that p as long as you don't have independent reason to suspect a skeptical hypothesis is true. Each presenter will pick one of White's three arguments and present on it. Obviously, if there are two presenters, they will have to coordinate on topics so that there isn't overlap. [If you choose the argument from “degrees of confidence” you must present the *intuitive* version of that argument—not the one that appeals to Bayesianism.]

Semantic Blindness and Contextualism

“Contextualist Solutions to Scepticism”

Preview: Schiffer argues that contextualism about knowledge is untenable, since it is committed to an implausible form of semantic blindness, where speakers are completely unaware of the context-sensitivity of knowledge attributions, despite being aware of the context-sensitivity of other locutions like familiar indexicals.

“Knowledge First”: Luminosity

Knowledge and its Limits, Ch. 4

Preview: Williamson argues, by exploiting a kind of vagueness in cases of gradual change, that no mental states are “luminous” in the sense that you're always in a position to know that you're in that state when you are (so, in particular, knowledge isn't luminous.) Focus on the argument concerning awareness of being cold.

“Knowledge First”: KK

Knowledge and its Limits, Ch. 5

Preview: Williamson presents a more targeted argument against the “KK principle” which states, roughly, that if you know that p , you're in a position to know that you know that p . The argument again exploits consideration of gradual differences.