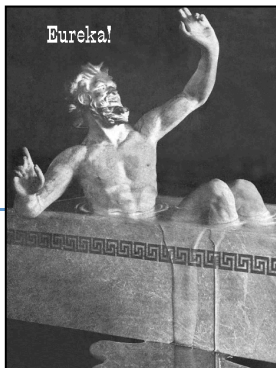


# Seminar on Understanding & Explanation

Pomona Phil 185L  
CGU Phil 343  
Spring 2010



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o-hours: Tue 2–4; Wed 11–12

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o-hours: Tue 9:30–11:30

Monday night 7–9: 50 p.m.  
Pearsons 102 [note room change!]

## Tentative Schedule

### Week 1 Introduction

Perkins, D. (1993). Teaching for understanding. *American Educator*, 17(3), 8, 28–35.

### Week 2 The Value of Truth, the Value of Knowledge

Background

Gibbons, J. (manuscript). “Knowledge versus truth” from *The Norm of Belief*. University of Nebraska.

Kvanvig, J. (1998). Why should inquiring minds want to know? *Monist*, 81(3), 426–51.

### Week 3 Understanding Over Knowledge

Kvanvig, J. (2002). *The value of truth and the pursuit of understanding* (excerpt). Cambridge University Press.

Kvanvig, J. (forthcoming). The value of understanding. In Haddock, A., Millar, A. & Pritchard, D. (Eds.), *Epistemic value*. Oxford University Press.

*Recommended:* Kvanvig will give a talk at Pomona Friday, January 29, “Curiosity and a response-dependent account of the value of understanding,” Pearsons 101, 3:30 p.m.

### Week 4 Is Understanding Factive?

Elgin, C. (forthcoming). Is understanding factive? In Haddock, A., Millar, A. & Pritchard, D. (Eds.), *Epistemic value*. Oxford University Press.

Elgin, C. (2006). Understanding and the facts. *Philosophical Studies*, 131(1), 33–42.



- Week 5 Debating Understanding Versus Knowledge**  
 Zagzebski, L. (2001). Recovering understanding. In M. Steup (Ed.), *Knowledge, truth, and duty* (pp. 235–56). Oxford University Press.  
 Grimm, S. (2006). Is understanding a species of knowledge? *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 57(3), 515–35.
- Week 6 The Standards of Explanation: PSR and D-N**  
 Della Rocca, M. (2003). A rationalist manifesto: Spinoza and the principle of sufficient reason. *Philosophical Topics*, 31, 412–37.  
 Hempel, C. & Oppenheim, P. (1948). Studies in the logic of explanation. *Philosophy of Science*, 15, 2, 135–75.
- Week 7 Explanation as Causation and Unification**  
 Lewis, D. (1986). Causal explanation. In *Philosophical papers: Volume II* (chapter 22). Oxford University Press.  
 Friedman, M. (1974). Explanation and scientific understanding. *Journal of Philosophy*, 71(1), 5–19.  
 Kitcher, P. (1981). Explanatory unification. *Philosophy of Science*, 48, 507–31.
- Week 8 Pragmatic Accounts of Explanation**  
 Van Fraassen, B. (1981). The pragmatics of explanation. In *The Scientific Image* (pp. 132–57). Oxford University Press.  
 Achinstein, from *The Nature of Explanation*
- Week 9 Inference to the Best Explanation**  
 White, R. (2005). Explanation as a guide to induction. *Philosopher's Imprint*, 5(2), 1–29.  
 Lipton, P. (2004). Inference to the best explanation. In *Inference to the best explanation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (chapter 4). Routledge.
- Week 10 Explanations in Social Science**  
 TBA
- Week 11 Narrative Explanation**  
 Velleman, D. (2003). Narrative explanation. *Philosophical Review*, 112(1), 1–26.
- Week 12–14 Student presentations**

## Sakai

We use it. You will submit all work via your Sakai “Drop Box.” If you are a 6C (=5C or CGU) student you should have access to Sakai, and if you are registered for our course then our site should already be

visible. Please verify right away that you have access.

Note on readings: For copyright purposes, many readings listed in Sakai are simply links to archived journal articles that are viewable by subscription only. The 6Cs

have a subscription, but you need to be on a 6C network. Just to be clear: access to Sakai ≠ access to journal websites. You can access Sakai off-campus easily; journals websites, less easily (you need the library's proxy server, or VPN...)

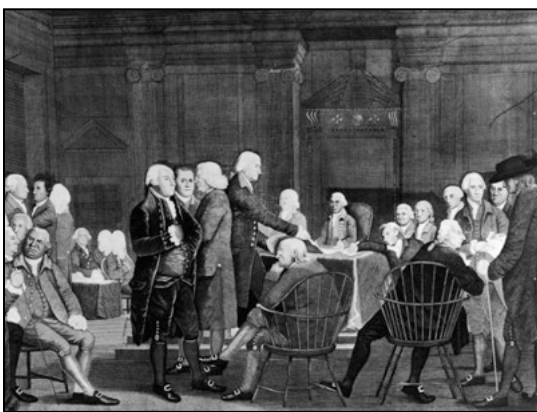
## Expectations

Because this is an advanced seminar we expect you to have some background in philosophy, and preferably in metaphysics & epistemology, such as

- PHIL 30 | Knowledge, Mind & Existence
- PHIL 42 | History of Modern Philosophy
- PHIL 81 | Phil 341 | Epistemology
- PHIL 103 | Philosophy of Science
- PHIL 185M | Topics in Philosophy of Language and Mind

If you are interested in the course but haven't taken any philosophy before, please come talk to us about your background.

We intend to run this course like a graduate seminar. Each week we will examine two to four papers in detail; typically we'll discuss a couple of papers for about half the session, take a break, and then turn to the others.



Discussions seminars work best (or, “work, period”) when everyone comes prepared, with lots of ideas about the readings to

share! Hence regular participation is both encouraged and expected. This brings us to...

## Reading Responses

Most of what you'll get out of this course you'll get out of discussions; the readings will often make sense only in light of the discussion. We make full-fledged assignments fairly minimal because we want you to focus on preparing for class discussions.

Each week you are required to write a two- to three page reading response. We want you to be reading articles critically and carefully. See Pryor's helpful guidelines:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

Your response will have two parts: First, a *précis* of an argument from the reading. A *précis* might focus on a single article or a section of a single article; it might take up instead an issue or argument discussed in one or more of the articles. Either way, your *précis* should extract and concisely present the main line of argument you are interested in.

Second, your *critical thoughts* on whatever it is you singled out in your *précis*. Perhaps you think there's some crucial point that needs further elaboration and discussion; perhaps you have an objection; perhaps you want to propose a useful distinction that the authors neglect; and so on.

Whatever your thoughts, use your *précis* to pinpoint a premise or inference that you have a criticism or comment about. Be as specific as possible: if you think some issue should be discussed in class, explain why, and offer your take to get the discussion going.

Place your response in your Sakai “Drop Box” by 5 a.m. Monday morning (i.e., some time Sunday night).

Everyone must do a response pretty much each week. We’ll allow you to skip two. Each week we’ll select a couple of responses to comment on more extensively, but even if we don’t comment on yours that week, we’ll still be noting whether you did one.

Response grades range from 5 (well-written and insightful), 4 (good, understands the argument, less in the way of critical insight), 3 (has the basic idea but confused), 2 (at least you submitted something), and 0 (not even a 2).

## Paper(s)

You have two options:

1. Two shorter papers, the first five to six pages, the second seven to ten pages.
2. One twelve- to fifteen-page paper.

To help you write your final paper, a report (roughly four pages) will be due in the 11th or 12th week of the semester. Think of the report as map of your intended paper; the more detailed, the better.

In our experience most students acknowledge that writing two shorter papers rather than one long one may be in their best interest, and then fail to do it nonetheless. (Hey, deadlines: we empathize.) If you are newer to philosophy and haven’t written many philosophy papers you should consider committing to the two-paper option. We’ll hold you to it!

We’ll talk much more about writing as the time approaches. In the meantime, you might want to look at Pryor’s guidelines:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

A *routine* part of the writing process is getting feedback from colleagues. For instance Peter never writes anything in epistemology that he doesn’t run by Masahiro.

Strongly consider booking time at the Writing Center:

<http://writing.pomona.edu/>

This is free feedback! Take advantage of it, even for your weekly responses.

## Presentations

Each student will present his/her report to the class and then field questions from students, totaling 20–25 minutes. (Actual time will depend on how many students are enrolled). Graduating seniors will go first.

Presenting your work will ensure that you develop a paper idea well in advance of the due date. You’ll also get lots of feedback to consider as you revise and expand the report into your final paper.

We’ve had good success with student presentations in past years. The bar, and expectations, are high!

