

PHIL 673/463: Testimony-Based Belief
Or, *What I Did On Summer Holiday*

Time: Thursday
Place: HH 357
Professor: Tim Kenyon
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I. Course description

Much – arguably, most – of what we believe is based on testimony, in the broadest sense of the term. When are testimony-based beliefs reliable, and why? What can we learn from cases in which testimony-based beliefs are unjustified, or even incandescently false? This research seminar considers a range of issues arising from these questions. It centres on a series of papers that bear on testimony and the beliefs that are based on it. Several of these papers are my own works-in-progress; the course is partly a matter of developing this work by critically discussing the drafts and the issues.

After completing the course successfully, you will have gained familiarity with some influential arguments that bear on these topics. You will have refined your abilities to recognize issues at the intersection of epistemology and the philosophy of language, and to subject these issues to close critical analysis. General philosophical abilities will also be enhanced, including skills of reading difficult material for thorough understanding, evaluating complex arguments, writing expository and argumentative pieces with clarity, and leading group discussions. Necessary but insufficient conditions for attaining these wondrous results include: attending class without exception; doing all the readings carefully and multiple times; participating appropriately in class discussions; and completing coursework in an engaged and reflective manner.

II. Required Texts

Readings are available through a combination of email distribution, the UW Library electronic journal subscriptions, and hard copy reserve readings at the Dana Porter Library.

III. Course Assessment Structure and Requirements

This is a seminar course, meaning that participants lead and sustain the discussion during class meetings. Naturally this entails that everyone must prepare appropriately, and show up ready to talk.

For their course grade participants will write a research paper, which they will first present in a 15-20 minute conference paper format, and then submit as an expanded written term paper.

Presentation: 10%

Final paper: 90%

Please note that everyone is expected to provide constructive written feedback on every other participant's presentation. The presentations will take place late in the term; the term papers will be due on the last day of classes. The conference-style presentations may be scheduled outside of class hours. I will attempt to accommodate as many schedules as possible, but attendance at the presentation session(s) is mandatory.

Late work and absences are not acceptable except in cases of significant illness or other unforeseeable catastrophe. Having lots of work in other courses might feel like a catastrophe, but does not count as an *unforeseeable* catastrophe. A wish for a longer weekend or holiday is also not a catastrophe. For medical excuses, the rule of thumb is that if you are too ill to complete an assignment, then you are ill enough to go to the doctor at that time, so a note from UW medical services will be expected. Please note that the nature and dates of an illness and of the medical documentation are relevant to whether it excuses lateness; a doctor's note is not an automatic license to defer an examination or to submit an assignment late.

Some guidelines on reading and writing a philosophy essay, giving a seminar presentation, and giving a conference paper, are available under "Tips and Advice" at: <http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/~tkenyon/Welcome.html>

IV. Core course readings

The precise schedule for the readings will depend on how quickly we get through them. The fundamental principle is: read what we are talking about; read just ahead in the list; and read independently to fill in your understanding of the background issues.

1. Introductory readings

Pritchard, D. 2004. The epistemology of testimony. *Philosophical Issues* 14: 326-348.

Stevenson, L. 1993. Why believe what people say? *Synthese* 94: 429-451.

Fricker, E. 1995. Telling and trusting: Reductionism and anti-reductionism in the epistemology of testimony. *Mind* 104: 393-411

Weiner, M. 2003. Accepting testimony. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 53: 256-264.

2. Mode of fixation/justification I

Thagard, P. 2003. Testimony, credibility and explanatory coherence. *Erkenntnis* 63: 295–316

Kenyon: Default acceptance of testimony: The dual-route model.

3. *Mode of fixation/justification II*

Audi, R. 2006. Testimony, credulity, and veracity. In J. Lackey and E. Sosa (eds.) *The Epistemology of Testimony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 25-49. (Available online through UW Library.)

Kenyon: Noninferentialism and testimony-based belief.

4. *Informational context of testimony*

Lackey, J. 2008. *Learning from Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (On reserve in DPL) pp. 176-185.

Insole, C. 2000. Seeing off the local threat to irreducible knowledge by testimony. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 50: 44-56.

Kenyon: The informational richness of testimonial contexts

5. *Credible speakers and incredible claims*

Coady, C.A.J. 1992. *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. pp. 179-198.

Kenyon: Convergent false testimony

6. *Oral history as epistemological test case*

Coady, C.A.J. 1992. *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. pp. 199-223.

Kenyon: Trusting testimony in oral history

General and background supplementary readings:

Elgin, C. 2002. Take it from me: The epistemological status of testimony. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65: 291-308.

Fricker, E. 1994. Against gullibility. In B. K. Matilal, & A. Chakrabarti (eds.) *Knowing From Words*. Dordrecht: Kluwer. 125-161. (On reserve in DPL)

Gelfert, A. 2010. Reconsidering the role of inference to the best explanation in the epistemology of testimony. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*. 41.4: 386-396.

Lackey, J. 2008. *Learning from Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (On reserve in DPL) pp. 142-175

Shogenji, T. 2006. A defense of reductionism about testimonial justification. *Noûs* 40: 331-346.

Slightly more specialized supplementary readings:

Clément, F. 2010. To trust or not to trust? Children's social epistemology. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*. 1.4: 531-549.

Michaelian, K. 2010. In defence of gullibility: the epistemology of testimony and the psychology of deception detection. *Synthese* 176.3: 399-427.

Rysiew, P. 2007. Beyond words: Communication, truthfulness, and understanding. *Episteme* 4.3: 285-304.

VI. Administrative information

Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline,

<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm>

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4,

<http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm>

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm>

Academic Integrity website (Arts):

http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

Academic Integrity Office (University): <http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/>

Note for students with disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.