

Sample Syllabus—What Is Inference? (Graduate Seminar)

Course Description: When an agent infers one proposition from another, she thereby transitions from one mental state to another. However, not all transitions between mental states are inferential transitions. To better distinguish inferential transitions from other mental state transitions, many philosophers contend that inferences alone involve (1) an agent’s *taking* her premises to support her conclusion, and (2) her drawing an inference *because* of this taking. This picture seems to suggest that the agent must have higher-order awareness of her inferences, for she must be aware of the basis on which she is drawing them. However, some philosophers now worry that this “taking condition” over-intellectualizes the nature of inference, or else suffers from other problems. In this seminar we explore this and other debates concerning the nature and epistemology of inference.

Course Requirements

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

- Seminar Participation*—20%
- Weekly Reflections*—40%
- Paper Proposal*—10%
- Paper*—30%

Weekly reflections will be 300-600 words, to be submitted no later than two hours before seminar. Ideal reflections will have argumentative components. You only need to submit eight reflections in total. If you submit more, your lowest grade(s) will be dropped.

Your paper proposal will be due one week before your paper itself, though earlier submissions are encouraged. I will aim to provide feedback on your proposal within 24 hours of reception.

Course Schedule

Week 1—Introduction
Required Readings: N/A—syllabus and orientation
Week 2—A Non-Reflective Conception of Inference
Required Readings: Chapters 1-2 of <i>On Reflection</i> , By Hilary Kornblith
Week 3—A Reflective Conception of Inference
Required Readings: “What is Inference?” By Paul Boghossian; “Comments on Boghossian” by John Broome; “Comments on Paul Boghossian” by Crispin Wright
Week 4—The Initial Debate
Required Readings: “Against Boghossian, Wright, and Broome on Inference” by Ulf Hlobil; “Reasoning and Reflection: A Reply to Kornblith” by Paul Boghossian

Week 5—Objections to the “Taking Condition” on Inference

Required Readings: “Reasoning Without Regress” by Luis Rosa; “Against the Taking Condition” by Conor McHugh & Jonathan Way

Week 6—A Return to the Taking Condition

Required Readings: “What Reasoning Might Be” by Markos Valaris; “Inference and the Taking Condition” by Christian Kietzmann

Week 7—Inference as a Necessarily Self-Conscious Activity

Required Readings: “Inference as a Way of Knowing” by Nicholas Koziolk; “Inference as Consciousness of Necessity” by Eric Marcus

Week 8—Addressing Concerns About Over-Intellectualization

Required Readings: “Reasoning and Normative Beliefs” by Andreas Müller; “Inferring by Attaching Force” by Ulf Hlobil

Week 9—One More Push Against Intellectualism About Inference

Required Readings: “Reasoning as a Social Competence” by Dan Sperber & Hugo Mercier; “Have Mercier and Sperber Untied the Knot of Human Reasoning?” by Ladislav Koreň

Week 9—Inference and Doxastic Responsibility

Required Readings: “Inference, Agency, and Responsibility” by Paul Bogossian; “On Fundamental Responsibility” by Anna-Sara Malmgren

Week 11—Critical Reasoning and Reflective Inference

Required Readings: “Our Entitlement to Self-Knowledge” by Tyler Burge; Chapters 4 and 12 of *Self Knowledge for Humans*, by Quassim Cassam

Week 12—Inference and Self-Knowledge

Required Readings: “Inference and Self-Knowledge” by Benjamin Winokur; “Self-Knowledge and Interpersonal Reasoning” by Benjamin Winokur