

PHIL 6014: Philosophy of Questions

Times: 2.30–3.45pm Mondays and Wednesdays

Classroom: War Memorial 5th floor / War Mem. 332

Instructor: Daniel Hoek, dhoek@vt.edu

Zoom: zoom.us/my/dhoek

Office hours: Mondays 11am or by appointment

Office: War Memorial 401A

Course Topic

This course is about *questions*, and about the role they play in the way we think, the way we learn, the way we reason, and the way we act. The study of questions has already had transformative effects in linguistics and philosophy of language. The same is now beginning to happen in various other areas of philosophy.

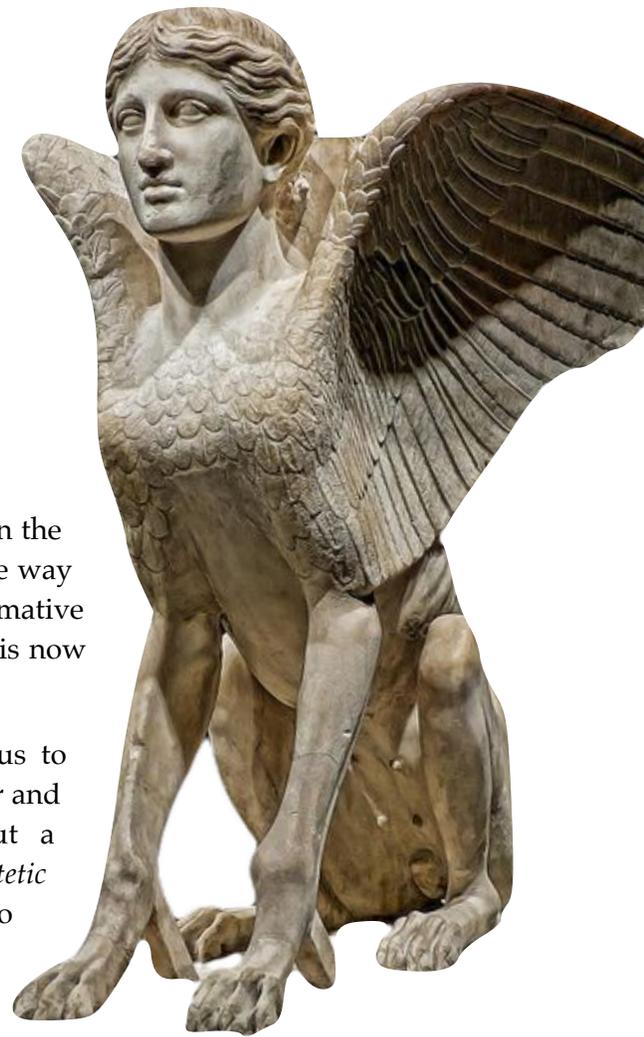
For instance, in the philosophy of mind, questions help us to understand the function of mental states like *curiosity*, *wonder* and *attention*. In epistemology, questions are bringing about a renewed interest in the process of inquiry known as the *zetetic turn*. In philosophical logic, questions have led to insights into the individuation of propositions and the character of deductive reasoning. Questions have cast new light on issues in decision theory, statistics, and the philosophy of mathematics as well.

In this course we will survey all these various developments, and we will seek to better understand the connections that exist between them.

Textbook & Readings

As a textbook for the course, we will be using my book manuscript “The Inquisitive Mind: How Questions Shape Our Thoughts and Guide our Actions.” The course will thus give you the opportunity to engage with and contribute to a substantive philosophical work in progress. As I make improvements based on your feedback, the manuscript will be periodically updated throughout the semester. Since this is work in progress, you should not share the manuscript with people outside of the course.

Most weeks, we will read a paper from the literature and a chapter for the book. Optional further readings are recommended in the schedule below as well. Readings that are not readily accessible online will be distributed over e-mail ahead of each class.



Sphinx, Roman 2nd C., British Museum

Assessment

Participation (10%). Show up to class, do the readings, participate in discussion, and above all... come to class with some questions about questions!

Class Presentations (40%). You will do two 15-minute presentations over the course of the semester with a two-page handout for each. Your presentation should summarise the paper we read for the class and raise two comprehension questions and a discussion question.

Term Paper (50%). The week after Spring break, you will submit a two-page essay plan related to the course material. You will receive feedback on your proposal and the final paper is due at the end of the semester. Suggested paper length: 4,000 words.

Editor Bonuses. Please e-mail me any typos/thinkos/errors you find in the book manuscript each week, and any other editorial suggestions! For every 10 typos uncovered, you will get $\frac{1}{3}$ of a grade point added to your next presentation grade. Serious typos count double. Anybody who finds over 100 typos receives a guaranteed A+ in participation. In addition, I will treat whoever finds the largest number of typos over the course of the semester to a nice dinner.

Homework Submission. All work for the course (including presentation handouts) should be submitted by e-mail: dhoeck@vt.edu.

Late Work. Essay plans that are submitted late are not guaranteed to receive feedback. If you are running into trouble meeting the term paper deadline, make sure to notify me well ahead of time to discuss. Late term papers can result in an incomplete or failing grade.

Advising. If you are interested in working on a longer paper related to material from this course, or in turning your work for the course into a thesis project, let me know! I will be able to continue advising student projects remotely into the next academic year.

Academic Integrity. Students are expected to meet the academic integrity standards of Virginia Tech at all times. The normal sanction for a violation of the Honor Code is an F* as your final course grade, where the * indicates an integrity violation. You are expected to be familiar with, and employ, proper citation standards in written work for this course. Any form of plagiarism results in an F* grade.

ChatGPT. The use of AI Writing tools like ChatGPT is *not* permitted for any assignments in this class, with or without attribution. The use of Grammarly is also not permitted. If you do use these tools, it will be considered dishonest, and result in an F or F* for the course. I recommend working in Google Docs under your VT account so you can prove your authorship by sharing the document history. But this is not an official requirement.

Office Hours. You are always welcome to come see me during office hours with any questions you have about the course. My office is 401A in War Memorial. If you would like to speak to me separately, that can also be arranged: just e-mail me at dhoeck@vt.edu.

Provisional Reading Schedule

Starred readings optional; IM = The Inquisitive Mind.

I. Introducing Questions

January 21. Introductions

January 26. Jane Friedman, 2013, "Question-Directed Attitudes." *Phil. Persp.* 27(1): 145-74.
*Peter Carruthers, 2018, "Basic Questions." *Mind & Language* 33(2): 130-47.

January 28. *IM* Chapter 1: The Inquisitive Turn

February 2. *No class!*

February 4. David Lewis, "Relevant Implication."

* Peter Hawke, Levin Hornischer and Francesco Berto, 2024, "Truth, topicality, and transparency." *Linguistics and Philosophy* 47(3): 481-503.

February 9. *IM* Chapter 2: Questions and Answers

February 11. Larry Powers, 1978, "Knowledge by Deduction." *Phil. Review*, 87(3): 337-71.

* Adam Elga and Agustín Rayo, 2021, "Fragmentation and Information Access." In *The Fragmented Mind*, 37-53, OUP.

II. Question-Directed Belief

February 16. *IM* Chapter 3: The Questions We Face

February 18. Jane Friedman, "Why Suspend Judging?" *Noûs* 51(2): 302-26.

* Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, transl. Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes. CUP.

February 23. *IM* Chapter 4: The Search for Answers

February 25. Jane Friedman, "The Epistemic and the Zetetic." *Phil. Review* 129(4): 501-36.

* Daniela Dover, 2024, "Two kinds of curiosity". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 108(3): 811-32.

III. The Web of Questions

March 2. Seth Yalcin, "Belief as Question-Sensitive." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 97(1): 23-47.

* Stephen Yablo, 2017 "Open knowledge and changing the subject." *Philosophical Studies* 174(4): 1047-71.

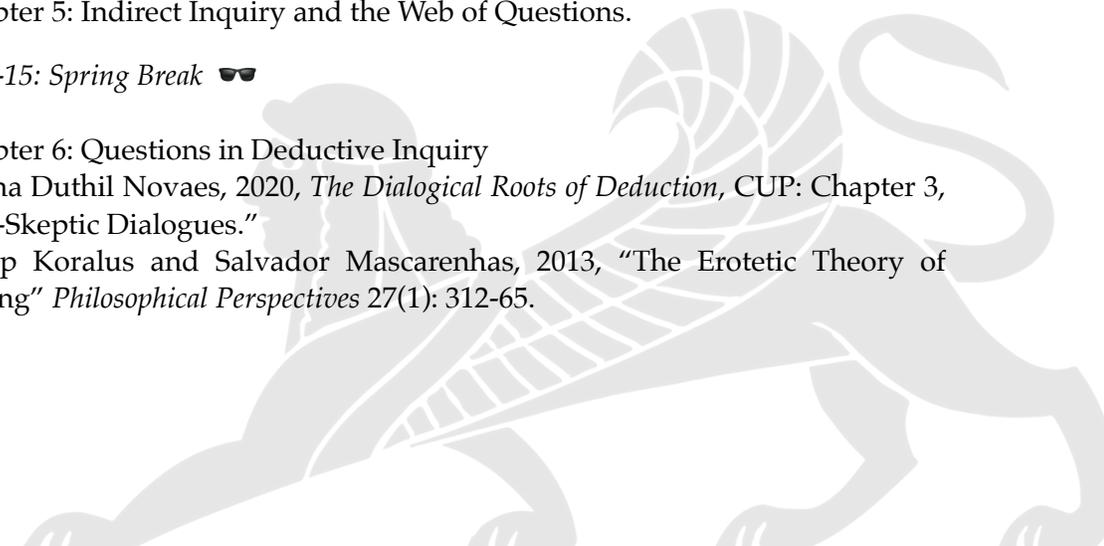
March 4. *IM* Chapter 5: Indirect Inquiry and the Web of Questions.

March 7-15: Spring Break 🕶

March 16. *IM* Chapter 6: Questions in Deductive Inquiry

March 18. Catherina Duthil Novaes, 2020, *The Dialogical Roots of Deduction*, CUP: Chapter 3, "Prover-Skeptical Dialogues."

* Philipp Koralus and Salvador Mascarenhas, 2013, "The Erotetic Theory of Reasoning" *Philosophical Perspectives* 27(1): 312-65.



March 20. Outlines Due.

March 23. Matti Eklund, 2019, "Incoherentism and the Sorites Paradox." In: Oms and Zardini (eds.) *The Sorites Paradox*, 78-94, CUP.

March 25. Rohan Sud, "A Zetetic Approach to Vagueness."

IV. Inquisitive Decision Theory

March 30. Daniel Greco, 2023, *Idealization in Epistemology*, OUP: Chapter 3, "Modeling with Possible Worlds."

* Adam Elga and Agustín Rayo, 2022, "Fragmentation and Logical Omniscience." *Noûs* 56(3): 716-41.

April 1. *IM* Chapter 7: The Practical Problem of Deduction.

April 6. *IM* Chapter 8: Question-Directed Probability

April 8. L.J. Savage, 1967, "Difficulties in the Theory of Personal Probability." *Philosophy of Science* 34(4): 305-10.

* Richard Pettigrew, "Logical Ignorance and Logical Learning." *Synthese* 198(10): 9991-10020.

April 13. Ben Holguín, 2022, "Thinking, Guessing and Believing." *Phil. Imprint* 22(6).

* Kevin Dorst and Matthew Mandelkern, 2022 "Good Guesses." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Review* 105(3): 581-618.

April 15. Jennifer Nagel, ms, "The Full Strength of Full Belief."

V. Between Idealisation and Overfitting

April 20. Jennifer Rose Carr, 2022, "Why Ideal Epistemology?" *Mind* 131(524): 1131-62

* Daniel Greco, 2023, *Idealization in Epistemology*, OUP: Chapter 1, "Idealisation and Modest Modelling."

April 22. *IM* Chapter 10: Inquisitive Rationality as a Normative Ideal

April 27. Jens Kipper, Arc Kocurek and Zeynep Soysal, 2025, "Idle Questions." *Journal of Philosophy* 122(4): 160-76.

* Richard Teague, 2022, "The problem of closure and questioning attitudes." *Synthese* 200(5): 1-19. OR

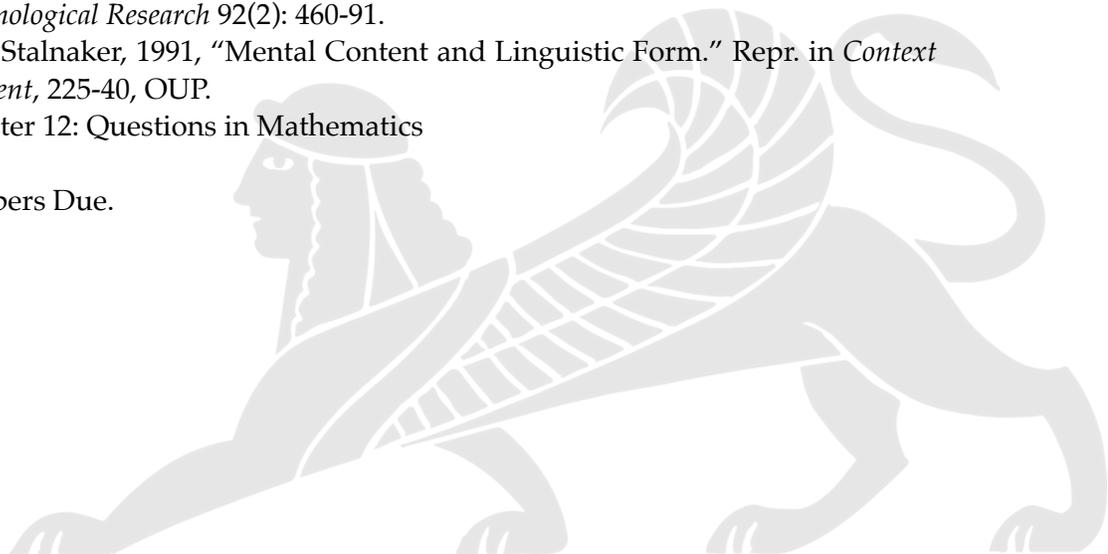
April 29. *IM* Chapter 11: The Inquisitive Mind and the Fragmented Mind

May 4. Alejandro Pérez Carballo, 2016, "Structuring logical space." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 92(2): 460-91.

* Robert Stalnaker, 1991, "Mental Content and Linguistic Form." Repr. in *Context and Content*, 225-40, OUP.

May 6. *IM* Chapter 12: Questions in Mathematics

May 10. Final Papers Due.



Other Resources

This schedule is *provisional*. Depending on where our curiosity takes us, here is some other work we may end up looking at.

Questions in Linguistics:

- ▶ Ivano Ciardelli, Jeroen Groenendijk, and Floris Roelofsen, 2019, *Inquisitive Semantics*, OUP.
- ▶ Roberts, Craige, 2012, "Information Structure: Towards an integrated formal theory of pragmatics." *Semantics and Pragmatics* 5(6): 1-69.
- ▶ Groenendijk, Jeroen and Floris Roelofsen, 2010 "Radical Inquisitive Semantics."

Aboutness:

- ▶ Franz Berto, 2022, *Topics of Thought: The Logic of Knowledge, Belief, Imagination*. OUP.
- ▶ Hawke, Peter, 2016, "Questions, topics, and restricted closure." *Phil. Studies* 173(10): 2759-84.
- ▶ Yablo, Stephen, 2014, *Aboutness*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Contrastivism and Focus Alternatives:

- ▶ Dretske, Fred, 1970, "Epistemic Operators." *The Journal of Philosophy* 67(24): 1007-23.
- ▶ Jonathan Schaffer, 2007, "Knowing the answer." *PPR* 75(2):383–403.
- ▶ Rooth, Mats, 1992, "A theory of focus interpretation." *Natural Language Semantics* 1: 75-116.

Inquiry:

- ▶ Charles Sanders Peirce, 1877, "The Fixation of Belief." *Popular Science Monthly* 12: 1-15.
- ▶ Arianna Falbo, "Should Epistemology Take the Zetetic Turn?" *Phil. Studies* 180: 2977-3002.
- ▶ Christopher Hookway, 2006, "Epistemology and inquiry: The primacy of practice." In *Epistemology Futures*, ed. Stephen Hetherington, 95-110. OUP.
- ▶ Christoph Kelp, 2021, *Inquiry, Knowledge, and Understanding*. OUP

Interestingness & Value of Information

- ▶ Janina Hosiasson, 1931, "Why do we prefer probabilities relative to many data?" *Mind* 40(157): 23-36.
- ▶ Alejandro Pérez Carballo, 2018, "Good Questions." In *Epistemic Consequentialism*, eds. Kristoffer Ahlstrom-Vij & Jeff Dunn, 123-145. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ▶ Richard Pettigrew, ms, *The value of information and the epistemology of inquiry*. Manuscript, available at philpapers.org/archive/PETTAG-5.pdf.

Idealisation & Rationality:

- ▶ Yalcin, Seth, 2021, "Fragmented But Rational." In: *The Fragmented Mind*, 156-79. OUP.
- ▶ Williamson, Timothy, 2024, *Overfitting and Heuristics in Philosophy*, OUP: Chapter 3, "Case Study: Hyperintensionalism."

