

# Essay Two

## Requirements

You are to submit one 9-11 page research paper on Wednesday 29 April, addressing one and only one of the questions listed below. A hard copy of the paper must be submitted in class.

## Guidelines

An excellent resource to read before starting your essay is James Pryor's [Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper](#) (you might also find his [Philosophical Terms and Methods](#) and [How To Read a Philosophy Paper](#) useful). In addition, essay guidelines have been posted here: <http://mail.rochester.edu/~bweslake/teaching/resources/guidelines.pdf>

## Questions

*Note:* I will accept papers on other topics we have covered, *provided you have submitted a paper outline and have received permission to write the associated paper.*

- In his *Theories, Theorists and Theoretical Change*, Philip Kitcher argues against a thesis he calls “conceptual relativism” by (i) developing a theory of reference; and (ii) applying this theory to the case of the dispute over the phlogiston theory. Explain and evaluate Kitcher’s argument, addressing the following questions:
  - How does Kitcher define “conceptual relativism”?
  - Why does Kitcher call his theory of reference a “context sensitive theory”, and how does this contrast with a “context insensitive theory”?
  - How does Kitcher’s theory of reference apply to the phlogiston theory?

- How does this application undermine the case for conceptual relativism?

*Mandatory reading:* Kitcher (1978).

*Optional reading:* Kuhn (1983), Kitcher (1983).

- In Chapter 5 of his *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*, Paul Boghossian outlines an argument for epistemic relativism. Explain and evaluate this argument, addressing the following questions:
  - How does Boghossian formulate epistemic relativism?
  - What is Boghossian’s argument for epistemic relativism?
  - What reasons are there for accepting the first premise of the argument, and what reasons are there for doubting this premise? Should this premise be accepted?
  - What reasons are there for accepting the second premise of the argument, and what reasons are there for doubting this premise? Should this premise be accepted?

*Mandatory reading:* Boghossian (2006, Chapters 5 and 7).

*Optional reading:* Goldman (forthcoming).

- In Chapter 6 of his *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*, Paul Boghossian outlines a number of arguments against epistemic relativism. Explain and evaluate these arguments, addressing the following questions:
  - How does Boghossian formulate epistemic relativism?
  - What is Boghossian’s argument for the claim that an epistemic relativist should not, by their own lights, accept an epistemic system?
  - What is Boghossian’s argument for the claim that an epistemic relativist should not, by their own lights, accept epistemic pluralism?
  - Boghossian considers an alternative form of epistemic relativism on which epistemic systems are sets of imperatives rather than sets of propositions. Explain this alternative form of epistemic relativism, how it avoids the two aforementioned problems, and explain and evaluate Boghossian’s arguments against it.

*Mandatory reading:* Boghossian (2006, Chapter 6), Rosen (2007), Boghossian (2007, §§I–VIII).

*Optional reading:* Kalderon (2009).

## References

- Boghossian, Paul A. 2006. *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- .2007. “The Case against Epistemic Relativism: Replies to Rosen and Neta,” in *Episteme*, Vol. 4, No. 1, February 2007, pp. 49–65. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/epi.2007.4.1.49>.
- Goldman, Alvin I. forthcoming. “Epistemic Relativism and Reasonable Disagreement,” in *Disagreement*, edited by Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield, Oxford University Press, Oxford. URL: <http://fas-philosophy.rutgers.edu/goldman/Epistemic%20Relativism%20and%20Reasonable%20Disagreement.pdf>.
- Kalderon, Mark Eli. 2009. “Epistemic Relativism,” in *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 118, No. 2, April 2009, pp. 225–240. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/00318108-2008-042>.
- Kitcher, Philip. 1978. “Theories, Theorists and Theoretical Change,” in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 87, No. 4, October 1978, pp. 519–547. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2184458>.
- .1983. “Implications of Incommensurability,” in *Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association 1982*, Vol. 2, pp. 689–703.
- Kuhn, Thomas S. 1983. “Commensurability, Comparability, Communicability,” in *Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association 1982*, Vol. 2. Reprinted in Kuhn (2000, pp. 33–57). Pp. 669–688. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/192452>.
- .2000. *The Road Since Structure: Philosophical Essays*, edited by James Conant and John Haugeland. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Rosen, Gideon. 2007. “The Case against Epistemic Relativism: Reflections on Chapter 6 of *Fear of Knowledge*,” in *Episteme*, Vol. 4, No. 1, February 2007, pp. 10–29. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/epi.2007.4.1.10>.