THE NATURE AND VALUE OF KNOWLEDGE

PHIL 6404, Spring 2010
Friday 3:30-5:30, Collins

Professor: Dr. Stephen Grimm
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Office Hours: Tuesday 1-5, and by appointment
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Course Description

In this class we will be considering several questions associated with the recent “value turn” in epistemology.

For example, is truth our primary epistemic goal? If so, then how can we explain the additional value that knowledge seems to have, over and above mere true belief?

Moreover, is it the case that all truths (or subjects, or questions) are equally valuable from an epistemic point of view, or are certain truths more valuable than others? If the latter, then in virtue of what are certain truths more valuable than others?

Finally, what is it about certain states—such as wisdom and understanding—that makes them so desirable from an epistemic point of view?

Readings

With the exception of our first reading (Alston), the course readings will all be available via Blackboard.

Requirements for the Course

Précis Assignments

A 300-350 word précis of the reading (or, more likely, some part of it) will be due at the beginning of class each week. Précis will not be graded; they are meant to be an opportunity for you to think through the material more carefully, and (possibly) to test out ideas, objections, etc. for your final paper. Further details:
Please try to fit the précis on one page; use both sides of a single piece of paper if necessary. Also, please include a word count at the top of the page.

**Final Paper**

A 5,000-6,000 word paper (roughly, 15-17 pages) will be due at the beginning of our final class. The topic is up to you, but you should speak to me beforehand about possible ideas so I can help you to find a manageable topic, and to point you towards relevant readings.

**Grading**

Your grade will be based on your final paper, though excellence in class participation will help those on the borderline of a grade.

**Tentative Schedule of Readings**

**Jan 22 Epistemic Desiderata**


**Jan 29 The Truth Goal**


Feb 5  Curiosity and the Desire for Truth


Optional reading: Dennis Whitcomb, “Ignorance Killed the Cat” (2010); Grimm, “What’s Interesting?” (draft); Grimm, “Epistemic Goals and Epistemic Values” (2008); Anne Baril, “A Eudaimonist Approach to the Problem of Significance” (draft)

Feb 12  Can Practical or Moral Considerations Bear on Knowledge?


Optional reading: Jason Stanley, Knowledge and Practical Interests (2005); John Hawthore, Knowledge and Lotteries (2004); Allan Hazlett, “Knowledge and Conversation” (2009); Grimm, “On Intellectualism in Epistemology” (draft); Grimm, “Knowledge, Practical Interests, and Rising Tides” (draft)

Feb 19  Sosa’s Virtue Account

Required reading: Ernest Sosa, Knowing Full Well, Chs. 1-3 (2010)

Optional reading: Grimm, “Epistemic Normativity” (2009); Allan Hazlett, “Performance Essentialism” (draft)

Feb 26  Greco’s Virtue Account

Required reading: John Greco, Achieving Knowledge, Chs. 1 & 3-4 (2010)

Optional reading: Richard Feldman, “Justification is Internal” (2005)

Mar 5  Greco’s Virtue Account (cont.)

Required reading: John Greco, Achieving Knowledge, Chs. 5-6

Optional reading: Jennifer Lackey, “Why We Don’t Deserve Credit for Everything we Know” (2007); Edward Craig, Knowledge and the State of Nature (1990); David Henderson, “Motivated Contextualism” (2009)
Mar 12  No class (SRG at conference)

SPRING BREAK

Mar 26  Greco’s Virtue Account (cont.)

Required reading: John Greco, Achieving Knowledge, Chs. 7-8

Apr 9  Greco’s Virtue Account (cont.)

Required reading: John Greco, Achieving Knowledge, Chs. 9-11

Apr 16  Epistemic Normativity Workshop (Lincoln Center)

Apr 23  Understanding


Apr 30  Understanding (cont.)


Optional reading: Peter Lipton, “Understanding without Explanation” (2010); Jaegwon Kim “Explanatory Knowledge and Metaphysical Dependence” (1994)

May 7  Wisdom


May 14  Last Class