

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

Required reading: William Alston, *Beyond Justification* (2005), Introduction and Chs. 1-3

Optional reading: Wayne Riggs, “The Value Turn in Epistemology” (2006); Duncan Pritchard, “The Value of Knowledge,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*; Robert Fogelin, *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* (1994), Ch. 1 (“Gettier Problems”)

Jan 29 The Truth Goal

Required reading: Michael DePaul, “Value Monism in Epistemology” (2001); Marian David, “Truth as the Primary Epistemic Goal: A Working Hypothesis” (2005)

Optional reading: Linda Zagzebski, *Epistemology* (2009), Ch. 1 (“Epistemic Value and What We Care About”); Jason Baehr, “Is There a Value Problem?” (2009); Ernest Sosa, “The Place of Truth in Epistemology” (2003); Jonathan Kvanvig, “Truth is not the Primary Epistemic Goal” (2005)

Feb 5 Curiosity and the Desire for Truth

Required reading: Jonathan Kvanvig, “Pointless Truth” (2008); Michael Brady, “Curiosity and the Value of Truth” (2009)

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?

Required reading: Jeremy Fantl & Matthew McGrath, “Pragmatic Encroachment” (2010); Michael Pace, “The Epistemic Value of Moral Considerations: Justification, Moral Encroachment, and James’ ‘Will To Believe’” (2010)

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

Required reading: Jonathan Kvanvig, "The Value of Understanding" (2009); Linda Zagzebski, "Epistemic Good and the Good Life" (2009)

Optional reading: Grimm, "Understanding" (forthcoming); Grimm, "Is Understanding a Species of Knowledge?" (2006); Catherine Elgin, "True Enough" (2004)

Apr 30 Understanding (cont.)

Required reading: Duncan Pritchard, "Knowledge, Understanding, and Epistemic Value" (2009); Catherine Elgin, "Is Understanding Factive?" (2009)

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

May 7 Wisdom

Required reading: Sharon Ryan, "What is Wisdom?" (1999); Dennis Whitcomb, "Wisdom" (2010)

Optional Reading: Sharon Ryan, "Wisdom," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

May 14 Last Class