

VIRTUE EPISTEMOLOGY

PHIL 6580, Spring 2013

Wednesday 12:30-2:30, Collins Seminar Room

Professor: Dr. Stephen Grimm

Office: Collins 133

Office Hours: Thursday 2-5, and by appointment

Tel.: 718-817-3282

email: sgrimm@fordham.edu

Course Description

Just as virtue ethics focuses on what it is that makes for a good human life or for a good moral character, so too virtue epistemology focuses on what it is that makes for a good *epistemic* life or for a good *epistemic* character.

Virtue epistemologists are therefore especially interested in what it is that makes a person a conscientious and effective believer, or what it is that makes his or her beliefs justified or rational. They are also interested in the sort of “higher” epistemic goods that seem especially important to human intellectual flourishing, such as the pursuit of wisdom or understanding.

In this class we will focus on all of these issues, along with recent work in virtue ethics that touches on questions of common concern.

Texts

Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Jason Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

John Greco, *Achieving Knowledge: A Virtue-Theoretic Account of Epistemic Normativity* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Additional readings will be available on Blackboard.

Requirements for the Course

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.

Précis Assignments

A 300-350 word précis of the reading will be due at the beginning of class each week. Your précis can either be a summary of the main gist of the reading (its leading idea, its basic moves, etc.), or a summary of one particular argument/objection that you take to be especially important. The assignments 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.

Please try to fit the précis on one page; use both sides of a single piece of paper if necessary. Also, **do not go over the word limit**; concision is part of the assignment. To keep track of this, please include a word count at the top of the first page.

Précis turned in at the beginning of class will receive an A, A-, or B+. Précis not turned in on time will be marked down a full grade. From among the 12 possible précis assignments (from January 23rd to April 24th), your top ten grades will be counted towards your final grade. In other words, I will drop your two lowest grades.

Class Participation

Participation will count for 10% of your grade. This is the easiest place to do well in the class, and the best way to learn the material, so I encourage you to participate regularly. Asking questions, raising objections, expressing puzzlement, etc. are all good forms of participation.

Grading

Final paper=50%

Précis assignments=40%

Class participation=10%

Tentative Schedule of Readings

January

16 Welcome and overview

23 Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, Part I

30 Zagzebski, Part II

February

6 Zagzebski, Part III

13 Baehr, *Inquiring Mind*, Chs. 1-3

20 Baehr, Chs. 4-6

27 **No class: SRG at talk**

March

6 Baehr, Chs. 7-9

13 **No class: Spring Break**

20 Baehr, Ch. 10 & appendix

27 Greco, *Achieving Knowledge*, Part I: Epistemic Normativity (except Ch. 2)

April

3 Greco, Part II: Problems for Everyone

10 Greco, Part III: Problems for Reliabilism

17 Situationist Challenge to Virtue Epistemology [readings on Blackboard]

24 Wisdom [readings on Blackboard]

May

1 Last class