I. Basics

Meeting time: Tuesday/Thursday 3:40pm-4:55pm
Meeting place: Pasqua Engineering 205
Professor: E.J. Coffman
E-mail address: ecoffma1@utk.edu
Course website: http://online.utk.edu
Office: 816 McClung Tower
Office Hours: 12:30-1:30pm Thursday; 2:30-3:30pm Friday; by appointment

II. Texts

A. Required
1. Online course packet available at our course’s site at Online@UT (http://online.utk.edu)

B. Recommended

Throughout this course, you’ll need to access Online@UT, as well as receive e-mail sent to your UT e-mail account. If you need assistance with this stuff, visit the OIT website (http://oit.utk.edu), or give OIT a call at 974-9900.

III. Course Overview

This course’s main aim is to introduce you to some fundamental issues in contemporary Epistemology. We’ll spend most of our time surveying important contemporary work on the nature of propositional knowledge and epistemic justification. While I probably won’t assign any readings in areas of “applied” epistemology—e.g., moral or religious epistemology—, I’ve designed the course so as to strengthen your ability to interact with work in “applied” areas that interest you.

The course divides into four parts. We’ll start the course’s first part—which focuses on the nature of propositional knowledge—with what’s arguably the most popular account of knowledge during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century: the Justified True Belief (JTB) Analysis of knowledge. After considering the main objection to the JTB analysis—so-called Gettier Cases—we’ll explore the main accounts of knowledge developed over the last forty years. Some of these accounts—e.g., those due to Peter Klein and Gilbert Harman—are variations on the JTB analysis, designed to sidestep Gettier Cases. Other accounts—e.g., those due to Alvin Goldman, Fred Dretske, and Robert Nozick—depart significantly from the JTB approach. We’ll then consider two questions arising from reflection on the main contemporary analyses of knowledge. The Warrant Infallibilism/Fallibilism Debate stems from the following question: Can false beliefs have warrant—the property that distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief? The second question—prompted by the fact that multiple different kinds of luck figure in our attempts to gain knowledge—is this: What sorts of luck does knowledge exclude, and what sorts does it allow? That’s what we’ll do in the first part of our course.
In the course’s second part, we’ll explore two central debates about epistemic justification. The first debate—the Foundationalism/Coherentism/Infinitism Debate—stems from this question: *What structure can a set of justified beliefs have?* According to Foundationalists, any set of justified beliefs will contain some “basic” or “foundational” beliefs—i.e., justified beliefs that don’t depend for their justification on any other beliefs. Coherentists and Infinitists reject Foundationalism, offering different answers to the question of what structure a set of justified beliefs can have. The second debate about justification—the Internalism/Externalism Debate—stems from this question: *Are the facts about which of your beliefs are justified determined completely by facts to which you have “reflective access”?* Internalists say Yes; Externalists say No, maintaining that the facts about which of your beliefs are justified are determined—at least in part—by facts you don’t have reflective access to (e.g., facts about the “reliability” of the process that’s causing you to hold a particular belief). We’ll close the course’s second part by exploring an important recent debate about the nature of evidence.

In the course’s third part, we’ll consider the following two recent trends in epistemology:

- The “Knowledge First” trend, which opposes the standard view that the concept of *knowledge* is to be explained in terms of allegedly more fundamental or intelligible epistemic concepts like *evidence*, *justification*, and *rationality*. According to the “Knowledge First” movement, we should use the concept of *knowledge* to explain other epistemic concepts like *evidence*, *justification*, and *rationality*.

- The “Pragmatic Encroachment” trend, which opposes the standard view that facts about people’s “practical concerns” have no impact whatsoever on the semantics of knowledge ascriptions (i.e., what such an ascription means, and what its *truth value* is). The trend itself features two opposing sides: *Contextualism* and *Interest-Relative Invariantism*. According to Contextualists, knowledge ascriptions have different meanings relative to different “conversational contexts,” where such contexts are constituted in part by people’s practical concerns. According to Interest-Relative Invariantists, the meaning of a given knowledge ascription is “invariant”—i.e., it *doesn’t* vary according to conversational context (contrary to the Contextualist position). Nevertheless, Interest-Relative Invariantists maintain that whether a given knowledge ascription is true depends in part on its subject’s practical interests. In a nutshell, Interest-Relative Invariantists claim that whether you know a particular proposition, P, depends in part on how important it is to you that P be true, on how much worse your circumstances would be were P to turn out false.

We’ll spend whatever time is left on the course’s fourth part, where we’ll explore three recent arguments for restricted forms of *Skepticism*. The first of these arguments—the Underdetermination Argument—concludes that none of our beliefs about the “external world” are justified. The second argument—the Live Hypothesis Argument—concludes that we don’t know claims that conflict with certain “live” philosophical/scientific hypotheses (e.g., that there are no beliefs, that there are no colors, that all pains are in the brain, that there are no character traits). The third argument—the Uniqueness Argument—aims to show that so-called “reasonable disagreement” is impossible under certain common circumstances: in these common circumstances, the argument concludes, at least one of the disagreeing parties holds unjustified beliefs about the points in question.
Here’s an outline of the course’s content:

**Part I: The Nature of Knowledge**

A. Contemporary Analyses of Knowledge
   1. The “Justified True Belief” Analysis & Gettier Cases
   2. Main Post-Gettier Analyses
      a. Variations on JTB
      b. Departures from JTB

B. The Warrant Infallibilism/Fallibilism Debate

C. Luck and Knowledge

**Part II: The Structure and Nature of Epistemic Justification**

A. The Structure of Justification
   1. Foundationalism
   2. Coherentism
   3. Infinitism

B. The Nature of Justification
   1. Three Arguments for Internalism
      a. The Deontological Argument
      b. The Subject’s Perspective Argument
      c. The Cumulative Case Argument
      d. Defenses of Externalism
   2. Three Main Analyses of Justification
      a. Reliabilism
      b. Evidentialism
      c. Proper Function

C. The Nature of Evidence
   1. Evidential Internalism
   2. Evidential Externalism

**Part III: Two Recent Trends**

A. “Knowledge First”

B. “Pragmatic Encroachment”
   1. Contextualism
   2. Interest-Relative Invariantism

**Part IV: Three Recent Skeptical Arguments**

A. The Under-determination Argument
B. The Live Hypothesis Argument
C. The Uniqueness Argument
IV. Requirements

A. Graduate Students

- 4 Critical Commentaries (750-1,000 words each) = 40% of final grade
- 1 Critical Commentary Presentation = 10% of final grade
- 1 Term Paper (3,000-4,000 words) = 50% of final grade

B. Undergraduate Students

- 10 Critical Notes (125-250 words each) = 30% of final grade
- 1 Term Paper (2,500-3,500 words) = 40% of final grade
- 1 Cumulative Final Exam = 30% of final grade

C. Grade Scale

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D. Explanations

- **Term Paper** [Graduates: 3,000-4,000 words; Undergraduates: 2,500-3,500 words]

My hope for this requirement is that it’ll result in your writing a paper of suitable length and quality for conference submission. The final draft of your term paper will be due by **5pm Tuesday May 2nd**. You’ll submit some “preparatory” writing to me by **5pm Friday April 4th**. This initial submission can be as short as a 2-page prospectus, or as long as a full draft. In any case, I strongly encourage you to discuss ideas with me before starting your “preparatory” writing, so that I can be maximally helpful to you and your paper.

- **Critical Commentaries (CCs) & CC Presentation**  [Graduates]

Besides helping you prepare to write your term paper, this requirement will help prepare you to serve as a conference commentator. Each of your four CCs will be between 750-1,000 words, and will earn a grade of ‘Exemplary’, ‘Satisfactory’, or ‘Unsatisfactory’. An Exemplary CC will raise—and maybe attempt to answer—a handful of objections to and/or questions about central parts of some or other assigned reading(s). You’ll present one of your Critical Commentaries to the class for discussion (this presentation will be no longer than ten minutes).

Here are six things to keep in mind about CCs:

- CCs must be typed.
- Each CC must include a word count.
It’s your responsibility to schedule your CC presentation with me (I won’t be formally assigning CC presentation times).

We probably won’t be able to do more than two CC presentations in a given class meeting.

Once we’ve finished class discussion of a given set of readings, it’s too late to present a CC on those readings.

All CCs are due by the last class meeting.

I encourage you to draw on your CCs in class discussion: share your questions with us, try out your objections on us, and so on. “Anonymized” CCs may sometimes be used as springboards for class discussion.

• Critical Notes [Undergraduates]

Besides helping you to critically interact with assigned readings and prepare to write a term paper, this requirement will strengthen your ability to clearly and concisely express questions about and/or objections to all sorts of arguments.

Each Critical Note (CN) you submit will earn a grade of ‘Exemplary’, ‘Satisfactory’, or ‘Unsatisfactory’. A Satisfactory CN will be at least 125—but not more than 250—words, and will raise either (i) a question about or (ii) an objection to something that happens in a particular assigned reading. An Exemplary CN will fall within the same word limits, and will raise a significant question about or objection to a central or crucial part of the selected reading. To ensure that I understand exactly how your question or objection engages the material you’re writing about, you’ll need to provide some context by briefly summarizing the part of the reading your question or objection concerns.

Here are six important rules about CNs:

• CNs must be typed.

• Each CN must include a word count.

• A CN on a particular reading must be submitted before or at the first class where we discuss that reading—i.e., once we’ve started talking about a particular reading, it’s too late to submit a CN about it.

• Each of your CNs must engage a different reading assignment—i.e., no more than one CN on a given reading assignment.

• CNs can’t be “replaced”: if you submit a CN, the grade it earns will be one of your ten CN grades.

• All CNs are due by the last class meeting.

I encourage you to draw on your CNs in class discussion: share your questions with us, try out your objections on us, and so on. “Anonymized” CNs may sometimes be used as springboards for class discussion.
• **Cumulative Final Exam  [Undergraduates]**

The cumulative final exam—which takes place on **Tuesday May 6th (2.45pm-4.45pm)**—will consist of 2-3 essay questions drawn from a list of several possible questions. The possible questions will derive entirely from material covered in class. I’ll distribute a list of possible questions at least a week before the exam. A typical question will ask you to explain a particular argument/theory, present a standard objection to that argument/theory, provide a possible reply to that objection, and (finally) offer your own reasoned verdict about the relevant debate.

**V. Key Dates**

1/10 (R): First class meeting  
4/4 (F): Preparatory writing due [by 5pm]  
4/17 (R): Class canceled (EJ at conference in Chicago)  
4/24 (R): Last class meeting (all CCs/CNs due)  
5/2 (F): Term papers due [by 5pm]  
5/6 (T): Final exam (undergrads) [2.45pm-4.45pm]

**VI. Tentative Reading Schedule**  [merely recommended readings are bold-faced]

*Part I: The Nature of Knowledge*

A. Contemporary Analyses of Knowledge
   1. The “Justified True Belief” Analysis & Gettier Cases
      • A.J. Ayer, “Knowing as Having the Right to be Sure” [JTB]
      • Roderick Chisholm, selection from Perceiving [JTB]
      • Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” [counterexamples to JTB]
      • Linda Zagzebski, “What is Knowledge?” §§1-2
      • Richard Feldman, *Epistemology*, Chapters 1-2

   2. Main Post-Gettier Analyses
      a. Variations on JTB
         • Michael Clark, “Knowledge and Grounds” [No False Grounds]
         • Peter Klein, “A Proposed Definition of Propositional Knowledge” [No Defeaters/“Defeasibility”]
         • Gilbert Harman, selection from *Thought* [No Essential False Grounds]
         • Richard Feldman, *Epistemology*, Chapter 3

   b. Departures from JTB
      • Alvin Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing” [Causal]
      • Fred Dretske, “Conclusive Reasons” [Safety]
      • Robert Nozick, selection from *Philosophical Explanations* [Sensitivity]
      • Alvin Plantinga, selection from *Warrant and Proper Function*; “Warrant and Accidentally True Belief” [Proper Function/“Teleological Reliabilism”]
      • Linda Zagzebski, “What is Knowledge?” [Intellectual Virtue]
      • Richard Feldman, *Epistemology*, Chapter 5
      • Robert Audi, *Epistemology*, Chapter 8
B. The Warrant Infallibilism/Fallibilism Debate

- Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder and Neil Feit, “Infallibilism and Gettier’s Legacy”

C. Luck and Knowledge

- Mylan Engel, “Is Epistemic Luck Compatible with Knowledge?”
- Duncan Pritchard, “Epistemic Luck”

Part II: The Structure and Nature of Justification

A. The Structure of Justification

1. Foundationalism

- William Alston, “Has Foundationalism Been Refuted?”
- Robert Audi, *Epistemology*, Chapter 7
- Richard Feldman, *Epistemology*, Chapter 4

2. Coherentism

- Laurence BonJour, selection from *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*
- Richard Fumerton, “A Critique of Coherentism”
- Alvin Plantinga, selection from *Warrant: The Current Debate*

3. Infinitism

- Peter Klein, “Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress of Reasons”

B. The Nature of Justification

1. Three Arguments for Internalism
   a. The Deontological Argument

- Matthias Steup, “A Defense of Internalism”

   b. The Subject’s Perspective Argument

- Laurence BonJour, “Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge”

   c. The Cumulative Case Argument

- Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, “Internalism Defended”

   d. Defenses of Externalism

- Michael Bergmann, “A Dilemma for Internalism”

2. Three Main Analyses of Justification

   a. Reliabilism

- Alvin Goldman, “What is Justified Belief?”
b. Evidentialism

• Richard Feldman and Earl Conee, “Evidentialism”

C. The Nature of Evidence
1. Evidential Internalism

• Nicholas Silins, “Deception and Evidence”

2. Evidential Externalism

• Timothy Williamson, “Knowledge as Evidence”

Part III: Two Recent Trends

A. “Knowledge First”

• Jonathan Sutton, “Stick to What You Know”

B. Knowledge Ascriptions and Practical Interests
1. Contextualism

• Keith DeRose, “Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions”

2. Interest-Relative Invariantism

• Jason Stanley, Knowledge and Practical Interests, Chapter 1

Part IV: Three Recent Skeptical Arguments

A. The Under-determination Argument

• Michael Huemer, “Direct Realism and the Brain-in-a-Vat Argument”

B. The Live Hypothesis Argument

• Bryan Frances, “When a Skeptical Hypothesis is Live”

C. The Uniqueness Argument

• Roger White, “Epistemic Permissivism”