PHIL 255  Theory of Knowledge

Professor Baron Reed                      Winter Quarter, 2008
office: 3-225 Kresge Hall               G21 Annenberg Hall
email: b-reed@northwestern.edu        MW 3:30-4:50
office hours:  MW 12:30-1:30
            and by appointment
Teaching Assistants: Matthew Mullins and Adam Ring

Course Description:
What can we know? What does it mean to have knowledge? These are some of the most
fundamental questions in philosophy. We will consider some influential answers to these questions
given by both historical and contemporary philosophers. Additional topics include skepticism,
relativism, the nature of evidence, and the nature of rationality.

Required Texts:
Readings on Blackboard.

Recommended Texts:

Required Work:
Three papers:

1st paper (4-5 pages): 25% of the final grade
2nd paper (4-5 pages): 30% of the final grade
3rd paper (8-10 pages): 45% of the final grade.
Excellent class participation may also factor into the final grade.

Course Policies:
(1) In order to pass the course, all assignments must be completed.
(2) Extensions must be requested before the due date.
(3) Only paper versions of the assignments may be handed in.
(4) VERY IMPORTANT: plagiarism will not be tolerated. All cases of alleged violation of
    academic integrity will be referred to the Assistant Dean for Advising and Academic
    Integrity. Possible penalties range from failing the course to permanent exclusion from
    the university. For more on plagiarism, see:
    http://www.wcas.northwestern.edu/advising/dishon.html
Students with Disabilities:
Any student with a documented disability needing accommodations is requested to speak directly to the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) (847-467-5530) and the instructor, as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first two weeks of class). All discussions will remain confidential.

Blackboard:
Much of the business of this course, including access to readings on reserve, will be conducted through the Course Management System (Blackboard). You are encouraged to check it frequently, as I may post announcements there from time to time. To access Blackboard, you will need to use your NetID and password.

Schedule of Readings:
[Recommended reading in brackets]

Jan. 7  Introduction

Jan. 9  Beginning in epistemology
       Feldman 1-12; Fumerton 1-10

Jan. 14 The analysis of knowledge
       Feldman 12-23; Fumerton 12-16

Jan. 16 The Gettier problem
       Feldman 25-37

Jan. 21 MLK Day: no class

Jan. 23 Evidentialism and the regress argument
       Feldman 39-52; Fumerton 37-42

Jan. 28 Internalist foundationalism
       Fumerton 59-69; Feldman 52-60 [Fumerton 53-59, 69-73]

Jan. 30 Coherentism
       Feldman 60-70; Fumerton 43-48

Feb. 4 Modest foundationalism and puzzles for fallibilism
       Feldman 70-78; Fumerton 16-18, 24-25

Feb. 6 Review
       1st paper due

Feb. 11 Externalism (I): the causal theory and the tracking theory
       Feldman 81-86, 86-90; Fumerton 76-80, 84-86

Feb. 13 Externalism (II): reliabilism
       Feldman 90-99; Fumerton 80-83, 86-98
Feb. 18  Skepticism and fallibilism
    Feldman 114-128; Fumerton 117-120

Feb. 20  The problem of induction
    Feldman 130-141

Feb. 25  Skepticism and inference to the best explanation
    Feldman 141-152; Fumerton 120-129

Feb. 27  Review
    2nd paper due

Mar. 3   Epistemology and science
    Feldman 157-175

Mar. 5   Relativism and disagreement
    Feldman 177-189

Mar. 10  Knowledge and action
    Fantl and McGrath; Stanley (Blackboard)

Mar. 12  Reading period

Mar. 18  (Tuesday) Final paper due by 12 PM