Foundationalism and Its Critics
University of Chicago
PHIL 22950/32950, Winter Quarter 2012
301 Rosenwald Hall
TH, 12:00-1:20pm

Instructor: Anubav Vasudevan
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Office Hours: T, 10:30am-12:00pm

Course Description: Foundationalism is the view that all of our knowledge of the empirical world ultimately rests on a ‘foundation’ of non-inferentially justified belief. In this course, we will consider some of the most influential arguments that have been offered against the foundationalist thesis, and discuss the various proposals that have been put forward for how best to articulate an anti-foundationalist conception of epistemology. Readings for the course will include writings by Goodman, Sellars, Davidson, Quine and Rorty, among others.

Assigned Readings: All assigned readings for the course will be made available for download through the “Chalk” course website (to access Chalk, navigate to chalk.uchicago.edu and login using your CNetID and Password).

Syllabus:

Week 1 Introduction and Overview
1/3 Introduction
1/5 What is Foundationalism?
Optional: Audi R., Foundationalism, Coherentism and Epistemological Dogmatism

Week 2 Cartesian Foundationalism
1/10 Descartes R., Meditations on First Philosophy (with Objections and Replies)
1/12 Schmitt F., Why was Descartes a Foundationalist?

Week 3 Are Epistemic Principles Foundational?
1/17 Chisholm R., The Problem of the Criterion
1/19 van Cleve J., Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle

Week 4 Empirical Foundationalism
1/24 Lewis C.I., The Bases of Empirical Knowledge
1/26 Lewis C.I., The Given Element in Experience

Week 5 The Myth of the Given: Arguments against Foundationalism
1/31 Reichenbach H., Are Phenomenal Reports Absolutely Certain?
2/2 Goodman N., Sense and Certainty

Week 6 The Myth of the Given: Arguments against Foundationalism (cont…)
2/7 Sellars W., Selections from Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind
2/9 Bonjour L. Can Empirical Knowledge have a Foundation?
Week 7  Anti-Foundationalist Epistemologies: Coherentism
2/14  (First Essay Due) Davidson D., *A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge*
2/16  Lehrer K., *The Coherence Theory of Knowledge*

Week 8  Anti-Foundationalist Epistemologies: Naturalized Epistemology
2/21  Quine W.V.O., *Epistemology Naturalized*
2/23  Kornblith H., *Beyond Foundationalism on the Coherence Theory*

Week 9  Foundationalism Reborn
2/28  Pastin M., *Modest Foundationalism and Self-Warrant*
3/1   Alston W., *Has Foundationalism been Refuted?*

Week 10  A Quiet Conclusion
3/6   Rorty R., Selections from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*
3/7   Second Essay Due

**Grading Policy:** Final grades for the course will be assessed on the basis of two essays (8-10 pages in length) worth 45% each, and a class participation grade worth the remaining 10% (NB: Regular attendance is taken for granted and, on its own, contributes nothing towards a student’s participation in the course). Students must obtain instructor approval for their paper topic at least one week in advance of the paper’s due date. All written assignments will be assessed on the basis of clarity of expression and the quality of the reasoning offered in support of a position.

**Contacting the Instructor:** If you wish to set up an appointment outside of my regularly scheduled office hours, please send me an e-mail, briefly describing your question and proposing a time at which we can meet. Alternatively, if you think that your question can be answered with only a few lines of text, you could pose it directly in the body of an e-mail. However, keep in mind that the likelihood of a prompt reply goes inversely with the length of the reply required. When in doubt, set up an appointment. For filtering purposes, all course-related e-mails should include the expression ‘foundationalism’ somewhere in their subject line. This will ensure that your message will be replied to with the least possible delay. Except during scheduled office hours, phone calls are to be limited to time-sensitive queries or other emergencies.