2015

PHIL 290-20 Theory of Knowledge

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Philosophy 290-20
Theory of Knowledge
Xavier University, Intersession 2015
M-F 1:00-4:45, Smith 349

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Ancient, modern, and contemporary philosophers will help us reflect on some fundamental questions about knowledge. What does it mean to know something? How does perception contribute to knowledge? What is science? What is education? Is there any absolute truth? Is moral knowledge possible?

We will not settle these questions, but you will become more aware of them and will explore, criticize, and defend some possible answers. In this way, you may become more thoughtful and articulate.

Required texts

Plato, *Theaetetus* (Hackett)
René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Hackett)
Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, *Plato at the Googleplex* (Vintage)

Other editions of these texts are not acceptable. I do not recommend e-books, as you will not be allowed to consult them during the final exam.

Course requirements

8 reading questions:	25%
Essay:	25%
Final exam:	25%
Class participation:	25%

The *eight reading questions* are your initial reflections on and inquiries about the reading assignments. Before each class meeting, except May 18 and May 22, you should type or carefully handwrite a question about the reading assigned for that day. A good question will include some analysis of the text, will show significant thought about the text, and will be written carefully in correct English. The minimum length is half a double-spaced page; there is no upper limit. You will not be graded down for misunderstanding the text, as long as your question shows that you read attentively. I will collect questions each day and return them with a tentative grade, but the final grade on the questions as a whole will be determined at the end of the course. Each time you are not ready with a question at the beginning of class, your grade on the reading questions will go down by up to one letter grade. You may consult secondary sources if you wish as you write your questions, but your questions must show that you read the assigned book yourself, and you must properly cite any secondary sources you use (see "Plagiarism," next page).

The *essay* (4+ pages) will defend your view on an issue in Plato's *Theaetetus.*

The *final exam* will consist of multiple-choice questions and two essay questions about the readings. You may consult the assigned books and your notes during the exam, but may not use electronic devices.

The *class participation* grade will reflect the quality of your effort and your contributions to the class, based on your participation in discussions and in-class work, any extra writing you may do, and your communication with me outside class (office, e-mail, phone).

Policies

Plagiarism is using someone else's words or ideas, either as originally stated or rephrased, without giving credit to the source (such as a website, book, article, or another student's writing). Plagiarism is dishonest and unacceptable. Whenever you use any sources other than the assigned texts, you must cite them. To learn more about plagiarism and methods of citation, visit http://www.xavier.edu/library/xu-tutor/Preventing-Plagiarism.cfm. *Any plagiarism will result in an F for the course, and your dean will be notified of the incident.* "It was an accident" or "I didn't mean to" are not valid excuses; plagiarism is defined by the fact that your work uses someone else's work without giving credit, and you are responsible for the work that you turn in.

Absence policy: You may miss up to two days of the course with a legitimate excuse; further absences may lead to an F for the course, because our time is so limited. In order to compensate for an absence, you must write at least two pages carefully summarizing the text assigned for the day you missed; you must also write a reading question if one was due that day. We may need to meet outside class to review the material. If you do not compensate for an absence, *you will fail the course*.

Late essays will be penalized by one letter grade for each day they are late. *Late reading questions* will not be accepted unless you were absent with a legitimate excuse.

Good English policy: I reserve the right to reject work that has extensive flaws in spelling or grammar. Such work must be corrected before it receives a grade.

Electronic devices may not be used in class without permission.

All course requirements must be completed in order to pass the course.

Calculating your grade

I give each element a letter grade, then convert it to a number on a 4-point scale (like the scale for your GPA), with pluses and minuses counting as 0.33 point. I multiply this number by the percentage the element is worth, and add all the results to get your raw grade. This raw grade is rounded to the nearest letter grade to yield the course grade.
For example:

Reading questions	B	3.00 x 25% = 0.75
Essay	C+	2.33 x 25% = 0.5825
Final exam	C–	1.67 x 25% = 0.4175
Participation	A–	3.67 x 25% = 0.9175
Raw grade		2.6675
Course grade		B –

Complete the readings and writing assignments in advance for every class meeting.

Week 1

May 11   Mon   What is knowledge?
Plato, *Theaetetus* through 148d (pp. 1-10)
Socrates as midwife; is knowledge perception?
Theaetetus 148e-155c (pp. 10-19)
A relativistic theory of reality:
Theaetetus 155d-160e (pp. 19-26)
Reading question #1 due. (See page 1 of this syllabus.)

May 12   Tu   Objections to relativism:
Theaetetus 161a-168c (pp. 26-36)
Relativism and the philosophical life:
Theaetetus 168d-179b (pp. 36-50)
Implications of Heracliteanism:
Theaetetus 179c-184a (pp. 50-56)
Reading question #2 due.

May 13   Wed   Knowledge is not perception:
Theaetetus 184b-186e (pp. 56-60)
How is false judgment possible?
Theaetetus 187a-191b (pp. 60-67)
Memory as a wax block:
Theaetetus 191c-196c (pp. 67-73)
Reading question #3 due.
Handout in class: essay assignment

May 14   Th   Memory as an aviary; knowledge is not true judgment:
Theaetetus 196d-201c (pp. 73-80)
Is knowledge true judgment with an account?
Finish *Theaetetus* (pp. 80-93)
Reading question #4 due.

May 15   Fri   The search for certainty:
Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Part 1 (pp. 1-6)
Method and morals:
Discourse on Method, Parts 2 and 3 (pp. 6-18)
Reading question #5 due.

Week 2

May 18	Mon	**Essay due today.** No reading question due. Radical skepticism: Descartes, Meditation One (pp. 59-63) I think, therefore I am: Meditation Two (pp. 63-69) Descartes' metaphysics: *Discourse on Method*, Part 4 (pp. 18-22)
May 19	Tu	Descartes' physics: *Discourse on Method*, Part 5 (pp. 23-33, focus on 23-25 and 31-33) The promise of science and technology: *Discourse on Method*, Part 6 (pp. 33-44) **Reading question #6 due.**
May 20	Wed	Expertise and moral authority: Goldstein, pp. 59-86 **Reading question #7 due.**
May 21	Th	Moral knowledge without a knower: Goldstein, pp. 81-103 **Reading question #8 due.**
May 22	Fri	Moral ignorance: Goldstein, 104-120 No reading question due. Review session and course evaluations **Final exam**