2014

290-06 Theory of Knowledge

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Course Syllabus:
PHIL 290 Fall 2014:
Theory of Knowledge

Introduction
This course is an introduction to epistemology, or theory of knowledge. We will read the works of three influential philosophers who have shaped (and continue to shape) the way we think about the nature of knowledge, method, science, the mind and body, and rational approaches to God and beauty. We will address perennial philosophical questions: What is knowledge? Is there some method we should use to know what is true? Is knowledge relative? Is the body necessary to have knowledge? What does the notion of a disenchanted world imply about the modern project of mastery and possession of nature? How does scientific reductionism of mental phenomena to brain correlates work, and what may be lost in such a reduction?

The objectives of the course are to gain some sophistication in thinking about these questions and to acquire the critical reasoning, oral and writing skills needed to do philosophical work both inside and outside the classroom.

Required Books: (these editions only)
Rene Descartes, Philosophical Essays and Correspondence, trans. R. Ariew (Indianopolis: Hackett, 2000)

Course Requirements:
20% Participation
10% Writing assignments (inside and outside of class)
10% Protocol assignment
25% Exam on Descartes
10% Paper #1
25% Paper #2 (= Final Exam)

Reading: You must read each text at least twice. I suggest reading rather quickly the first time, marking up with pencil what you think are important terms and arguments. Then, a slower second read, with more attention to detail.

Writing Center: Everyone needs help with his or her writing. Even great authors need an editor or second pair of eyes. I strongly suggest that you visit the writing center before you turn in each paper. Your grammar will improve, your prose will become crisper, and your argument stronger. Overall, your writing skills and course grade will very likely increase. There is really nothing to lose, and everything to gain. For more information, see: http://www.xavier.edu/writingcenter/
I will be happy to work with you on drafts, but only if we go over them in office hours, with hard copies (one for you, one for me), with you taking notes on my suggestions. No drafts will be looked at if sent as attachments or within 48 hours before the due date. This policy is meant to encourage you to organize your ideas as early as possible.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism will result in the failing of the assignment, and it may result in the failing of the course. All cases of plagiarism will be reported to the Dean of your College and a written statement will be put in your student file. TurnItIn will be used for all papers, using Canvas.

**Participation:** Participation is required. Participation can take place in a number of ways: asking questions, responding to questions, raising objections, and making points. I do recognize that for some students talking in class and discussing philosophy can be intimidating. Discussing the philosophical content of the readings or class discussion by email or during office hours will count toward your participation grade. Socratic method will be practiced during class time (calling on students at random in a brainstorming fashion), but I don’t want to put anyone on the spot, so you always have the option of saying “pass” without any shame.

**Protocol:** Please see forthcoming sheet for information about 2-person team protocols, which are 2-page summaries of a particular week’s content.

**Papers:** You will write two papers. For each paper I will provide a handout detailing the assignment and my expectations. A late paper will be lowered a full grade for each day (not each class day) it is late.

**Attendance:** You are allowed three unexcused absences. Each unexcused absence after three will result in a lowering of your final grade by a full grade. If your final grade is an A- and you have 4 absences, then your grade for the course will be a B-. This policy will be strictly followed. Excused absences require an official note from a doctor or student affairs—of course, I am happy to discuss upcoming conflicts with you. If you have more than 7 absences then you will fail the course.

This instructor takes mental health issues quite seriously. Please feel free to approach me with any issues on this count, and be assured of absolute discretion.

If you do miss a class you must (a) get notes from another student, (b) ask me for handouts I might have distributed and (c) ask for instructions for the next class. If you are absent, do not assume that you know where we are in the readings.

**Students must keep their cell phones off during class, not on vibrate or silence. Please: no eating during class. Anyone using a computer or tablet reader MUST sit in the first or second row—No exceptions.**
PHIL 290f14 Reading Schedule (subject to revision)

**Week 1: Descartes, Discourse on Method, Part 6 (pp. 73-82)**

**August**  
T 26  *Thoughtlessness: TH: “Once in a Lifetime”*  
Th 28

**Week 2: Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation” (pdf), pp. 12-31 (pay particular attention to highlighted sections)**

**September**  
T 2  
Th 4

**Week 3: Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy 1-2 (pp. 104-113)**

T 9  
Th 11

**Week 4: Descartes, Discourse on Method, Parts 1-2**

T 16  
Th 18

**Week 5: Descartes, Discourse on Method, Parts 4-5**

T 23  
Th 25

**Week 6: Christof Koch, Consciousness, Preface and chs. 1-2**

T 30  *Exam on Descartes*  
**October**  
Th 2

**Week 7: Koch, chs. 1-2 cont.**

T 7  
Th 9  *Fall break—no classes*

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**Week 8: Koch, ch. 3**

T 14  
Th 16

**Week 9: Koch, ch. 6**

T 21  
Th 23
**Week 10: Koch, chs. 8-9**
T  28
Th  30

**Week 11: Roger Scruton, *The Soul of the World*, ch. 1**
November
T  4  
*No Wed. office hours*
Th  6  *Koch paper due*

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**Week 12: Scruton, ch. 2**
T  11
Th  13

**Week 13: Scruton, ch. 3**
T  18
Th  20

**Week 14: Scruton, ch. 7**
T  25  
*Th  27  Thanksgiving*

**Week 15: Scruton, ch. 8**
December
T  2
Th  4

**Week 16: TBA**
T  9
Th  10  *Last class*

Final Exam = Paper on Scruton