2013

290-01 Theory of Knowledge

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Course Overview:

What is knowledge? What is truth? How can we know? What can we know? How do we know when we know something? How is knowledge different from opinion? Is knowledge the same as wisdom? As science? Are practical and theoretical knowledge different? Also, what is knowledge of? How do questions of knowledge intersect with questions about the nature of reality? And why do knowledge and truth matter (or do they)? Is it worthwhile to know or care about knowing? Why or how? How do questions of knowledge intersect with questions of value?

We shall explore these and related questions by examining various theories of knowledge from ancient to modern times. We begin with Plato's Apology and Meno, along with sections from the Republic, then study selections from Plato's greatest student Aristotle to consider how the two greatest philosophers of antiquity understood knowledge, truth, and related issues. Then we will turn to modernity and the 17th century to consider Rene Descartes' revolutionary ideas and methodology. Following Descartes we will take up the other great tradition of modern epistemology as represented by the Scottish empiricist (and self-described skeptic) David Hume. Finally, we will think through perhaps the most important challenge to both modern and ancient conceptions of truth and knowledge, that posed by the 19th century German thinker Friedrich Nietzsche.

Online Overview:

This course takes place entirely online. Instead of meeting face-to-face in the classroom we will interact through various features of Blackboard. To keep things simple, we’ll follow the same procedure from day one. (See the “module” and “schedule” sections below). After an initial introductory unit to be completed by the end of the first day (May 13th), every weekday will consist of reading, viewing and listening to my recorded discussion of the assigned portions of the texts. At least twice you should contribute to the Discussion Forum for each unit. Quizzes should be completed after each unit, and after completing three of the modules, you’ll have a short (3-4 pp.) paper due. On the day after these are submitted, you will peer review another student’s paper using the Peermark function on turnitin.com. A rubric will be provided to help you with this task. There will be a final exam on the last day of class. Each of these steps is outlined in greater detail below.

Note on time commitment: Usually instructors recommend devoting twice as much time outside of class as one spends in class to do well in a course. A typical 6 week summer course requires the equivalent of 5 weekly classes of 75 minutes each (as opposed to 2 weekly classes in a 15 week semester), which would require 2.5 hours of reading and preparation before class. This course will require at least as much time as a face-to-face course, although the 1.25 hour daily class-time commitment will be replaced by the module viewings and forum discussions. In short, you should be prepared to spend as much as four hours a day on this course five days a week, not counting time to write your papers and peer review. Of course, you may find that it takes you more or less time to read and write than the average recommendation. But don’t make the mistake of thinking that a summer course takes less work than a regular semester course, or than an online course is easier than a face-to-
Reading is the foundation of the course. Consequently, it is extremely important that you read carefully and consistently. Page assignments are usually short, but the material is often dense and difficult, so for every 10 pages of reading I recommend devoting at least 1-2 hours to read, reread, and take notes, in addition to the time needed to view and listen to my lectures and participate in the discussion forums. We will read the following authors and texts:

**Plato:** *Apology, Meno* (found in *Five Dialogues*, Hackett), and excerpts from *Republic* (Hackett)  
**Aristotle:** excerpts from *Ethics, Physics, and Metaphysics* (*Basic Works*, Random House)  
**Descartes:** *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy* (Hackett)  
**Hume:** Excerpts from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford)  
**Nietzsche:** Excerpts from *On Truth and Untruth: Selected Writings* (Harper Perennial)

*Note:* You may order either print or electronic copies of these texts. Copies will be available at the bookstore, or you can order them online through various vendors. The *Republic* and Aristotle selections will be available for free on e-reserve, and the Descartes and Hume texts, plus *Five Dialogues* (containing *Apology* and *Meno*), will be available to order electronically through Café Scribe ([www.cafescribe.com](http://www.cafescribe.com)).

**Modules:**

On Blackboard I have organized the course material into “modules,” one for each author we read (five in all). In each module you’ll find a “unit” for each assigned text (three for Plato, three for Aristotle, and one each for the last three authors), and each “unit” includes an introduction, learning objectives, outlines, study questions, and recorded lectures. The titles of the lecture files correspond to the outlines, so you can tell what sections of the text I’m discussing in each one. You should complete each module in the following order (although you may contribute to the Discussion Forum at any point during the unit):

1) Read the introduction and learning objectives for each unit  
2) Read the assigned pages for each day, using the outlines and study questions as a guide  
3) View and listen to the recorded lectures in order for each day’s reading  
4) Repeat steps 2-3 for each day's material in each unit  
5) After completing a unit, take the quiz at the end  
6) Participate in the discussion forum for each unit  
7) Repeat steps 1-6 for each unit  
8) Write an essay after the Plato, Aristotle, and Hume modules  
9) Peer review another student’s essay

The most unfamiliar part of this process will be steps 3 and 6, watching the recorded lectures and participating in the discussion forums. These are also the steps that most directly replace the usual face-to-face interaction of the classroom, so they are particularly important. So let me say a word about how to approach step 3 here (I discuss step 6 below under “Discussion”). First, make sure you do the reading before watching the lectures, because while the lectures are closely tied to the texts and will help you understand them, they cannot replace your own reading. I would advise you to have the
outline and your text in front of you as you watch the lectures, so that you can follow where I am more easily. It is very important to give the lectures your full attention and not to multitask while you watch. Resist the temptation to do other things online like check e-mail or Facebook, and make sure you watch as well as listen, since a major part of the lectures involves my highlighting and discussion of key passages in the texts, which I almost always have displayed on the screen. The individual recordings are of widely varying lengths, so you might want to pause every 5 or 10 minutes or at transition points in the material to take a quick breather and refresh your concentration. Jot down key points as you note them, just as you would in class, and take advantage of your ability to rewind and listen again to points that were not clear the first time around. If questions about the material occur to you, write them down, and submit them to the discussion forum that I've set up for this purpose (“Questions at Large”). Also keep in mind the key issues that I note in the “Learning Objectives” and “Study Questions,” since these are especially important, so that when they come up you can make special note of them. Finally, both while watching and just after, while the material is still fresh in your mind, think about ways you can contribute to the discussion forum questions for each unit, so that you can do so as soon as you're ready.

Discussion:

Philosophy depends on dialogue. Although we will not engage in face to face discussion, we will talk with each other through the threaded discussion forums on Blackboard. I will provide forums of three different sorts, including one reserved strictly for your own discussion of whatever you wish (the “water cooler”) and one for asking me questions about the material and the course (“questions at large”). Aside from these two, the third and most important kind of forum will ask you to respond to questions pertaining directly to the readings. Blackboard allows you to respond directly to the questions (the “threads”) as well as reply to the responses of others. I will expect at least one direct response and one reply for each unit (including the Introduction). Due dates for responses fall at the ends of the units, and are indicated on the schedule below (and under the “Schedule” tab on BB) and in the descriptions of the Forums on Blackboard. Replies must be submitted no later than the end of the following day.* Additional contributions might improve your grade, if your comments are substantive and relevant to an ongoing discussion, and you should feel free to continue contributing after the unit is completed, so long as you've already posted your minimum. Note, however, that I will not look favorably on posting just for the sake of boosting your grade, particularly if comments are posted long after a unit is finished.

Scoring: How well you do on the discussion component of the grade will depend not just on meeting the minimum quantitative requirement, but also and more importantly on how substantive and thoughtful your comments are. I will grade each required response and reply on a scale of 1-5 (for a total of 10), with deductions for lateness (see “Grading” note on lateness, below). You have 90 possible points for the 9 total units (including the Introduction and counting the two short Aristotle units as one and the three Nietzsche selections as one). 10 more possible points will be awarded based on your participation in the “Questions at Large” forum over the course of the term, for a total of 100 possible points (worth 20% of your final grade).

Papers:

Essays: The formal writing requirement of the course consists of three essays (3-4 pages), due at regular intervals (see assignment schedule below). Late papers will be docked a partial letter grade

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* For the one-day “Physics” and “Metaphysics” units for Aristotle, I will expect only one response and one reply in total: the response due by the end of Friday May 31st, and the reply by the end of the day after, Saturday June 1st.
for every six hours late, beginning with the very first minute (e.g. a paper submitted at 12:01 am reduces a B to a B-; a paper submitted at 6:01 am reduces a B to a C+). The prompts and paper requirements will be posted under the “Assignments” tab on Blackboard at least one week before the paper is due. The papers will be submitted as Turnitin assignments (in .doc or .docx format) through Blackboard, and will be peer reviewed through Turnitin. I will also provide my own feedback, which will not be viewable by others.

Peer Review: By the end of the day following the day that you have turned in a paper, you should peer review a paper submitted by another student. The process will be entirely anonymous, and peer reviewers will be randomly assigned papers. However, all papers and all reviews will be viewable by the entire class, so that everyone can benefit from seeing the papers and reviews of others. I will provide a rubric for review on turnitin.com. Your reviews will be graded by how thoughtful and helpful they are. Late peer reviews will be docked a partial letter grade per six hours late.

Rewrites: You may rewrite the first two papers if you do the following: (1) Consult with me about the paper; (2) Attach a short note explaining how you tried to improve the paper, including how you have addressed my comments and those of your peer reviewer; and (3) Turn in the revised version no later than one week after receiving the graded original. Revisions that do not meet all of these requirements will not be accepted. The grade of the rewrite will replace the grade of the original. Note: I will never lower the grade, but I reserve the right not to raise it if I deem the changes to be too superficial. It is very important to correct mistakes of grammar, spelling, and style, but you must make an effort to improve the content and presentation of the essay as well.

Exam:

There will be a final exam on June 20th, the last scheduled date of the summer term. It will begin at 6 PM and end at 8 PM. You will need to be online during that time; it will not be possible to take the exam before or after that time. It will be cumulative and consist of a combination of short answer questions and short essays.

Quizzes:

There will be multiple-choice quizzes at the end of the recorded lectures for each unit. These are designed to test your understanding of the material. They will be graded automatically on a percentage basis and will equal 100% taken all together. To receive credit, quizzes must be taken no later than the day after the unit is completed (according to the Schedule).

Grading:

First Essay: 15%
Second Essay: 15%
Third Essay: 15%
Peer Review: 10%
Final Exam: 20%
Discussion: 20%
Quizzes: 5%

Grade Reductions for Lateness: As indicated above, I will dock a paper one partial letter grade per six hours late. Late means any time after midnight (even one minute). The same applies to your peer reviews. For Discussion Forum contributions, I will knock one point off of a required response or
reply for every six hours (past midnight) that it is late.

**Academic Conduct:**

Academic dishonesty of any sort will not be tolerated. Most serious is plagiarism. If you turn in work that is not your own in any way—for example, copied in whole or part from another student, from secondary texts, from the Internet (this includes SparkNotes), etc.—it will receive no credit, and may result in your referral to the Dean’s Office for disciplinary measures. Note that I will be checking papers for plagiarism. To make sure we're all on the same page about plagiarism, please complete the online library tutorial on the subject [http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/index.cfm](http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/index.cfm). If necessary, take the quiz several times until you have scored 100%. This will need to be completed before the first paper is due for you to receive credit on the paper. Plagiarism aside, in both your written work and online discussion, it is very important that you be honest: about what you don’t understand, about what you like or don’t like, about questions or problems you may have, and about your ideas and opinions.

**Schedule:**


*Monday:* Apology 17a-24b (~7 pp.) [Introductory activities to be completed by end of today]

*Tuesday:* Apology 24b-35d (~11 pp.)

*Wednesday:* Apology 35d-end (~5 pp.)

*Apology Discussion Responses due*

*Thursday:* Meno 70a-80d (~11 pp.)

*Apology Discussion Replies due*

*Apology Quiz due*

*Friday:* Meno 80d-86c (~8 pp.)


*Monday:* Meno 86c-end (~14 pp.)

*Meno Discussion Responses due*

*Tuesday:* Republic 473c-487a (~10 pp.)

*Meno Discussion Replies due*

*Meno Quiz due*

*Wednesday:* Republic 503b-511e (~8 pp.)

*Thursday:* Republic 514a-521b (~6 pp.)

*Republic Discussion Responses due*

*Friday:* Ethics I.1-5, 7, 13; II.1-2, 6 (~14 pp.)

*Republic Discussion Replies due*

*Republic Quiz due*

***First Essay Due by end of Sunday, May 26th; peer review due by end of Monday***

**Week 3 (5/27-5/31): Aristotle: Ethics, Physics, Metaphysics**

*Monday:* Memorial Day holiday

*Tuesday:* Ethics VI.1-7 (~7 pp.)
Wednesday: Ethics VI.12-13, X.6-8 (~9 pp.)
   *Ethics Discussion Responses due*
Thursday: Physics II.1-3 (~7 pp.)
   *Ethics Discussion Replies due*
Friday: Metaphysics I.1-2 (~5 pp.)
   *Physics / Metaphysics Discussion Responses due*
   *Physics / Metaphysics Replies due Saturday*
   *Physics / Metaphysics Quiz due Saturday*

***Second Essay Due by end of Sunday, June 2nd; peer review due by end of Monday***

**Week 4 (6/3-6/7): Descartes: Discourse on Method; Hume: Enquiry**

   Monday: Discourse 1-2 (~11 pp.)
   Tuesday: Discourse 4 (~4 pp.)
   Wednesday: Discourse 5 (~10 pp.)
   Thursday: Discourse 6 (~10 pp.)
   *Discourse Discussion Responses due*
Friday: Enquiry 1-2 (~13 pp.)
   *Discourse Discussion Replies due*
   *Discourse Quiz due*

**Week 5 (6/10-6/14): Hume: Enquiry; Nietzsche: Ch. 1**

   Monday: Enquiry 3-4 (~12 pp.)
   Tuesday: Enquiry 5-6 (~14 pp.)
   Wednesday: Enquiry 9-10 (~22 pp.)
   Thursday: Enquiry 12 (~12 pp.)
   *Enquiry Discussion Responses due*
Friday: Nietzsche 1 (~12 pp.)
   *Enquiry Discussion Replies due*
   *Enquiry Quiz due*

***Third Essay Due by end of Sunday, June 16th; peer review due by end of Monday***

**Week 6 (6/17-6/20): Nietzsche: Chs. 2, 4; Exam**

   Monday: Nietzsche 2.1 (~ 23 pp.)
   Tuesday: Nietzsche 2.2 and 4 (~ 28 pp.)
   *Nietzsche Discussion Responses due*
Wednesday: Study Day
   *Nietzsche Discussion Replies due*
   *Nietzsche quiz due*
Thursday: Exam