2014

290-09 Theory of Knowledge

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Course Description and Objectives: What does it mean to know something and how does that differ from simply having an opinion about it? Can we ever truly know anything, and if so, how? Do some fields, like mathematics and science, have a greater claim to knowledge than others, like philosophy and theology? Is humanity making progress in its knowledge? These are the sorts of questions asked by the branch of philosophy called epistemology (the study of knowledge) which will be the focus of this course.

This semester, you will discuss epistemological questions with others and develop your own thinking about them. You will also improve your skills at interpreting philosophical texts, articulating your own thoughts, and writing quality academic papers.

Course Goals: This course will contribute to the following goals of Xavier’s core curriculum.

- **GOAL 1:** Students will be effective communicators in writing and orally.
  - Students will organize and express their ideas in writing and orally.
  - Students will formulate clear and arguable theses, supported by evidence drawn from appropriate sources.
  - Students will utilize an effective writing process guided by audience, purpose, cultural context, and disciplinary standards.

- **GOAL 2:** Students will be critical thinkers.
  - Students will analyze and interpret texts.
  - Students will evaluate the strength of an argument or claim and its evidence.
  - Students will discuss fundamental questions that arise from the human condition, such as questions about the grounds of morality, the essence of justice, the nature of reality, the possibility of certainty, the nature of beauty, or the reasonableness of religious faith.

- **GOAL 3:** Students will be creators of new knowledge and expression.
  - Students will utilize their imagination and creativity, individually and collectively, to innovate and generate new perspectives to problems.

- **GOAL 4:** Students will be able to understand and appreciate the arts, humanities and science disciplines, and reflect on connections among these studies.
  - Students will articulate and engage with great ideas in the history of Western thought through the writings of great philosophers.

Required Text Books:

Required Electronic Reserve Text: On the XU Library web site, go to the “Reserves” tab. Under “Search Electronic Reserves,” click “Search by Professor or Course,” then “Access to Faculty E-Reserves Documents,” then search under the name “Hill.” The password is “tok.”

C. S. Lewis, “De Futilitate,” excerpted from *Christian Reflections*. 
Course Requirements: You will be graded on class participation, pop quizzes, short writing assignments, a paper, and two exams as follows:

- Class Participation: 15%
- Pop Quizzes: 10%
- Short Writing Assignments: 15%
- Paper: 25%
- Midterm Exam: 15%
- Final Exam: 20%

The grade for each of these, as well as your cumulative grade for the course, will be based on a one hundred point scale as follows: A: Exceptional (90-100%), B: Good (80-89%), C: Satisfactory (70-79%), D: Minimum Passing (60-69%), F: Failure (below 60%). The upper 3 points of each range earn a plus and the lower 3 points of each range earn a minus.

Class Participation: Philosophy is not simply information to be memorized, but rather an activity in which one engages. Therefore, it is important for you to come to each class session well-prepared and ready to participate in an active discussion of the material. This means that before each class, you should review your notes from the previous class, read the new assignment carefully, think it through, and come to class ready to talk about it. To help you prepare for class, the instructor will be providing you with guided reading questions for each assignment. These will help to get you started with thinking through what you are reading, but they are only a starting point. The more actively you engage the texts, the more rewarding you will find them. Important passages will be read and discussed in class, so you should always bring your book to class sessions.

Your class participation grade will be based primarily, but perhaps not exclusively, on your active contribution to class discussion. Class participation grades begin with the assumption of a C (satisfactory). To receive a higher grade than this, you must regularly volunteer contributions to class discussion. On the other hand, your class participation grade may be lowered if you are sleeping in class, working on other projects in class, or otherwise disengaging from the course.

Pop Quizzes: Quizzes will be unannounced and will focus on the reading assigned for that day and material covered in recent lectures. If you are absent from a quiz, you may not make up the quiz. However, missed quizzes will not count against you in determining your final grade for the course.

Paper and Short Writing Assignments: The paper will be 5-7 full pages in length and topics will be provided. To build skills for this assignment, you will be doing two shorter writing assignments. All writing assignments must be typed (not handwritten) and double-spaced. Spelling, grammar and punctuation will be considered in grading. Late papers will be reduced by 3% for each day they are late. Papers submitted on the due date, but after class time, will be considered one day late. Requests for extensions must be received before the due date. Papers may be submitted electronically as proof that they have been completed by a certain date, but a hard copy must also be submitted, since only hard copies will be graded. All writing assignments must be submitted in order for you to pass the course. You will also be asked to submit all papers to Turnitin.com.

Exams: The exams must be taken at the announced time except when there are extreme and unforeseeable circumstances, as judged by the instructor. The final exam will be cumulative, but weighted more heavily toward material covered since the midterm exam.

Blackboard: To access Blackboard, go to http://blackboard.xavier.edu and log in. Then click the link to this course. You should check this site before each class. At least 24 hours before each class session, the Announcements section will tell you what to prepare. The Course Content section will have copies of all course handouts. Your attendance and grades will also be posted to Blackboard. However, posted grades are not official. All official grades will be calculated and recorded in the instructor’s own files. If you believe that a grade has been incorrectly posted on Blackboard, or if you would like to see your official grade sheet, please contact the instructor.
**Attendance Policy:** Only four absences will be tolerated without academic penalty. Each absence after the fourth will result in a reduction of your final grade by two points on the hundred point scale. **No distinction is made between excused and unexcused absences.** However, if you need to miss more than four classes for good reasons (illness, athletic commitment, family concern, etc.), please contact the instructor within a day or two of each absence after the fourth to find out whether there is a way to earn attendance credit for that session.

Students are generally expected to be on time for class and to remain until the session has ended. *(It’s only a 50 minute commitment!)* Arriving late or stepping out during class can be a distraction to others and also means that you will miss out on part of the discussion. Therefore, every four times that you arrive late, leave early, or step out in the middle of class, this will be counted as an absence. If you come to class after the roll has been called, **it is your responsibility** to see the instructor after class to make sure that your attendance has been counted.

**Academic Honesty:** Academic honesty is expected of all Xavier students. Conduct such as plagiarism, cheating, submitting the same paper for two courses, or fabrication of source material will not be tolerated. In any case of academic dishonesty, the dean of the student’s college will be notified and the presumed penalty will be failure for the course.

Plagiarism is using the words or ideas of others without proper acknowledgment. This is wrong because it is an attempt to pass off someone else’s work as your own. Any time that you use someone else’s work (books, articles, web sites, etc.), you must identify the source, even if you are only paraphrasing or borrowing general ideas. All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the following tutorial on plagiarism: [http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/plagiarism/](http://www.xavier.edu/library/xututor/plagiarism/)

**Special Accommodations:** Accommodations will be made for students with learning disabilities according to the needs specified for each student by Xavier’s Learning Assistance Center *(745-3280, [http://www.xavier.edu/lac/](http://www.xavier.edu/lac/)), provided that the instructor has received this information in sufficient time to make the accommodation.*

**Calendar:** The following calendar is tentative and subject to change. If you miss a session of class, it is your responsibility to contact the instructor or another student to find out what preparation is expected for the following session.

- **Mon. 1/13** Introduction
- **Wed. 1/15** Discussion
- **Fri. 1/17** *Discourse on Method* – Part VI up to page 35
- **(Sun. 1/19)** Last day to add or drop courses
- **(Mon. 1/20)** NO CLASS – Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday
- **Wed. 1/22** *Discourse on Method* – Part I
- **Fri. 1/24** *Discourse on Method* – Part II
- **Mon. 1/27** Lecture – How to Write Philosophy Papers
- **Wed. 1/29** *Discourse on Method* – Part IV and *Meditations*
- **Fri. 1/31** *Discourse on Method* – Part IV and *Meditations*
- **Mon. 2/3** *Discourse on Method* – Part IV and *Meditations*
- **Wed. 2/5** *Discourse on Method* – Part IV and *Meditations*
- **Fri. 2/7** *Discourse on Method* – Part V
  - 1st Short Writing Assignment Due
- **Mon. 2/10** *Discourse on Method* – Part V
- **Wed. 2/12** *Discourse on Method* – Part VI
- **Fri. 2/14** Lecture on Wittgenstein
Mon. 2/17  *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – Chapter 1
Wed. 2/19  *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – Chapter 2
Fri. 2/21  *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – Chapter 3

Mon. 2/24  *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – Chapter 4
Wed. 2/26  *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – Chapter 6
Fri. 2/28  **Midterm Exam**

**SPRING BREAK**

Mon. 3/10  *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – Chapter 9
          2\textsuperscript{nd} Short Writing Assignment Due
Wed. 3/12  *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* – Chapter 13
Fri. 3/14  Discussion

Mon. 3/17  *De Futilitate*
Wed. 3/19  *De Futilitate*
Fri. 3/21  *De Futilitate*

Mon. 3/24  *De Futilitate*
Wed. 3/26  *De Futilitate*
Fri. 3/28  *De Futilitate*

Mon. 3/31  Discussion
Wed. 4/2   *History for Life* – I
Fri. 4/4    *History for Life* – II and III
          Final Paper Due

Mon. 4/7   *History for Life* – II and III
Wed. 4/9   *History for Life* – IV
Fri. 4/11  *History for Life* – V

Mon. 4/14  *History for Life* – VI
Wed. 4/16  Discussion

**EASTER BREAK**

Wed. 4/23  *History for Life* – VII
Fri. 4/25  *History for Life* – VIII

Mon. 4/28  *History for Life* – IX
Wed. 4/30  *History for Life* – X
Fri. 5/2    Discussion

Wed. 5/7    **Final Exam: 2:00 p.m. - 3:50 p.m. (in our usual classroom)**