

2013

## 290-11 Theory of Knowledge

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# THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

PHIL 290-11

Fall, 2013

Hailstones Hall 3

T/TH 11:30-12:45

Prof. Michael Sweeney  
Hinkle Hall 205  
745-2035  
sweeney@xavier.edu

## Office hours

T/Th 1:00-2:00

W 10:00-12:00

And by appointment and by chance

## Requirements and Tentative Schedule

### Exams

Midterm (tentatively Tuesday, October 9<sup>15</sup><sup>th</sup>): 30%; three essays; study questions provided in advance.

Final (unchangeably Tuesday, December 17<sup>th</sup>, 10-30-12:30): 30%; four essays; study questions provided in advance.

**Paper:** 25% (tentatively Tuesday, November 21<sup>st</sup>)

8 pages submitted by hard copy and electronically to turnitin.com

The class after the midterm will be devoted to further explanation of the paper.

Plagiarism will result in an "F" for the course and a letter to the dean.

**Class participation:** 15%

Participation refers to discussion: it presumes attendance.

Six or more unexcused absences will result in an "F" for the course.

## Texts

Plato, *Theatetus* (Hackett Press)

Plato, *Republic* [V 472d-VI] (Hackett Press)

Thomas Aquinas, *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Modern Library)

Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (Hackett Press)

Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (University of Minnesota Press)

## Tentative Schedule

Plato: 5 classes

Aquinas: 8 classes

Midterm exam

Descartes: 8 classes

Paper

Lyotard: 4 classes

Final exam

## READING ASSIGNMENTS

### Plato

1. Knowledge is sense-perception and Protagoras' idealism  
*Theatetus*, pp. 1-25
2. Refutation of Protagoras' idealism  
*Theatetus*, pp. 26-41, 47-60
3. Why the philosopher must rule  
*Republic* 472a-487c, pp. 147-161
4. Why knowledge is necessary  
*Republic* 487d-504d, pp. 161-178
5. Divided line: separation of knowledge from opinion  
*Republic* 504e-511e, pp. 178-189

### Aquinas

1. Against Plato: q. 84, a. 1; pp. 377-9
2. Sensation and abstraction  
q. 84, aa. 2-3; pp. 380-6  
q. 84, a. 6; pp. 392-5  
q. 85, a. 1; pp. 400-5
3. Return to imagination  
q. 84, a. 7; pp. 395-8
4. Purpose of knowledge  
*De veritate* q. 2, a. 2 (handout)  
q. 2, a. 3; pp. 34-7  
q. 12, a. 5; pp. 79-80  
q. 12, a. 12; pp. 93-4
5. Goodness  
q. 5, a. 1; pp. 34-6  
q. 5, a. 6; pp. 43-5
6. Truth  
q. 16, a. 1; pp. 168-71
7. Aquinas' physics and the question of method  
*On the Division and Methods of the Sciences* V.3 (handout)

### Descartes

1. Method, tradition and mathematics  
*Discourse*, Parts I-III; pp. 1-18
2. Method and self  
*Discourse*, Part IV, pp. 18-19
3. Proofs for the existence of God  
*Discourse*, Part IV, pp. 19-21
4. Proof of the existence of matter  
*Discourse*, Part IV; pp. 21-22
5. Re-creation of the world, relation between mind and body  
*Discourse*, Part V; pp. 23-34
6. Purpose of knowledge  
*Discourse*, Part VI; pp. 35-44

## **Lyotard**

1. Modern vs. Postmodern  
*Postmodern Condition*, pp. xxiii-9
2. Agonistics and consensus  
*Postmodern Condition*, pp. 9-17
3. Metanarratives  
*Postmodern Condition*, pp. 18-41
4. The university  
*Postmodern Condition*, pp. 41-53
5. Efficiency and dissent  
*Postmodern Condition* pp. 53-67

## EXAM STUDY QUESTIONS

### Study questions for midterm exam

1. In the *Theatetus*, how does Socrates explain Protagoras' "man is the measure," and how does Socrates argue against it?
2. How is knowledge defined in the *Republic*? What does Aquinas think that Plato's account is idealist?
3. What is Aquinas' account of abstraction and the return to imagination (judgment)?
4. For Aquinas, what is the purpose of knowledge? Explain briefly how Aquinas' position differs from that of Protagoras and Plato.
5. What makes Aquinas' account of goodness and truth realist? How does the standard of truth differ for natural and artificial things?

### Final exam questions

1. Is there only one method of knowledge for Aquinas? What are the mistakes that Aquinas makes with regard to method in physics?
2. Compare Descartes' view of the self in Part IV (the "cogito") of the *Discourse* with his view of the self in Parts V and VI.
3. How and why does Descartes eliminate form from matter? What is the role of Descartes' method in the elimination of form from matter?
4. Explain the purpose of knowledge according to Descartes, and compare it to that of Aquinas and Protagoras.
5. Why does Lyotard think that a new account of knowledge is necessary, and what is that account?
6. What is the educational revolution that, according to Lyotard, is following upon the epistemological revolution that is postmodernism?

## **PAPER ASSIGNMENT**

### **Requirements**

1. Due: tentatively Tuesday, November 20<sup>th</sup>
2. Length: 8 pages
3. Submission: hard copy to me and electronic copy to turnitin.com

### **Methodology**

1. Summarize the position, i.e. the conclusion, of either Aquinas or Descartes (only one) on some topic taken from the reading assignments.
2. Using the text, explain the arguments by which the philosopher arrived at that conclusion.
3. Discuss the strength of those arguments and objections that could be raised against them.
4. State how that philosopher or could have replied to those arguments, and on that basis determine whether you think the position is true or false.

### **Secondary source**

1. You must find, read, and intelligently quote at least once an article about your topic from a philosophical journal.
2. These articles can be found using the Philosopher's Index in the Xavier Library database.
3. You must include a printed copy of your article with the paper.

### **Format**

1. Title page (not included in numbering)
2. Number all pages.
3. One inch margins.

### **Stylistic rules**

1. A paragraph should have at least five interrelated sentences.
2. Correct grammar and punctuation are necessary to communicate clearly your thought.
3. Avoid contractions, slang, and use of the slash.

### **Quotations**

1. You must use passages from the author's writing to support your interpretation.
2. Put a quoted passage into your own words and explain it: the quote is meant to support your interpretation of the author.
3. Never begin or end a paragraph with a quote.

### **Topics**

1. Role of sensation in knowledge
2. Innate knowledge
3. Purpose of knowledge
4. Role of consensus in knowledge
5. Whether there is only one method for knowledge
6. Role of mathematics in knowledge
7. Self-knowledge
8. Goodness, truth and being

## **PHIL 290 AND GOALS FOR THE CORE CURRICULUM**

GOAL 1: Students will be effective communicators in writing and orally

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

GOAL 2: Students will be critical thinkers

1. Students will analyze and interpret texts
3. Students will evaluate the strength of an argument or claim and its evidence
4. 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
5. Students will evaluate the use of science and mathematics in society and everyday life in an informed manner

GOAL 3: Students will be creators of new knowledge and expression

1. 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

2. Students will articulate and engage with great ideas in the history of Western thought through the writings of great philosophers
5. Students will explain the scientific method, including the difference between hypotheses, theories and laws, valid hypothesis and/or models
8. Students will compare and contrast the aims and methodologies of the humanities, fine arts, sciences, and mathematics

GOAL 5: Students will be integrated individuals who articulate a coherent, ethical perspective on the world and their place in it

1. Students will recognize the societal, ethical and moral dimensions of discourse, art, information, science and technology
2. Students will relate their knowledge and skills in a reflective and constructive way to their life experiences and the challenges confronting today's world
3. Students will use information and resources responsibly in their communication and research [e.g. not plagiarize]