2013

290-07H Theory of Knowledge

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Theory of Knowledge

(i) Texts
Required: René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, tr. D.A. Cress, Hackett
Additional required texts posted on Blackboard
Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (an online source available through Xavier’s Library site)
Notes and other supporting material will be posted on Blackboard regularly and as the discussion evolves

(ii) Description
The course is a survey of how significant philosophers, responding to the problems of their times, raised and answered the question what it means to know. This main line of investigation will also give occasion to examine the nature of authority, the operation(s) of the human mind, and the relation between knowledge and action.

(iii) Course Goals
In accordance with the core curriculum goals of Xavier’s liberal education, the course aims to give students intellectual tools by means of which they will be able to understand:

- each philosopher by reading original texts
- fundamental questions that arise from the human condition, specifically the nature of human knowledge, the possibility of certainty, and the reasonableness of faith.
- the significance of knowledge, in its various forms, for agency within the natural and political environment

(iv) Learner Outcomes
Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- give a concise account of the examined epistemological theories in their context
- analyze and evaluate the respective merits and shortcomings of each theory
- comprehend the distinctiveness, cultural significance, and influence of epistemological theories
- discuss critically the contemporary relevance of such ideas
- give a comprehensive account of what constitutes human knowledge
- relate their comprehension to the role of human beings as actors in their culture

(v) Course Requirements and Evaluation of Learner Outcomes

- Attendance, participation in class activities, and note-taking/journals (25%)
- Three take-home exams (25% each), one of which will be the final exam

Grading Scale:

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<th>Grade</th>
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<td>A</td>
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<td>A-</td>
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1 See http://www.xavier.edu/cas/core.cfm for a description of Xavier’s Core Curriculum.
(vi) Meetings and Assignments
Introduction: The Ancient Greek Background or THE AUTHORITY OF LOGOS
Week 1: August 28/30
Week 2: September 4/6

RELATIVISM VS UNIVERSAL KNOWLEDGE
Plato, Meno, 70a-86c: “How will you aim to search for something [form of virtue] you do not know at all?”
and Friedrich Nietzsche, On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense
Week 3: September 11/13
Week 4: September 18/20

EPISTEMIC STANDARDS OR JUSTIFICATION (the structure of knowledge)
Aristotle, Posterior Analytics, Bk. I, ch. 1-4; Bk. II, ch. 19: Induction/Deduction and
Week 5: September 25/27
Week 6: October 2/4
Aristotle, Metaphysics, Bk. I, ch. 1-3: The range and unity of sciences
Week 7: October 9/11
Week 8: October 16/18

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS OF KNOWLEDGE
Week 9: October 23/25
Week 10: October 30/November 1

FAITH AND REASON
Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Part I, Question 1 (In Ten Articles): Articles of Faith and Indemonstrable Principles
Week 11: November 6/8
Week 12: November 13/15

THE TURN TO THE ‘I’
Rene Descartes, Discourse on Method (In Six Parts): Certainty as Scientific Foundation
Week 13: November 20/22

Week 14: November 27/29 Thanksgiving Holiday
Influence of Descartes’ Method
Week 15: December 4/6
Week 16: December 11

Week 17: Final Examinations

Notes:
• The syllabus is subject to change.
• It the responsibility of the student to familiarize him/herself with the full text of the University Policies included in the most recent Undergraduate Catalogue and especially with the Academic Honesty policy.