290-08H Theory of Knowledge

Michael Sweeney

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THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE
PHIL 290-08 (Honors)
Fall, 2014
T/TH 10:00-11:15
Cintas 204

Prof. Michael Sweeney
Hinkle Hall 205
745-2035
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Office hours
T/Th 9:30-10:00
W 9:30-11:30
Also by appointment and by chance

Requirements and Tentative Schedule
Exams
Midterm: 30% (Tentatively Thursday, October 15th)
Final: 30% (Certainly Thursday, December 18th; 8:30-10:30)
Exam questions will be chosen from a list provided in advance.
Paper: 25% (Tentatively Thursday, October 16th)
10 page minimum
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.
Texting or computer use other than following a digital text will count as an unexcused absence.
Extra-credit schedule: all lectures are at 7:00 pm in the Conaton Board Room
2. Prof. Lisa Fullam (Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley): Sept. 23, 2014
3. Prof. Kathleen Smythe (Xavier): October 1, 2014
6. Rev. David Meconi, SJ (St. Louis): November 12, 2014

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: 9 classes
   Lyotard: 4 classes
   Final exam

PAPER ASSIGNMENT

Requirements
   1. Due: Thursday, October 16th
   2. Length: 10 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

Plagiarism
1. Use of another person’s words or ideas must be referenced.
2. Plagiarism will result in an “F” for the course and a letter to the dean.

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?

Study questions for the final exam
1. Is there only one method of knowledge for Aquinas? What are the mistakes that Aquinas makes with regard to method in physics?
2. What is Descartes' *cogito* and how does he arrive at it? Why is it the first principle of his philosophy? Compare the view of the self in Part IV with Descartes’ 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 in detail the purpose of knowledge according to Descartes, and briefly compare it to that of Aquinas.
5. Why does Lyotard think that a new account of knowledge is necessary, and what is that account? How does it lead to a change in education?

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. Plato’s mistake: 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 (only the first way/proof)
   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