2014

290-11 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
Recommended: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:
http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html
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,¹ 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 reflective journals (25%)
- Three take-home exams (25% each)

Grading Scale:

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(vi) Meetings and Assignments
Introduction: The Ancient Greek Background or THE AUTHORITY OF LOGOS

¹ See http://www.xavier.edu/cas/core.cfm for a description of Xavier’s Core Curriculum.
Week 1: January 15/17
Week 2: January 22/24

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: January 29/31
Week 4: February 5/7

EPISTEMIC STANDARDS OR JUSTIFICATION (the structure of knowledge)
John Dewey, “The Process of Scientific Thinking,” selection from *How we Think*

Week 5: February 12/14
Week 6: February 19/21
Week 7: February 26/28

Week 8: March 5/7 SPRING BREAK

Week 9: March 12/14

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

Week 10: March 19/21

Week 11: March 26/28

FAITH AND REASON

Week 12: April 2/4
Week 13: April 9/11

THE TURN TO THE ‘I’
Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (In Six Parts): Certainty as Scientific Foundation

Week 14: April 16 APRIL 18 EASTER HOLIDAY
Week 15: April 23/25

CONCLUSIONS
Week 16: April 30/May 2

Week 17: Final Examinations

Notes:
- The syllabus is subject to change.
- It is 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.