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200-22 Philosophical Perspectives: Theory of Knowledge

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Xavier University

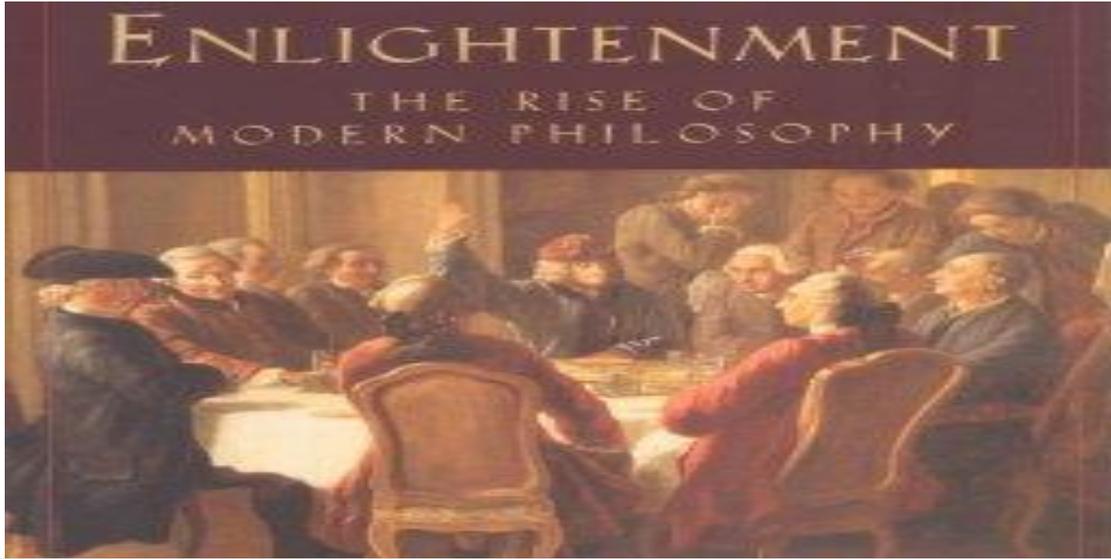
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Philosophy 200-22
Philosophical Perspectives: Theory of Knowledge
Xavier University, Fall 2020
MWF 1:00-1:50, Hailstones Hall 5

Instructor: Dr. Myron Jackson
Office Location: Hinkle 227
Office Hours: R 10-12 or by appointment
Office Phone and Voicemail: 513-745-3827
Email: jacksonm31@xavier.edu

Textbooks:
 Rene' Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Hackett)
 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age* (provided on canvas by instructor)
 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

Justin E. H. Smith, *Irrationality: A History of the Dark Side of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019)

Additional articles, book reviews, and blogs will be provided via Canvas

Welcome to Philosophical Perspectives: Theory of Knowledge!

Modern and contemporary philosophers will help us reflect, analyze, and understand some fundamental questions about knowledge, or as it is formally called, epistemology as related to political philosophy. What does it mean to know something? Is it the case that what we observe actuality represents reality? Is there an independent reality beyond perception or opinion? What exactly is an opinion? Is there any absolute, objective truth?

We will not settle these questions, but you will become more aware of them and will explore, criticize, and defend some possible answers. In this way, you may become more thoughtful and articulate. We will examine each philosopher’s theory of knowledge, and you will have a chance to reflect upon many of the current debates in epistemology (the study of knowledge).

Learning Outcomes: Upon completion of this course, the student will be able to:

Define epistemology as it relates to the varying ideas and theories within philosophy.

Examine and reflect upon classical epistemological theories, as well as explore current philosophical perspectives in epistemology.

Analyze epistemological theory by comparing and contrasting the problems within varying philosophical perspectives throughout history, as well as discover possible strengths and weaknesses within these perspectives.

Apply what the student has learned to justify and defend their arguments, as well as critique the arguments of others.

Late Assignments: Are subjected to a 10% late penalty. A late assignment is considered after the module date/time has ended.

Method of Evaluation

Grading: Your final grade will consist of 2 exams (150 points each), 3 Paragraph Q/R assignments (50 points each), attendance (100 points), participation/discussion boards (150 points) totaling 700 points as outlined below:

Grading Scale

	Grade	Percentage	Total Points
A+	98–100%	686–700	
A	93–97	651–685	
A–	90–92	630–650	
B+	87–89	609–629	
B	83–86	581–608	
B–	80–82	560–580	

C+	77–79	539–559
C	73–76	511–538
C–	70–72	490–510
D+	67–69	469–489
D	63–66	441–468
D–	60–62	420–440
F	0–59%	0–419

General Requirements

1. *Attendance:* Philosophy is done in conversation. In order to fully engage in a philosophy course, you must participate in that discussion and get the most out of the class. A necessary, though not sufficient, condition of this is attending class.
2. This is a discussion class, and you must come to class prepared to discuss the reading assignments, which will be given at least one class period ahead of time. I reserve the right to give a quiz in class to verify that you are doing the work required of you. Lack of participation will result in a reduction of your final grade.
3. Due to social distancing this semester, students will be assigned to either **Groups A, B, and C** according to a weekly rotation. **Group A will be attending class for that week.** Your group will be responsible for the following tasks that week:

Group A: Will be responsible for classroom dialogue and logistics. Participation involves asking and answering questions during lecture, being able to know what page number we are on and how to summarize the readings. You will also monitor and respond to the discussion board material led by group B (Face-to-Face in class meeting for that week)

Group B: Will be responsible for discussion board material. Posting and responding to the topic announced for that week. Once you have the article, book review, blog, or any other assigned reading you will provide other information and relevant concerns that relate to the class readings.

Group C: Will be responsible for completing your Q/R paragraph assignment (Due by the end of the week). Also, monitor the comments and questions coming in through zoom chat to be discussed during the last few minutes of each class.

Specific Course Objectives

Students who complete this course should be able to do the following:

1. Examine how an inquiry into the history of western political philosophy can provide thinkers with the resources to construct a personal and social philosophy applicable to early twenty-first century US society.
2. To recognize the importance of careful moral and political reasoning in understanding and addressing contemporary social issues.

3. To engage in articulate expression through effective writing.

Course Policies

Absence policy: You do not need an excuse if you miss a class, but you are expected to turn in a journal entry for the day you missed when you return. Getting someone else's class notes may be a good idea, but it is unacceptable to base your journal entry only on such notes; your work has to show that you read the text yourself. Merely using a secondary source about the assigned reading is also unacceptable, as is plagiarism from any source (see below). If you do not turn in acceptable makeup work promptly, I may subtract up to 5 points for each day you missed.

Late assignments will be penalized by up to one letter grade for each day they are late.

Unacceptable essay policy: I reserve the right to reject an essay that has major flaws in spelling or grammar, or that fails to meet the minimum length. Such an essay must be brought up to minimum standards before it receives a grade, and it will be counted as late.

Essays may be rewritten. A rewrite will not change your grade on an essay, but it will count as significant class participation. Turn in the rewrite along with the original and my original comments. Rewrites may be turned in as late as the time of the final exam.

Plagiarism is using someone else's words or ideas, even if you rephrase them, without giving credit to the source (such as a website, book, article, or another student's writing). According to Xavier's Academic Honesty Policy (<http://xavier.edu/handbook/standards/Academic-Honesty.cfm>), "unattributed use of another's efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one's own. Penalties for violations of this policy may include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following: a zero for that assignment or test, an 'F' in the course, and expulsion from Xavier." Whenever you use sources other than the assigned text, you must cite them in footnotes or by some other standard method. Plagiarism will lead to an F for the assignment or the course, and your dean will be notified of the incident. For more information, a tutorial, and a quiz, see <http://xavier.edu/library/xu-tutor/xu-tutor-Use.cfm>.

Students with disabilities: Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the Learning Assistance Center at 513-745-3280 on the Fifth Floor of the Conaton Learning Commons, Room 514, to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Canvas: If you are new to the Canvas Learning Management System, you can engage in the Student Tutorial provided through eLearning. You will also find the Canvas Student Guides in an Announcement within our Canvas course.

Incompletes: Refer to the university catalog for the policy on incompletes. Incompletes are reserved for considerations such as Title IX, extreme medical emergencies or military deployment.

All course requirements must be completed in order to pass the course.

Getting help

Stop by Hinkle 227 during my office hours (Thurs. 10-12 or by appointment).

Writing Center: <http://www.xavier.edu/writingcenter/>

Office of Student Success: <http://xavier.edu/student-success>

Learning Assistance Center: <http://xavier.edu/learning-assistance-center/index.cfm>

Remember This Important Question to Ask Yourself: "What will I remember?" "In a system every fact is connected with every other by some thought relation. The consequence is

that every fact is retained by the combined suggestive power of all the other facts in the system, and forgetfulness is well-nigh impossible. The reason why cramming is such a bad mode of study is now made clear. I mean by cramming that way of preparing for examinations by committing 'points' to memory during a few hours or days of intense application immediately preceding the final ordeal, little or no work having been performed during the previous course of the term. Things learned thus in a few hours, on one occasion, for one purpose, cannot possibly have formed many associations with other things in the mind. Their brain processes are led into by few paths, and are relatively little liable to be awakened again. Speedy oblivion is the almost inevitable fate of all that is committed to memory in this simple way. Whereas, on the contrary, the same material taken in gradually, day after day, recurring in different contexts, considered in various relations, associated with other external incidents, and repeatedly reflected on grow into such a system, form such connections with the rest of the mind's fabric, lie open to so many paths of approach, that they remain permanent possessions. This is the intellectual reason why habits of continuous application should be enforced in educational establishments. Of course, there is no moral turpitude in cramming. If it led to the desired end of secure learning, it would be infinitely the best method of study. But it does not, and students themselves should understand why."



—American philosopher and psychologist William James, *Principles of Psychology*, 1890

Inclusivity and Diversity

Teaching in the liberal tradition is at the heart of Xavier's identity, and this focus is critical. Liberal education transcends the acquisition of information; it goes beyond the factual to ask

important evaluative and philosophical questions. Liberal learning holds the fundamental principles and suppositions of a body of knowledge up to inquiry, question, and discussion. It helps a person recognize the assumptions under which he or she operates and encourages the examination and questioning of those assumptions. Liberal learning begins in the classroom and continues through the more specialized studies comprising each student's major and minor areas of study. This entails asking what impact and meaning does this subject matter have on our lives and everyday experiences.

Students are expected to treat all other students with respect. Violations of this expectation will not be taken lightly. Because this course involves the philosophical discussion of controversial issues, the expectations of mutual respect and tolerance are worthy of explicit and repeated consideration. Please keep inclusivity and diversity in mind throughout the course.

Guidelines for submitted work

All submitted work should be typed and be written using 10–12 point Times New Roman or similar font. Proper citation is expected in everything other than your discussion boards.

Format Criteria for Question and Response Paragraphs (*Meta-writing assignments*)

You will be assigned as a member of one of the groups a one-paragraph question and response, practicing your own internal dialogue. They will be due by the end of the week they are assigned and every student should be prepared throughout the semester to share your internal dialogue with the class! Questions and responses must be formulated according to the following guidelines:

You will select a promising paragraph from the reading assigned for that week. In the passage cited you must provide *one* question and *two* responses that interjects your voice into the work. Questions must be labeled according to one of the following four types: internal, external, practical or comparative. **It is imperative that you should specify explicitly which type of question is being asked (see section V example question below).** Internal questions aim at simply understanding the theory we are studying and the meaning of difficult passages of text. External questions presuppose a good grasp of the text and they analyze and criticize the bases, assumptions, and philosophical implications of that theory. Practical questions deal with the consequences, theoretical and practical, of proceeding upon the assumed truth of a given theory. Comparative questions are concerned with juxtaposing different thinkers or theories against each other for the purpose of teasing out the strengths and weaknesses they have to offer. Examples of these four types are provided below followed by an example question:

I. Internal Questions:

1. What is an actual entity in relation to temporal passage?
2. How does the primordial nature of God relate to the consequent nature of God?
3. What is Whitehead's method?
4. How does a claim made in one part of Whitehead's text relate to a claim made in another place?

II. External Questions:

1. Is Whitehead's method self-consistent? Does he always employ the method he advocates in his own thinking and reasoning?

2. How does Whitehead's method give rise to anything like "knowledge" or "truth"?
3. What is assumed to be real and unreal in Whitehead's worldview? Is anything omitted that is real? Is anything included that is not real?
4. What criteria can we use to determine the truth or falsity of this theory?
5. Does Whitehead employ his technical terminology consistently?

III. Practical Questions:

1. Does Whitehead's idea of symbolic reference affect daily communication?
2. Is it possible to experience the primordial nature of God, and if so, would such an experience be religious in any ordinary sense?

IV. Comparative Questions:

Such inquiries bring together two or more views by comparing the answers to internal, external, or practical questions in two different theorists. For example, "What is the relationship between Whitehead's and Descartes' respective methods?" is a comparative internal question, since Whitehead discusses Descartes in some detail in the book.

Or, "Given Whitehead's and Hume's respective accounts of the starting point of knowledge, which of them is more self-consistent in applying it?" is a comparative external question. Or, "Does Whitehead's view of the universe provide a better basis for ethical philosophy than Kant's?" This is a comparative practical question.

EXAMPLES

1. "[...] the mirror stage applies not to the visual, but rather to the auditory and audio-vocal self-relationship of the subject. Through its advance hearing of the ego motif the individual forms a pact with its own future, from which it draws the joy of living towards fulfillment. Every unresigned subject lives in the orthopedic expectation of its most intimate hymn, which will simultaneously be its triumphal march and its obituary. **[R1: It has been said that we *hear* rather than *see* the dead in our encounters with the "other side" or netherworld. In any event, the rituals of prayer and chorus eulogies are performed when we are laid to rest, which seems to be a transcultural phenomenon. When it comes to dealing with the existential anxiety of death humans seem to rely more on the ear rather than the eye as our guide.]** This is what makes so many dream of musical appearances and bursting out in recitation: those who hear their hymns have triumphed [...] Like most people today, the early humans did not want to look like something; they want to sound like something. It took the unleashing of modern machinery of images, which has been forcing its clichés into the populace since the Baroque, to conceal this basic circumstance and bring the masses under the spell of visual individualism with its quick views, its mirrors and its fashion magazines **[Practical Question: It can be said that living under this "spell" of global hyperimagery heavily sways and influences our imaginative capacities, for better and worse. What kind of impact does this constant assault on our imaginations have for the potential of human creativity—does it likely render us more passive or active?]** It is not without reason that the video clip is the symptomatic genre of contemporary culture, which works towards a visual gluing-up of the ears and a global synthesis through images. **[External Question: Perhaps Sloterdijk overstates his description of our current cultural state. Historically, what it means to be a people, a tribe,**

family, nation, etc. is to “glue up your ears” to the outside noise. We talk in our truest native tongues with those who are only allowed on the *inside* and have access to the acoustic fire, so to speak. Is Sloterdijk exaggerating in his indictment that our cultural times refuse to be seduced by the wider sounds of the world and does not listen to a greater degree than past generations?] The old songs of great men and women, by contrast, are still at home in a regime of sonospheric common spirits; they erect sounding monuments, halls of fame or sonorous burial mounds from which the heroes rose to sound on in the ears of subsequent generations. [R2: Americans want to see Hollywood endings! But the *real* finales occur when the visual scenes go dark, the credits roll, the lights come on while the music plays.] Peter Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Los Angeles: Semiotext, 2014, 492-493).

2. "But," I said, "I once heard something that I trust. Leontius, the son of Aglaion, was going up from the Piraeus under the outside of the North Wall when he noticed corpses lying by the public executioner. He desired to look, but at the same time he was disgusted and made himself tum away; and for a while he struggled and covered his face. [R1: Our human character is complex and entails a kind of negotiation between the body (outer self) and the mind (inner). We are continually surprised, shocked, and “disgusted” with who we find ourselves to be. Self-interpretation can often be in conflict with our self-disclosure and revelation.] But finally, overpowered by the desire, he opened his eyes wide, ran toward the corpses and said: 'Look, you damned wretches, take your fill of the fair sight.'" [R2: Philosophers have observed and debated from time immemorial how much of our behavior and activities are motivated by rational choices and irrational drives. Usually, one’s response will depend on whether they are emphasizing the humanity or animality of our existence. In this passage, Plato suggests that our animality (lower self) is likely to get the best of us even when we strive to prevent it from doing so.]

"I too have heard it," he said.

"This speech," I said, "certainly indicates that anger sometimes makes war against the desires as one thing against something else." [External Question: Plato presupposes in his argument that reason (*nous*) and desire (*epithymia*) “make war” against each other. He contends at the heart of all human experience is this fundamental conflict. But is it the case, or how far can we go with the assumption, that desire and reason are necessarily opposed and in a tragic tension with each other?]

"Yes," he said, "it does indicate that." Plato, *The Republic*, Second Edition, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 119.

3. "But what reasons should we have for doubting any knowledge--would the idea of doubting it ever occur to us--but for the difficulties and the contradictions which reflection discovers, but for the problems which philosophy poses? And would not immediate knowledge find in itself its justification and proof if we could show that these difficulties, contradictions and problems are mainly the result of the *symbolic diagrams* which cover it up, diagrams which have for us become reality itself, and beyond which only an intense and unusual effort can succeed in penetrating" [RESPONSE 1: Henri Bergson contends that the human mind operates discursively, or by taking snapshots of reality as frozen instances of time. The continuing

flow and rhythm of duration can only be grasped intuitively, not intellectually—real becoming stifles our minds. While performing analysis through this “spatializing of time,” it appears we have to rely upon diagrams or symbols as a “fixing of images.”] "These two terms, perception and matter, approach each other in the measure that we divest ourselves of what may be called the prejudices of action: sensation recovers extensity, the concrete extended recovers its natural continuity and indivisibility. And homogeneous space, which stood between the two terms like an insurmountable barrier, is then seen to have no other reality than that of a diagram or a symbol. It interests the behavior of a being which acts upon matter, but not the work of a mind which speculates on its essence." **[RESPONSE 2: A similar sentiment is expressed about symbols in regards to the usual treatment of space as a medium between matter and perception, labeled the “prejudices of action.” If “homogeneous space” is taken in the traditional sense of standing “between the two terms like an insurmountable barrier, [it] is then seen to have no other reality than that of a *diagram* or a *symbol*"]** [Internal Question: Does Bergson view symbols negatively or only as a secondary source of knowledge?] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991 [1908]), 187, 219-220.

Module 1: Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 4th ed.

Readings:

The search for certainty: Descartes', *Discourse on Method*, Part I (pp. 1-6)

Method and morals: Descartes', *Discourse on Method*, Parts 2 and 3 (pp. 6-18)

Radical skepticism: Descartes', *Meditation One* (pp. 59-63)

I think, therefore I am: *Meditation Two* (pp. 63-69)

Concerning God, That He Exists: *Meditation Three* (pp. 69-80)

Descartes' metaphysics: Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, Part 4 (pp. 18-22)

Descartes' physics: Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, Part 5 (pp. 23-33, focus on 23-25 and 31-33)

The promise of science and technology: Descartes' *Discourse on Method*, Part 6 (pp. 33-44)

Module 2: Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age and Fear and Trembling*

Readings:

Part I: *The Present Age* (pp. ix-20)

Part II: *The Present Age* (pp. 21-40)

Part III: *The Present Age* (pp.41-62)

Fear and Trembling

Mid-Term exam

Module 3: Justin E. H. Smith, *Irrationality*

Reading Assignments to be updated via Canvas

Final Exam: Wednesday, December 2, 12-1:50

One attempt, and no extensions on time will be given



“[...] the Zen master who, to the amazement of his pupil, poured a cup of tea and did not stop when it was full, rather continuing to pour: this was meant to show that a full spirit cannot be taught anything. The course of study, then, consists in pondering the question of how to empty the cup. Whether one should subsequently fill it anew or cultivate its emptiness, once reached, as a value of its own is another matter.”—Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, 2013, 187