

PHIL 290: Theory of Knowledge

Spring 2009

Sections: 2, 5, and 14

Instructor: Dr. Anthony Reeves

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Office Hours: Mon. 10:30 – 11:30 AM; Tues. 11:00 AM – Noon; Wed. 10:30 – 11:30 AM

I will be in my office and available during office hours, but you can make appointments to see me at other times. My preference is that we make appointments by email, and have substantive discussions face-to-face.

Course Description

In this course, we will consider some traditional philosophical questions concerning human knowledge and truth. Such questions include: “What is knowledge and how do we get it?”; “What is ‘truth?’”; “On what basis can we justify our beliefs?”; “Is there a foundation for human knowledge?”; “Are knowledge and truth relative?”; and “What are the limits of human knowledge?”. In addition to achieving a greater understanding of these and other philosophical issues, students should improve their writing and reading skills, their ability to reason through and intelligently talk about difficult problems generally, and their aptitude for analyzing arguments.

Texts

Compared with some of your other classes, there is not a great deal of reading required for this course. However, some of the passages are quite difficult and will have to be read with care. You will often find that you have to read assigned passages more than once in order to fully understand them.

The required texts for the course are:

Plato, *Meno*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Hackett)

Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. D. Cress (Hackett)

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Hackett)

William James, *Pragmatism* (Prometheus Books)

Paul Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (Oxford)

Requirements

Grade Breakdown:

1st Short Paper (4-6 pages)	15%
Mid-Term Exam	20%
2nd Short Paper (4-6 pages)	30%
Final Examination	25%
Class Participation	10%

Papers: Students will be required to write two short papers. Paper topics for each will be distributed at least two weeks before the due date. Papers should be written in 12-point, double-spaced text with margins of 1 inch, and submitted at the start of class on the due date provided on the assignment sheet. Late papers are subject to a deduction of a third of a grade per day of lateness (e.g. a 'B' becomes a "B-").

I will discuss how to write a philosophy paper when topics are first distributed. In general, however, papers will be assessed on the basis of: (1) accuracy and completeness in portraying the material in question, and (2) the development of a well-reasoned assessment of that material. These tasks are more difficult than they at first appear and some effort should be invested into paper writing.

Students are required to maintain a digital backup of all submitted work until the end of the semester. I reserve the right to request a digital copy of any work submitted by the student.

Exams: There will be a mid-term and a final exam. Students are responsible for all assigned material up to the day of the exam (i.e., the final exam is cumulative). The exams will consist of short answer and essay questions.

Participation: Students will be assessed on their contributions in class. The grade will be based on the frequency with which the students provide valuable verbal contributions to the class. Such contributions include informed participation in classroom discussions and asking relevant and cogent questions.

Course Policies

Attendance: Attendance in class is mandatory. Students should arrive promptly at the beginning of class with the assigned reading for the day in hand. Students are permitted up to five (5) unexcused absences per semester. *Every two times a student is late to class, they will have one absence counted against this total.* After the fifth absence, each successive class missed will result in the student's *final grade* being reduced by a third.

Exceptions will be made for documented absences due to otherwise sanctioned university activity, for observation of religious holidays, due to serious illness (the instructor reserves the right to request documentation from the student's doctor), or due to a family emergency. Students who miss classes for any of these reasons should consult me as far in advance as possible.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will be dealt with harshly in accordance with Xavier's policies. All cases will be reported to the dean.

The Xavier University Catalog states: "The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honesty. Academic and professional life requires a trust based on integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of results and materials submitted in reports or admission and registration documents, and the falsification of any academic records including letters of recommendation.

"All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student's own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct or 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 one or more of the following: a zero for that assignment or test, an 'F' in the course, and expulsion from the University. The dean of the college in which the student is enrolled is to be informed in writing of all such incidents."

Schedule of Readings

The following plan is subject to revision, I will inform the class of any changes as we go. Listed on the left are the dates of the lectures, on the right are the readings that will be discussed on those dates. Some readings are available on Electronic Reserves [ER], which is accessible through the course website.

Date:	Reading
Jan. 12	Introductory Lecture
Jan. 14	Plato, <i>Meno</i> , 70a-76e
Jan. 16	Plato, 76e-81e
Jan. 21	Plato, 82a-86b
Jan. 23	Plato, 86b-91c

- Jan. 26 Plato, 91c-100b
- Jan. 28 Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" [ER] 192-193
[First Paper Assigned]
- Jan. 30 Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Part One (1-6)
- Feb. 2 Descartes, Part Two (6-13)
- Feb. 4 Descartes, Part Three (13-18)
- Feb. 6 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation One (59-63)
- Feb. 9 Descartes, Meditation Two (63-69)
- Feb. 11 Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Part Four (18-22) **[First Paper Due]**
- Feb. 13 Descartes, Part Five (23-33)
- Feb. 16 Descartes, Part Six (33-44)
- Feb. 18 Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1-15
- Feb. 20 **Midterm**
- Feb. 23 Hume, 15-20
- Feb. 25 Hume, 20-31
- Feb. 27 Hume, 31-37
- Mar. 9 Hume, 37-48
- Mar. 11 Hume, 49-53
- Mar. 13 David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* 1.4.6 [ER], 164-171
- Mar. 16 David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* 1.4.7 [ER], 171-178
[Second Paper Assigned]
- Mar. 18 James, *Pragmatism*, 22-27
- Mar. 20 James, 27-38
- Mar. 23 James, 39-50
- Mar. 25 James, 50-56
- Mar. 27 James, 73-86
- Mar. 30 James, 87-96
- Apr. 1 James, 96-111
- Apr. 3 Richard Rorty, "Truth without Correspondence to Reality," [ER] 23-39
[Second Paper Due]
- Apr. 6 Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge*, 1-9
- Apr. 8 Boghossian, 10-24

Apr. 15 Boghossian, 25-41

Apr. 17 Boghossian, 42-57

Apr. 20 Boghossian, 58-72

Apr. 22 Boghossian, 72-80

Apr. 24 Boghossian, 81-94

Apr. 27 Boghossian, 95-110

Apr. 29 Boghossian, 111-128

May. 1 Boghossian, 129-131

**Final Exam: Final Exams will be held in accordance with the University Schedule
(available on the registrar website)**