

KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY (WINTER 2017)

MWF 5: 00PM - 5: 50PM

[MacEwan University, Canada]

Calendar Description

This course provides an introduction to philosophy through a study of issues in metaphysics and epistemology. Topics may include appearance and reality, the nature of knowledge, minds and bodies, personal identity, death and immortality, free will, the nature of God, perception, causation and, space and time.

Course Description

In this course, we will focus on some of the basic issues in metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and epistemology. The course will be divided into three main sections. In the first part, we will read texts by Plato, Rene Descartes, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, and Margaret Cavendish. While reading Plato, we will focus on such questions concerning reality and the nature of knowledge. While these questions will reappear as we make our way through Descartes' *Meditations*, we will ask further questions about how our minds work and what the relation between our mind and body is. Then we will read immediate criticism Descartes received from his contemporaries, Princess Elisabeth and Cavendish, concerning his understanding of the mind-body interaction. In the second section, we are going to look at more contemporary theories on the nature of mind. We are going to start with J.J.C. Smart's reductionist account of mind and then read immediate criticisms brought up against this type of reductionist model by theorizing about "what it is like" experiences, namely qualitative experiences. We will end this section with Laurie Paul's *Transformative Experiences*, which explores the implications of existence of qualitative experiences in terms of issues concerning rational decision-making and addresses various core issues that lie at the intersection of metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of mind. In the final section, we are going to look at three different approaches to the question of knowledge.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify several main problems and questions in metaphysics and epistemology
- Interpret the responses of philosophers to the identified philosophical questions
- Analyze and assess the consistency and plausibility of the philosophies included in the course readings
- Compare and contrast diverse philosophical positions
- Compose consistent and persuasive essays

Required Texts

Plato. *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, ed. John M. Cooper. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002.

Descartes, Rene. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3rd edition, trans. Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.

Paul, Laurie. *Transformative Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Other required readings will be available on [Ares Course Reserves](#), to which you will have access through Blackboard.

Course Requirements

Weekly Take-Home Questions	20% (2% each)
Plato Test	10%
Essays	40% (20% each)
Final Exam	30%

Attendance and Participation

Even though there is no official grade assigned for attendance and participation, please do not forget that much of the value you will get from this class will come from your interaction with your classmates and myself. Regular attendance and active participation is important to the class dynamic and to your learning process.

Weekly Take-Home Questions (THQs) (20% [2% each])

During the term you will be asked to write 10 short responses to questions assigned about the reading(s) prior to the lecture covering that reading/those readings. The THQs will be posted on Blackboard a week in advance, and are due the following Monday at the beginning of the class. After the lecture starts, namely after 5:00PM, you can no longer hand them in. They can be hand-written or typed but should not exceed one page in length. There is absolutely no possibility of extension or make-ups. You should keep them for exam review and in case I make a mistake calculating your final THQ-grade.

The THQs, which will normally include at least two questions, are graded in the following way:

2 = both questions are answered and answers show good understanding of the reading material;

1.50 = both questions are answered but there are signs of minor confusion;

1 = only one question is answered, or both questions are answered but one is wrong or both show that the student has read the material (or parts of the material) but there is lack of understanding;

0.5 = only one question is answered and the answer is confused or both questions are answered but shows significant misunderstanding in such a way that it is unclear whether the student has read the material carefully.

0 = no answer or answer does not show that the student has read the material.

Some Tips on THQs

- Answer the THQs in your own words; do not simply quote some passage of the text but include in parentheses the number(s) of the page(s) where you found the answer.
- Your responses to the THQs should be short and to the point. Don't waste words simply explaining everything in the readings. The questions are asking specific things about the readings. Read them carefully, answer directly to the question and avoid irrelevant details. These are very short pieces of writing and you can't afford to ramble.
- Write as clearly as possible. Avoid jargon, long words, and convoluted sentences. Don't try to sound sophisticated or 'philosophical': convey what you have to say as explicitly and unambiguously as you can. Keep sentences and paragraphs relatively short.
- Be sure to proofread your final draft: missing words, misspellings, and poor syntax all serve to undermine the reader's confidence.

Reading Assignments

Students are expected to read the material we cover in depth. The THQs are designed to foster a more directed reading of the texts prior to lectures. During the lectures, we will go through the texts in more detail to help you develop a deeper understanding. If you do not read the texts prior to the lectures, it will be difficult to achieve this goal. In order to get the most out of this class, it will also be prudent to reread the texts after the lectures. While reading the material, always note the parts that you are having difficulty with or that you find problematic. Ask me about them during the class or in my office hours. I am here to help you.

Plato Test (10%)

You will write an in-class test on Plato's *Meno* and *Phaedo*. It will be administered at the beginning of class on January 23. I will provide further information about the test as the date approaches.

Essays (40% [20% each])

You will write two essays (900-1250 words in length, typed, double-spaced, with normal margins and font) on questions from lists of topics assigned by me. First essay topics will be posted on Blackboard on February 3, and the first essay is due on February 17. Second essay topics will be posted on Blackboard on March 6 and the second essay is due on March 24. Papers that are handed in late will be docked 5% per day. Papers will not be accepted more than 5 days after the deadline. So please make sure to hand the assignments in on time. I will hold a paper-writing workshop on February 3. You are also encouraged to come to the office hours to discuss drafts of your paper with me.

Final Exam (30%)

There will be a final, cumulative exam during the exam period at the end of the term. Last two days of class are reserved for a review to prepare you for the exam.

SCHEDULE		
WEEK 1	Jan 4 -6 Wed, Fri	Introduction
WEEK 2	Jan 9-11 Mon, Wed	Plato's Theory of Forms and Recollection Plato, <i>Meno</i>
	Jan 13 Fri	Plato, <i>Phaedo</i>
WEEK 3	Jan 16-18-20 Mon, Wed, Fri	Plato, <i>Phaedo</i> , cont. THQ1 due at the beginning of class on Jan 16, Mon
WEEK 4	Jan 23-25-27 Mon, Wed, Fri	Descartes' Method of Doubt Rene Descartes, Meditations 1 & 2 Plato Test at the beginning of class on Jan 23, Mon THQ2 due at the beginning of class on Jan 23, Mon
WEEK 5	Jan 30, Feb 1-3 Mon, Wed, Fri	Descartes' Arguments for Self, God, and External World Descartes, Meditations 3, 4 & 5 THQ3 due at the beginning of class on Jan 30, Mon First Essay Topics distributed on Feb 3, Fri Paper Writing Workshop on Feb 3, Fri
WEEK 6	Feb 6-8-10 Mon, Wed, Fri	External World and Mind-Body Dualism and Interaction Descartes, Meditation 6 Correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia: to Descartes, 10 June 1643; to Elisabeth, 28 June 1643. Margaret Cavendish, <i>Philosophical Letters</i> (1664), (Letters XXXV and XXXVI) THQ4 due at the beginning of class on Feb 6, Mon
WEEK 7	Feb 13-15-17 Mon, Wed, Fri	Mind-Brain Identity Theory J.J.C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes" THQ5 due at the beginning of class on Feb 13, Mon First Essay due at the beginning of class on Feb 17, Fri

WEEK 8	Feb 20-22-24 Mon, Wed, Fri	NO CLASSES
WEEK 9	Feb 27, Mar 1-3 Mon, Wed, Fri	Qualitative Experiences Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat” Frank Jackson, “What Mary Didn’t Know” THQ6 due at the beginning of class on Feb 27, Mon
WEEK 10	Mar 6-8-10 Mon, Wed, Fri	Transformative Experiences Laurie Paul, Chapter 1 (Becoming a Vampire) and Chapter 2 (Transformative Choice), <i>Transformative Experiences</i> THQ7 due at the beginning of class on Mar 6, Mon Second Essay Topics distributed on Mar 6, Fri
WEEK 11	Mar 13-15-17 Mon, Wed, Fri	Laurie Paul, Chapter 2 (Transformative Choice) and Chapter 4 (The Shock of the New), <i>Transformative Experiences</i> THQ8 due at the beginning of class on Mar 13, Mon
WEEK 12	Mar 20-22-24 Mon, Wed, Fri	What is Knowledge A. J. Ayer, “The Right to Be Sure” Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” THQ9 due at the beginning of class on Mar 20, Mon Second Essay due at the beginning of class on Mar 24, Fri
WEEK 13	Mar 27-29-31 Mon, Wed, Fri	Linda Zagzebski, “What is Knowledge?” THQ10 due at the beginning of class on Mar 27, Mon
WEEK 14	Apr 3 Mon	Linda Zagzebski, “What is Knowledge?,” cont.
	Apr 5-7 Wed, Fri	Exam Review
FINAL EXAM A PERSONALIZED FINAL EXAM SCHEDULE IS AVAILABLE ONLINE THROUGH <i>myStudent-System</i> .		