

The University of Western Ontario  
Department of Philosophy

**Philosophy 200F:  
Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge**

**Instructor:** Robert J. Stainton

**Class Days and Hours:** MWF, 2:30-3:20 p.m.

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Students are responsible for following the Philosophy Department procedures included with this outline.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

An introduction to the main problems of epistemology. In Fall 2007, the course will focus on classic readings by three philosophers pertaining especially to three sub-topics:

- What knowledge is
- The nature and plausibility of skepticism
- The relationships between knowledge on the one hand, and being and representation (whether linguistic or mental) on the other.

Along the way, the following key concepts in the theory of knowledge will be introduced and discussed:

- The nature and sources of evidence and justification
- The intellect, sensation and perception
- Truth and error
- *A priori* versus empirical knowledge
- Knowledge of primary versus secondary qualities
- The nature and epistemic value of common sense

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Plato, *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Translated (1981) by G.M.A. Grube in his *Plato: Five Dialogues*. Indianapolis: Hackett. [ISBN 0-915145-22-7]

Plato, *Theaetetus*. Edited (1992) with an introduction by B. Williams, translated by M.J. Levett, and revised by M. Burnyeat. Indianapolis: Hackett. [ISBN 0-87220-158-9]

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated (1998) by D.A. Cress in his *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Fourth edition. Indianapolis: Hackett. [ISBN 0-87220-420-0]

Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* and *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*. In R.E. Beanblossom & K. Lehrer (1983) (eds.) *Thomas Reid: Inquiry and Essays*. Indianapolis: Hackett. [ISBN 0-915145-85-5]

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

First “very short” assignment (1500 words): 25%

Second “short” assignment (2000 words): 35%

Final exam: 40%

## **COURSE SCHEDULE:**

### Part I: Plato

1. Background on Plato and his Epistemology
  - a) *Meno* [pp. 59-88]
  - b) *Phaedo* [pp. 93-155]
2. Introduction to Plato’s *Theaetetus*
3. Clarifying the Question “What is knowledge?” [*Theaetetus*, pp. 1-13]
4. Knowledge as perception [pp. 13-60]
  - a) First objection: Requires a Protagorean/Heracleitean metaphysics
  - b) Second objection: Omits amodal knowledge
5. Knowledge as true judgment [pp. 60-80]
  - a) The problem(s) of false judgment: Being and representation
  - b) The jury counterexample
6. Plato Review
7. Unhistorical aside: Gettier’s counterexamples

### Part II: Descartes

1. Background on Descartes and his Epistemology
2. Introduction to the *Meditations*
3. The Specter of Skepticism [pp. 56-69]
  - a) First Meditation: Cartesian doubt
  - b) Second Meditation: The *Cogito*
3. God and Knowledge
  - a) Descartes’ Three Proofs of God’s Existence [pp. 69-81, 87-92]
  - b) God’s guarantee of “Clear and Distinct Ideas” [pp. 92-99]
4. The Nature and Sources of Error [pp. 81-87, 99-105]
5. Descartes Review

### Part III: Reid

1. Background on Reid and his Epistemology
2. Reid’s New Science of Mind
  - a) The Defects of the Present Science [pp. 3-12, 103-121]
  - b) The “Way of Ideas” and Reid’s Rejection of it
    - i) Smelling as a simple example [pp. 12-31]
    - ii) Reid’s history of the “Ideal Theory” [pp. 129-180]
4. Reid’s Alternative Theory of Perception

- a) Sensation and Suggestion [pp. 35-41]
- b) The Objects of Perception [pp. 181-190]
- b) Conception [pp. 218-233]
- c) Judgment [pp. 251-257]
- 5. Reid's Answers to Skepticism [pp. 52-61, 83-103, 199-206, 257-284]
- 6. End of Term Review