

IDH 3034 SYLLABUS
THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE
FALL 2021
M/W/F 1:00-1:50 P.M.
ACADEMIC HEALTH CENTER (AHC) 4-202

In this course we focus on the problem of knowledge from the perspective of three influential thinkers: Rene Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641); W. V. Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951) and "Epistemology Naturalized" (1969); and Martin Heidegger's later philosophy (particularly his "Letter on Humanism" [1946], "What is Metaphysics?" [1929], "On the Essence of Truth," [1943], and "The Origin of the Work of Art" [1960]).

More than about philosophy *per se*, this course is about *thinking*, and we use philosophy to help us think about the most important philosophical questions of our time. If you like to think and want to be challenged, this course is for you.



Figure 1 Quine



Figure 3 Heidegger

SOME OF THE QUESTIONS WE WILL BE DEALING WITH IN THE COURSE: In this course, we seek to answer two fundamental questions: What is knowledge, and do we have it? We go through life learning from our parents, from books, and teachers "facts" or statements that are supposedly known to be *true* (about *reality* in some sense), that most of the time it does not occur to us to question or doubt, such as:

- The "truths of arithmetic, such as $2+3=5$ "
- The "elementary laws of logic," such as the principle of non-contradiction (e.g. "nothing can be both red and not red all over") are immutable and absolutely true
- The "immediate, direct sensory evidence can't be mistaken"
- The "laws of physics are absolute"
- "Physical objects are entities that exist independently of our perceiving them"

- “Our concepts about reality correspond or tell us what reality *really* is like,”
- “Some things are simply self-evidently true,”
- “The sun is the center of the solar system”
- “The earth is flat” is an absolutely false statement
- “We know what it is to *know* something”
- “We can know with absolutely certainty a great many truths.”
- “We know what truth is”
- “We can know many things without a shadow of a doubt”
- “We have a higher faculty called Reason that distinguishes us from mere animals, and provides us with a kind of intellectual knowledge that allows us to figure the nature of reality”
- “We have knowledge of facts here and now that will forever remain true come what may”
- “People in antiquity had only *apparent* knowledge (such as “the earth is flat” and “the earth is the center of the solar system”), but we have *real* knowledge
- There are matters of fact that depend for their truth on experience, and there are truths of reason that do not

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the conclusion of this course:

1. Students will be able to think critically and do in-depth research about some of the most vexing questions and propose their own answers to those questions.
2. By engaging the most seminal problems in the theory of knowledge in their historical context, student students will be able to trace the genesis of those problems and gain greater clarity about their possible solutions.
3. Students will have been exposed to some of the most demanding and substantive thinking not only about knowledge but about a host of related concepts (such as truth, what it means to be human, how is art related to truth, is there a transcendent ground to our existence, are there objective values) whose importance to their lives and their formation as thinkers and human beings transcends the boundaries of this course.
4. The inclusion of Heidegger in this course means that students will confronted by a totally different and interdisciplinary approach that frames the problem of knowledge in a much wider and richer context that goes beyond (and is opposed to) the narrow logico-

mathematical-scientific method that dominates the Western philosophical tradition from Descartes to Quine.

5. By working together in groups students will be able to develop leadership and communication skills, and enhance their ability to work with other students in a cooperative manner.

WHY DESCARTES, QUINE, AND HEIDEGGER?

It would be legitimate to ask why these three thinkers, and not others who probably with equal or greater right deserve to be consulted when it comes the questions of what is knowledge, and whether there is any such thing? Descartes' *Meditations* are the foundation and beginning of the modern theory of knowledge until our times. It is indisputably the paradigm within which all the questions encompassed by the term "knowledge" must be asked. If Descartes (d. 1650) is the beginning of the modern theory of knowledge, then W. V. Quine (d. 2000) is the end of the Cartesian tradition in epistemology.

Quine's 1951's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," a frontal and relentless assault on just about everything in the Cartesian universe of discourse from the point of view of a mature scientific naturalism, represents the beginning of the most sustained and devastating critique—far more reaching than even David Hume's—of Cartesian Foundationalism *from within* the Cartesian tradition itself.

At first blush, Heidegger (d, 1976) seems to be without a question the odd man out, and indeed he is. But he is included because of his radical questioning of the philosophical tradition from Plato to Quine. In fact, for Heidegger, Quine would be the natural *reductio ad absurdum* of the philosophical tradition stemming from Plato, running through Descartes, Hume, Kant, and finding its ultimate destiny—destruction—fulfilled in Quine. For Heidegger, the only way to salvage not only knowledge, but truth, beauty, value, our humanity is to *think* about these concepts again with a clean slate, or in more original way; to ask about these things away and outside of the Platonic-Cartesian framework that has dominated Western thought until Quine.

THE ISSUES IN CONTEXT

To place the approaches of these thinkers in context, we will read selections of Richard Feldman's *Epistemology* as a useful guide into some the major concepts (e.g. skepticism, conceptual relativism, knowledge as justified-true-belief; justification, fallibilism, basic versus non-basic beliefs, etc.) and issues (e. g. classical versus modified foundationalism, correspondence theory of truth versus coherence theory) regarding knowledge that will help us understand what Descartes, Quine, and, very indirectly, Heidegger are arguing, for or against.

Inevitably along the way will brush shoulders with Hume, Kant, Frege, Russell, Carnap (Quine's teacher), who extended and further refined the Cartesian program and gave it its most influential and sophisticated formulation, the formulation against which Quine moved in his explosive and controversial critique.

The questions we will try to answer are clustered around three major concerns that are of fundamental importance:

1. Are we animals trapped in a struggle of survival in which our knowledge-claims are always provisional and fallible and of purely instrumental value (Quine)?
2. In contrast to this view, are we rational agents capable of ascending to realm of values and concepts that yield what we normally call “knowledge” that transcends our animal and biological nature (Descartes)?
3. Beyond both Descartes and Quine, are we ultimately dependent for knowledge, rationality, value, and truth on something much deeper, more *primordial* and *original*, what Heidegger calls *Being (to on*, “what is,” in Greek, from which we get the word *ontology*), a reality many assumed has to do with God, although Heidegger has vehemently denied it, pointing out that the concept is not only of pre-Socratic vintage, but the concept of God, gods, the holy, or the divine are supervenient on—determined by and therefore dependent on—the concept of *Being*?

Honors Fellows	Office	Office Hours	Phone
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Required Texts/Readings:

Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

(We read about 20 pages, Meditations I through first half of III.)

Richard Feldman, *Epistemology* (Pierson, 2003). (We read roughly ¼ of the book.)

Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings of Martin Heidegger*, 2nd edition, Harper Perennial (1994).

The required readings from *Basic Writings* are:

Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth" (1943). (Short) [Lecture by Professor]

Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" (1929; and Postscript, 1943) (Short) [Lecture by Professor]

Group Presentations:

Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics" [1st Group Presentation]

Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" [2nd Group Presentation]

Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" (1946) (Longer) [3rd Group Presentation]

Heidegger, "On the Origin of the Work of Art" (1935/1937/1960) (Longest selection) [4th Group Presentation]

Required readings that will be made available online:

W. V. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," (1951), in *From a Logical Point of View*. (About 15 pages)

_____, "Epistemology Naturalized" (1969), in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. (About 12 pages)

Other required learning tools, which you should have viewed before school starts:

The Matrix

Requirements

1. Two major essays (3-4 pages per essay minimum, double spaced, 12 pt. font) on topics provided by the instructor. These questions will address the fundamental problems or issues presented by the course materials (45% of grade).
2. Four Discussions (25% of grade).
3. Formulation of Gettier-type case. One (1) page example of a Gettier-type case (10% of grade).

THESE THREE ASSIGNMENTS MEET THE RESEARCH SKILLS HONORS
COLLEGE LEARNING OUTCOME

4. Group Oral Class Presentation on one of Heidegger's writings (2-3 pages minimum, double spaced, 12 pt. font). Three to four (3-4) students will present the main points of one of the assigned readings from Heidegger ((15% of grade).

THIS ASSIGNMET MEETS THE INTERDISCIPLINARY AND CONNECTIVITY,
AND THE LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT HONORS COLLEGE LEARNING
OUTCOMES

Religious Observances

Every effort will be made, where feasible and practical, to accommodate students whose religious practices coincide with class requirements or scheduling. Please make sure to notify your instructor at the beginning of the semester of which dates you will be absent or any anticipated problems with completing course work.

Physical, Mental and Sensory Challenges

The Disability Resource Center collaborates with students, faculty, staff, and community members to create diverse learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive and sustainable. The DRC provides FIU students with disabilities the necessary support to successfully complete their education and participate in activities available to all students. If you have a diagnosed disability and plan to utilize academic accommodations, please contact the DRC at 305-348-3532 (MMC) or at 305-919-5345 (BBC) to schedule an appointment. You can also visit them in person in GC 190 at MMC or in WUC 131 at BBC campus.

Honors College Requirements

Academic Misconduct Procedures and Policies

In The Honors College, the term "honor" refers both to academic accomplishment and character. Students in Honors should therefore adhere to and be held to the highest standards of personal academic accountability. Academic dishonesty in any form, including plagiarism, is antithetical to the very definition of being an Honors student at FIU. Consequently, an Honors College student found responsible for academic misconduct will be dismissed from the College.

An Honors faculty member may bring charges of academic misconduct against an Honors student if the faculty member suspects plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct. The faculty member will decide whether to pursue informal resolution, file formal resolution charges, or take no further action, and will follow the procedures outlined in the Academic Misconduct Procedures available at <https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/get-support/student-conduct-and-academic-integrity/academic-integrity/index.php> . Please refer to the following documents for additional information:

FIU Student Handbook: <https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/about/student-handbook/index.php>

Student Portfolios

The Honors College will be using a portfolio method to assess students' learning outcomes. The portfolio allows for maximum flexibility in gauging student learning. Students decide (with instructor consultation) what “artifacts” or assignments to include for consideration in their portfolios to demonstrate successful achievement of each of five key student learning outcomes over the 4-year Honors experience. Portfolios provide a rich context for students to show what they have learned and to explain their learning process. Because the Honors curriculum is meant to be thought-provoking and reflective, student self-assessment through portfolios will facilitate learning and provide in-depth assessment. Each Honors College course includes at least one assignment that could potentially fit portfolio requirements. <http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/portfolio/>

Honors Engagement

Requirements Honors College students are required to accumulate at least 20 engagement points each academic year (Fall and Spring) by attending Honors College activities. Students attending only one semester (Fall or Spring) are required to accumulate 10 engagement points. Each activity has a point value. Students may select which events and activities they want to attend. The new system is designed to be more flexible for students, offering events at various days and times (including some weekend events) and allowing for a variety of ways to meet the requirements. Please plan accordingly. <http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/citizenship/>

Community Service

Honors College students must also complete 20 volunteer service hours. These hours DO NOT count toward the 20 engagement points discussed above. <http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/community-service/>

Honors Education in the Arts (HEARTS)

The HEARTS program is designed to give Honors College students opportunities to “explore and appreciate different artistic and cultural traditions and modes of artistic expression. HEARTS will also serve as a clearinghouse (and curatorial framework) for our students to experience the arts on campus and in the community by providing them with information about cultural activities and access to performances with free or discounted tickets. <http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/hearts/>

Resources:**Panthers Care & Counseling & Psychological Services**

If you are looking for help for yourself or a fellow classmate, Panthers Care encourages you to express any concerns you may come across as it relates to any personal behavior concerns or worries you have, for the classmate's well-being or yours; you are encouraged to share your concerns with FIU's Panthers Care website.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers free and confidential help for anxiety, depression, stress, and other concerns that life brings. Learn more about CAPS at caps.fiu.edu. Professional counselors are available for same-day appointments. Don't wait to call 305-348-2277 to set up a time to talk or visit the online self-help portal.

GL Learning Outcomes**GL Learning Outcomes for IDH 3034-5**

- Global Awareness: Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the interrelatedness of local, global, international, and intercultural issues, trends, and systems.
- Global Perspectives: Students will be able to develop a multi-perspective analysis of local, global, international, and intercultural problems.
- Global Engagement: Students will be able to demonstrate a willingness to engage in local, global, international, and intercultural problem solving.

Assignments must be able to assess the students' ability to demonstrate these outcomes. We will be collecting them at the end of the academic year (spring).

For Convocation Week, Excellence Lecture, and Fall Awards Assembly
Check the Honors College Calendar

Fall 2021

Week 1

DESCARTES

Introduction, Syllabus Requirements; Survey: Ways of Knowing and Skepticism

Required Reading: Feldman, 8-24; Descartes, *Meditation I* read together with Feldman, “Brain in a Vat” (due to Hilary Putnam): 94-99; Skepticism I: 108-119.

Week 2

The Standard View: Cartesian Foundationalism

Required Reading: Descartes, *Meditation II & III* (up to page 45 on the margin); Feldman, 52-60, on Cartesian Foundationalism.

Week 3

The Limits of the Standard View: Modest Foundationalism

Required Reading: Gettier-Type Cases, in Feldman. 25-38; Evidentialism, Feldman, 45-48; Modest Foundationalism, Feldman, 70-78.

The Matrix (selected scenes)

Week 4

The Standard View Modified II: Historical Review: From Hume to Quine

Required Reading: Lecture: From Hume to Carnap (on Canvas).

Week 5

W. V. QUINE

The Standard View Modified III: W. V. Quine: Coherence theory of truth vs. Modest Foundationalism and Fallibilism

Required Reading: Coherentism, Feldman, 60-70; Fallibilism, Feldman, 122-125; Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”; Lecture on Quine’s “Two Dogmas” (on Canvas).

Week 6

Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized”

Required Reading: Naturalistic Epistemology and the a priori, Feldman, 166-175; Lecture on Quine’s Epistemology Naturalized” (on Canvas).

Recommended: Hume’s Problem of Induction and the a priori (Feldman, 132-141).

Week 7

The Standard View Modified IV: The End of Knowledge? Conceptual Relativism

Required Reading: Feldman, Epistemological Relativism, 177-190.

Week 8

HEIDEGGER

Lecture by Professor: Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” (93-110).

Documentary on Heidegger

- Week 9
Lecture by Professor: Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth” (115-138)
- Week 10
GROUP PRESENTATION: Heidegger, “Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics” (271-305).
- Week 11
GROUP PRESENTATION: Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” (
- Week 12
GROUP PRESENTATION: Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”
Recommended: Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (on Canvas).
- Week 13
GROUP PRESENTATION: Heidegger, “On the Origin of the Work of Art,” with emphasis on “van Gogh’s Painting of the Peasant Shoes,” second paragraph of 148 to top of 163 (before the poem), 164 last paragraph to top of 165; 170-182; second paragraph of 185 to first paragraph of 195.
- Week 15
Final Discussion