

PHIL 220 – Early Modern Philosophy

Fall 2014, MWF 10:00-10:50, Caldwell 105

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Office Hours: MW 11-12 or by appointment

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Course Description

Can your mind exist without your body? Does God exist, and if so, what is God like? How are we supposed to answer these questions: can we rely on our sense experience, or do we believe that we have innate ideas? Does the physical world exist outside of our minds? In this course, we will read and discuss how philosophers from the Early Modern period answered these and other questions. We will read works by Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, Conway, Hume, Leibniz and Kant. These philosophers are interesting not only because they produced difficult and fascinating arguments in favor of radically different answers to these questions, but also because they were “systematic” thinkers. Our goal will be to get an understanding of the various philosophical “systems” constructed by these philosophers in an effort to help us answer deep questions about the nature of god, the possibility of miracles, the nature and limits of human knowledge, the nature of personal identity, the existence and nature of the material world and so on. This course is highly recommended not only for philosophy majors, but also for those interested in how geniuses from the past tried to answer the “big questions” that we ask ourselves today. This course presupposes no knowledge of the history of philosophy, though students would likely benefit from having taken Ancient Greek philosophy.

Texts

All of the texts for this course are available online through the library or earlymoderntexts.org. However, I suggest the following editions for those who want a print edition.

Suggested Print Texts

Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Hackett edition. ISBN: 978-0872201927

Spinoza. *The Ethics*. Hackett edition. ISBN: 978-0872201309

Locke. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Hackett edition. ISBN: 978-0872202160

Berkeley. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. Hackett edition. ISBN: 978-0915145393

Conway. *The Principles of the most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. Cambridge Texts. ISBN: 0521479045

Leibniz. *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*. Hackett edition. ISBN: 0872201325

Course Goals

The goals of this course are

- To read, interpret, and critically discuss texts of systematic philosophy written by thinkers in the Early Modern period. The texts attempt to answer timeless questions about the nature of reality and our place in it. At the end of the course, I hope you will come to see the intrinsic interest in understanding the origins of your own philosophical worldview and of doing philosophy in general.
- To develop your ability to read, comprehend, and critically engage with texts concerning abstract philosophical questions written from a perspective that is likely remote from your own. Our course will emphasize the challenge and satisfaction of grappling with complex philosophical systems and arguments.
- To develop your ability to collaborate with peers on the difficult task of forming your own interpretation of a text and then assessing the merits of that text.
- To develop the skill of charitable interpretation so that you not only better understand the course material but also so that you can appreciate and productively challenge points of view you disagree with.

Achieving these Goals

- Students are expected to read assigned texts carefully before class and take notes of questions and comments you have about the text. If you would like supplemental reading material to read alongside the text, I am happy to provide it.
- I will give brief lectures to help explain the more complex material. However, most of class time will consist in my asking pointed questions about the text to help you guide your own thoughts.
- Sometimes I will ask small groups to work together to form an interpretation of an unfamiliar text to help develop the skill of constructing one's own interpretation of a text.
- When an objection to a philosopher's views is raised, I will do my best to respond "as" that philosopher. I will illustrate that though we may now reject these old beliefs, they have more merit than we might expect.
- When we find points of disagreement with a philosopher I will ask you to reflect on *why* your views are more plausible. For example, why is Descartes proof that mind and body are distinct unconvincing? What is better about *our* views on human consciousness?
- Exam questions will test not only your comprehension of the material discussed in class but also your ability to grasp the systematic points of view of many of these philosophers. For example, I might ask: how would Spinoza respond to the objection "God is not material because God does not have parts"? One should be able to answer this without our having discussed it explicitly in class.

Assignments and Grading

Reading Blog and Discussion Forum Posts (25 pts. total)

You may post on your blog or in the discussion forums. Blogs are due *before* the start of class when we discuss the relevant reading. Only one post per reading will be counted. Your blog post must include a short summary followed by 2 questions or confusions you had about the reading.

Forum posts are worth a *half* point per post. Posts should be either high-quality, discussion-provoking questions about that night's reading or high-quality responses to those questions. Each night's reading is a separate topic in the forum.

Two out-of-class written exams. (25 pts. each, 50 pts. total)

Out-of-class exams will consist of 3-5 questions that will require 5-7 double-spaced pages total of writing to answer. You should email me the exam by 11:59 PM on the date that it's due. Late exams will be docked 2 points for every day that they're late.

Final exam (25 pts. total)

There will be no in-class final exam. Instead, you will be given an essay exam similar in style to the previous written exams. However, the final will require approximately 6 pages of writing and will cover the content of the entire course. The final essay questions will be announced one week before the date of the final exam.

Course Grade Guide

A: 94-100 B+: 87-89 B-: 80-83 C: 74-76 D+: 67-69 F: 0-59

A-: 90-93 B: 84-86 C+: 77-79 C-: 70-73 D: 60-69

Course Policies

- Our classroom will be a technology-free classroom with the exception of e-readers/tablets in airplane mode. On some days, I will permit devices so that you can search electronic versions of texts.
- Discussions will be respectful. No one wants to feel uncomfortable or unsafe in a classroom. Any comment or action that discriminates or harasses on the grounds of sex, gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality, or any physical characteristics will not be tolerated. If you feel disrespected in any way during the class, please contact me immediately.
- Participation is mandatory. You won't receive credit for attending or participating in class, but you can lose credit for missing more than three classes without an excused absence. For every additional absence, I will take off one point from your final grade.
- Both plagiarism and cooperation on blogs and exams are unacceptable. For more info about the Honor Code, see studentconduct.unc.edu.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Intro to history of philosophy, and overview of the major thinkers 8/20 – 8/22

Week 2: Descartes' *Meditations*

8/25 – Letter of Dedication, Preface, Meditation 1 (p. 1-17)

8/27 – Meditation 2 (p. 17-24)

8/29 – Meditation 2 continued

Week 3: Descartes continued.

9/1 – No Class, Labor Day

9/3 – Meditation 3 (p. 24-35)

9/5 – Meditation 3, continued.

Week 4: Descartes continued.

9/8 – Meditation 4 (p. 35-42)

9/10- Meditation 4 (p. 35-42)

9/12- Meditation 5 (p. 42-47)

Week 5: Descartes continued.

9/15- Meditation 6 (p. 47-59)

9/17- Meditation 6 (p. 47-59), Selections from correspondence with Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia (Sakai)

9/19- Selections from correspondence with Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia (Sakai)

Week 6: Spinoza's *Ethics*

9/22- Part I, *Ethics*: Definitions, Axioms. (p.31-2) Part I, Appendix (p. 57-62), Part III (p.102-103), Part IV (p.152-4) Part V (p.201-3) Prefaces

9/24- Part I, Axioms, Definitions, and Appendix. 1P11, 1P15, 1P18, 1P28, 1P29, 1P33

9/26- Part I, Axioms, Definitions, and Appendix. 1P11, 1P15, 1P18, 1P28, 1P29, 1P33

Week 7: Spinoza continued.

9/29- Spinoza on Miracles from Nadler's *A Book Forged in Hell* (PDF on Sakai).

9/29- First out-of-class exam Assigned

10/1- Hume on Miracles (weblink on Sakai)

10/3- Hume on Miracles continued.

Week 8: Locke's *Essay*.

10/6- Dedication and Epistle to Reader of Locke's *Essay*. Book I, Chapter 1. (Link on Sakai: the links to these texts are visible on the left-hand side of the Past Master's page.) *Do not use your book for these readings, since it is abridged.*

10/6 - First out-of-class exam DUE

10/8- All of Book I (p. 4-32), Chapter iii. optional

10/10- Book II, Chapters i.- vii. (p. 33-46)

Week 9: Locke continued.

10/13- Book II, Chapter viii (p. 47-56)

10/15- Book II Chapters ix and x (p. 56-63)

10/17 – No class, Fall Break

Week 10: Locke continued.

10/20- Book II Chapter xxvii (p. 133-50)

10/22-

10/24- Hume on Personal identity (link on Sakai)

Week 11: Berkeley's *Principles*.

10/27- *Principles* – Introduction (p. 7-22)

10/29- Part 1, Sections 1-15 (p. 23-29)

10/31- Part I, Sections 16-24 (p. 29-33)

Week 12: Berkeley continued.

11/3- Part I, Sections 25-33 (p. 33-37)

11/5- Part I, Sections 34-66 (p. 37-52)

11/7- Part I, Sections 67-100 (p. 52-66)

Week 13: Conway

11/10- Chapters 1-3 (p. 1-9)

11/12- Chapters 4-6 (p.10-25)

11/14- Chapters 7-9 (p. 26-50) – be prepared to reconstruct 2 of the 6 arguments, skim the rest

11/14- Second out-of-class exam assigned

Week 14: Leibniz's *Monadology*.

11/17- *Monadology* 1-30 (p. 68-72)

11/19- *Monadaology* 31-60 (p. 72-77)

11/21- *Monadology* 61 - 90 (p. 77-81)

11/21- Second out-of-class exam DUE

Week 15: Kant

11/24- Selections from *Critique of Pure Reason* (Introduction, Transcendental Aesthetic)

11/26- No class, Thanksgiving

11/28- No class, Thanksgiving

Week 16: Kant

12/1- Selections from *Critique of Pure Reason* (Paralogisms [1,4], Antinomies 3,4)

12/3- Selections from *Critique of Pure Reason* (Ideal of Pure Reason: Impossibility of Cosmological and Ontological Proofs)

12/12 – 8 AM – Final Exam