

Philosophy 301L: Early Modern Philosophy, Spring 2012

Topic: Epistemology and metaphysics in the work of five major figures in the History of Modern Philosophy: Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Leibniz, and Kant.

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Course description

This course examines metaphysical and epistemological issues in early modern philosophy in a selection of major figures from Descartes to Kant. Topics include the following: the nature and existence of God, the existence of the external world, *a priori* knowledge, the analytic-synthetic distinction, the nature of space, the nature of the self, mind-body interaction, immortality, primary and secondary qualities, cause, possibility, substance, essence, and free will. **Note that ethical questions will not feature in this course.** In addition to developing an understanding of these fundamental philosophical concepts and issues, students will learn how to read a historical text sympathetically yet critically. We will finish with a brief consideration of some questions in contemporary theory of knowledge.

Note. Since clear and accurate writing is essential to good philosophy, each meeting I will devote a small part of class to discussing techniques for effective writing. For those seriously interested in improving their writing, I recommend: Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*.

Texts

The sole required text for this course is the anthology: *Modern Philosophy*, 2nd edition, Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, eds. This is an anthology of primary texts in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy. It is **not** available at the COOP. You should order it from one of the various booksellers on line. (It seems to be selling new for around 35-40

dollars, but you can buy it second hand cheaper.) **Please note: the first edition of the book is not suitable for our needs.**

Grading Policy

The final grade will be based on four components: (1) section attendance and participation (15%) (Note: lecture participation and attendance will **not** be used to determine the grade); (2) one short paper (four pages, double-spaced, 12 point; 25%); (3) a longer paper (5–6 pages, double-spaced, 12 point; 35%). (4) a forty-five minute in-class test (25%) Note: plus and minus grades **will** be awarded.

A description of how the grade will be calculated appears on the final page of this syllabus.

Policy on Plagiarism

Students found to have plagiarized in one assignment will receive no credit for that assignment. Students found to have plagiarized more than once will fail the course and may be referred to the Dean, who may wish to impose further sanctions.

What counts as Plagiarism?

Copying any material that is not your own without attribution is plagiarism. It is no excuse if that copying is inadvertent. (If you take notes, it's your responsibility to make sure you record the origin of any texts you copy.) If you go to a website and merely paraphrase what you find there without citing the source, that's plagiarism, too. If you do this you are, in any case, likely to earn only D or worse for the assignment, even if you do cite the source. (Unthinking paraphrase is not college-level work). Please be aware that we know the sources students tend to draw upon when they plagiarize, and that every year we catch a few plagiarists.

Policy on late papers

Papers submitted late without a reasonable excuse (e.g., serious illness), will be docked one third of a grade for each part-day they are late. So a paper submitted more than 48 hours late but less than 72 hours late will be docked a whole grade; one more than 24 hours late but less than 48 hours late will be docked 2/3 of a grade (so, e.g., from B+ to B-). Papers submitted more than 72 hours late without a reasonable excuse will receive no credit.

Extra credit

There will be no extra credit assignments in this class.

Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259. **If you do need accommodations, please bring your accommodations note to me *early* in the term.**

About the in-class writing exercise

The exercise will take 45 minutes. You will have to answer **three** of the six questions, which three being disclosed only at the start of the exercise. **So to be safe you will need to prepare answers to all six questions.** For each question you should aim to prepare an answer that will cover roughly 2.5–3 sides of a blue book double-spaced (i.e., writing on every other line). The way I count them, there are two “sides” on each leaf of a blue book. They are counted like “pages” in a printed book. **You must bring your own blue book (or green book) to section. The exercise is closed-book (and closed notes). No computers are allowed; so you will have to write by hand** (unless you have a note saying otherwise from the Office for Services for Students with Disabilities). From the time the exercise is distributed (roughly a week ahead) students will be under exam conditions and should not ask the TA or me for the answers!

Please be sure to notify me at the **beginning of the course if you will need any special accommodations for the in-class test.**

Syllabus

You should be sure to have read the readings for a given lecture before that lecture.

Note: The quantity of reading assigned sometimes varies from lecture to lecture and on some days, when less reading is assigned, students will be expected to read ahead. The syllabus is subject to change and supplementation. All page references are to the 2nd edition of *Modern Philosophy*.

I. Descartes and his Critics

Tu. Jan. 17. No reading. a) Aims of the course. b) Descartes' life, writings and project.

Th. Jan. 19. Letter of Dedication, Synopsis, 1st Meditation, pp. 35-43 (omit the "Preface to the Reader", which we read later), reply to Hobbes in 3rd set of objections (just one paragraph on p. 76). Kurt Smith, "Descartes' Life and Works," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-works/>

Tu. Jan. 24. 2nd Meditation, pp. 43-47 and selections from the *Discourse on the Method*, pp. 25-34; 3rd Objection II and reply, pp. 76-79

Th. Jan. 26. 3rd Meditation, pp. 47-54; 3rd set of objections: objection V and reply, pp. 79-80; objections IX and X and replies, pp. 81-82; 4th objection and replies, pp. 83-92.

Tu. Jan. 31. 4th Meditation, pp. 54-58, the whole of the reply to the 2nd set of objections, pp. 69-75.

Th. Feb. 2. 5th Meditation, pp. 58-61; 3rd set of objections: Objection X and reply pp. 81-82. Lawrence Nolan, "Descartes' Ontological Argument," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-ontological/>

Tu. Feb. 7. 6th Meditation, pp. 61-68. Preface to the Reader, pp. 37-38. **FIRST PAPER ASSIGNED.**

II. Leibniz

Th. Feb. 9. Biographical sketch. *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §§ 1-13, pp. 224-232; Letter to Arnauld, pp. 248-254. Brandon Look, "Leibniz's Modal Metaphysics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/leibniz-modal/>. (Read this article in connection with all the remaining lectures on Leibniz)

Tu. Feb. 14. *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §§ 15-26, pp. 232-240, Lin and Melamed, "Principle of Sufficient Reason" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sufficient-reason/> (Again, this article can be usefully read throughout the unit on Leibniz).

Th. Feb. 16. *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §§ 28-37, pp. 240-247

Tu. Feb. 21. *Primary Truths*, pp. 265-268.

Th. Feb. 23. *A New System of Nature and Communication of Substances, and of the Union of Soul and Body*, 269-274.

Tu. Feb. 28. *The Principles of Philosophy, or the Monadology*, 275-283. **FIRST PAPER DUE (IN CLASS)**

III. Locke

Th. Mar. 1. Biographical sketch, Ideas in general. Criticism of Innate Ideas, Criticism of Descartes' view that the essence of the mind is to think, pp. 316-328. Jerry Samet "The Historical Controversies surrounding innateness" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/innateness-history/>

Tu. Mar. 6. Primary and Secondary Qualities, pp. 328-337 (finish just before ch. IX "Of Perception"); Robert Boyle: "Of the excellency and grounds of the corpuscular or mechanical philosophy," 308-315.

Th. Mar 8. Our Idea of Substance, ch XXIII, "Of our complex ideas of substances," pp. 359-367.

Tu. Mar. 13. NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

Th. Mar. 15. NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

Tu. Mar 20. Real and Nominal Essence, pp. 377-386; Leibniz, *New Essays*, Preface, 422-433. **[YOU ARE ADVISED TO START THE READING ON BERKELEY FOR MARCH 22]**

IV. Berkeley

Th. Mar 22. Biographical sketch: *Three Dialogues*, The First Dialogue, (excerpt): pp. 454-464. Lisa Downing, "George Berkeley" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/berkeley/>(This article should be read throughout the Berkeley unit) *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. **[NOTE THE READING FOR THIS WEEK IS CONSIDERABLY LONGER, THOUGH LESS DENSE, THAN THAT FOR PREVIOUS WEEKS.]**

Tu. Mar. 27, *Three Dialogues*, The Second Dialogue, pp. 475-485.

Th. Mar. 29, *Three Dialogues* The Third Dialogue: common sense defended, pp. 484-503. **SECOND PAPER ASSIGNED**

V. Kant

Tu. April 3, Biographical sketch; Kant's critical project, "Preface," pp. 717-724

Th. April 5. A priori and a posteriori judgments, "Introduction," pp. 724-729.

Tu. April 10, Analytic and synthetic judgments (re-read texts assigned for April 5)

Th. April 12, Our representations of Space (and Time) as a priori intuitions, “Transcendental Aesthetic,” pp. 729-737 (the reading ends just before the “Transcendental Doctrine of Elements”)

Tu. April 17. Substance: The First Analogy, pp. 678-772.

Th. April 19. The Transcendental Ideas. Transcendental Illusion; The First Paralogism, pp. 783-788 (begin at “Transcendental Logic” Division II”).

Tu. April 24, The first two Antinomies, pp. 788-797 & pp. 801-804.

Th. April 26, The third Antinomy, pp. 798–800.

SECOND PAPER DUE.

QUESTIONS FOR IN-CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED.

Tu. May 1st. Kant’s Criticisms of the Ontological Argument, pp. 819-823.

Th. May 3, **IN-CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENT HELD IN CLASS**

Appendix: How the grade will be calculated

Assignments will receive letter grades. Then the grade will be calculated in three steps.

Step 1. Letter grades for each assignment will be converted to numerical equivalents according to the following scheme;

A= 4.0

A- = 3.7

B+ = 3.4

B = 3.0

B- = 2.7

C+= 2.4

C= 2.0

C- =1.7

etc.

Step 2. These numerical equivalents will be weighted in a way that reflects the percentage of the total grade corresponding to the assignment in question.

Step 3. The weighted numerical equivalents will be summed

Step 4. The result of step 3 will be converted into the final letter grade according to the following scheme.

3.85–4.0 = A

3.55–3.84 = A-

3.2–3.54 = B+

2.85–3.19 = B
2.55–2.84 = B-
2.2–2.54 = C+
1.85–2.19 = C
etc.

Illustration

Suppose a student earned the following grades for his or her assignment:

Participation in section: A
1st paper: B
2nd paper: B-
In-class writing exercise: A-

The corresponding weighted equivalents will be:

Participation in section: $4 \times 15/100 = .6$
1st paper: $3 \times 25/100 = .75$
2nd paper: $2.7 \times 35/100 = .945$
In-class writing exercise: $3.7 \times 25/100 = .925$
Sum of weighted numerical equivalents = $(.6 + .75 + .945 + .925) = 3.22$
Final grade: B+