History of Early Modern Philosophy

The George Washington University
Spring 2013—Phil 2112
MF 11:10am-12:25pm, Phillips Hall 217
Office: Phillips Hall 525-A

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Office Hours: MF 9:30-10:30am

Description:

What is modern in the works of the dead? Just this: like us, Western European philosophers in the 17th and 18th centuries bore witness to the fall of the Church and the rise in authority of a new science; like us, their common sense and knowledge emerged from a field of contested allegiances—to pure theory or reason, to science, to God. This course offers a critical introduction to the metaphysical and epistemological theories of Modern Philosophy with particular attention to the following figures and themes: Descartes’ indictment of the senses and his arguments for both the existence of God and mind/body dualism; pantheism, geometrical method, and the interaction of Imagination and Reason in Spinoza; Leibniz’s re-envisioning of atoms as monads and its implications for freedom and the ideality of space and time; Locke’s embrace of corpuscularian mechanics and the empiricist way of ideas; and the varieties of skepticism urged by Berkeley and Hume. We shall conclude by examining Kant’s Copernican Turn and its attempted closure of metaphysics and modern philosophy.

Learning Objectives:

This course introduces concepts and methodology pertaining to Metaphysics & Epistemology, a branch of philosophy that focuses on fundamental questions about knowledge, perception, and reality. Our focus will be on the metaphysical and epistemological theories promulgated by philosophers in Western Europe from roughly 1580 (the publication of Montaigne’s Apology for Raymond Sebond) thru 1781 (the publication of Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason). By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

1. Recognize and explain key philosophical concepts, including the following:
   - *metaphysics*—the branch of philosophy that deals with “first principles” or ultimate, foundational explanations of things
   - *ontology*—the study of being, of what there is in existence
   - *epistemology*—the study of the constitution and scope of knowledge
   - *skepticism*—a questioning (or negatively dogmatic) attitude as to whether knowledge is possible

2. Elaborate and critically assess the major argumentative strategies of the “Continental Rationalists,” the “British Empiricists,” and Kant’s Transcendental Idealism

3. Demonstrate competence in the philosophical method of writing, which is distinguished by its emphasis on argument. An argument is an interlocking set of statements that are intended to support some (true) conclusion. We shall learn how to identify, evaluate, and construct arguments.

Required Texts:

~COURSE REQUIREMENTS~

(1) Précis, 1 page, on Montaigne’s *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, worth 5%
   - A précis traces out the underlying logic of a reading. I.e., state the thesis or theses and explain any supporting argument(s).
   
   **DUE DATE: 25th January**

(2) Quizzes, worth 10%
   - These are brief quizzes that should be easy if you have done the reading. No make-ups permitted.

(3) First Paper, 8 pages, on Descartes, Spinoza, and/or Leibniz, worth 25%.
   - A list of possible essay topics will be distributed two weeks prior to the due date.
   
   **DUE DATE: 8th March**

(4) Second Paper, 8 pages, on Locke, Berkeley, and/or Hume, worth 25%.
   - A list of possible essay topics will be distributed two weeks prior to the due date.
   
   **DUE DATE: 19th April**

(5) Final Examination, cumulative but mostly on Kant, worth 25%
   - Essay format. You will answer four questions. Some of the questions will invite you to explain the comparative significance of Kant’s claims vis-à-vis other early modern philosophers. Others will require you to read and explain a passage from the *Prolegomena* or *Critique*.

(6) Participation, worth 10%
   - **Two Special Notes on Participation:**
     
     (1) You must earn these points; merely attending class, while a prerequisite for participation, is *not* sufficient. If you never participate, you will receive zero (0/10) points for this portion of your grade at the end of term. I shall assess this portion of your grade twice, once when I return your first paper and again at the end of the semester. Your final participation grade will be an average of those two assessments.
     
     (2) Attendance is required insofar as it is a precondition of the participation portion of your grade. I take attendance at the beginning of each class. After two missed classes, I shall subtract one point from your final grade for each additional absence unexcused by proper documentation.

   
   **Summary of Grade Breakdown:**
   - 55% - Essays (Précis, First & Second Papers)
   - 25% - Final Examination
   - 10% - Quizzes
   - 10% - Participation

*ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE COMPLETED TO PASS THIS COURSE*
~COURSE POLICIES~

(1) **Late Papers:** Late papers are not encouraged, but will be accepted. No excuses are needed or desired. However, the grade will drop two marks for each day that passes after the due date. Suppose the due date is Monday; if you submit it on Tuesday, and it was an “A” paper, it will now be a “B+” paper; on Wednesday of that week it will be a “B” paper; etc.

(2) **Drafts:** I am happy to read drafts if you come to office hours. I will not review drafts via email.

(3) **Submission of Written Work:** All written work is to be submitted as a paper hard-copy, in class, on the due date.

(4) **Make-up Examinations:** Only granted with documentation of family or medical emergency.

(5) **Religious Holidays:** Absences on religious holidays are granted with the request of prior notification.

**Academic Honesty & Plagiarism:** I shall strictly enforce the policies and procedures concerning academic honesty set forth in the university bulletin. The George Washington University’s Code of Academic Integrity (Article II, §1(b).3) defines plagiarizm thusly: "Plagiarism - intentionally representing the words, ideas, or sequence of ideas of another as one's own in any academic exercise; failure to attribute any of the following: quotations, paraphrases, or borrowed information." If you have any questions about what needs to be cited, please ask me. I have zero tolerance for post facto pleas of ignorance or forgetfulness. If you submit plagiarized work, minimally that assignment will receive a “F.”

**Disabilities:** Students requesting support services should contact Disability Support Services to establish eligibility and to arrange appropriate accommodations: (202) 994-8250, Rome Hall Suite 102.

**University Counseling Center:** This office offers confidential assessment, assistance, and referral for issues pertaining to students’ personal and social life, career, and studies. Counseling as well as crisis and emergency mental health consultations are available: (202) 994-5300.

**Security:** In the event of an emergency, shelter in place unless our location is effected, in which case follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter.
Schedule of Course Readings:

N.B. ALL READINGS ARE TO BE COMPLETED PRIOR TO THE MEETING FOR WHICH THEY ARE ASSIGNED

Week 1: M, 1.14 Reformation & the crisis pyrrhonienne
† Luther, “Address at the Diet of Worms” (handout); Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, “The Problem of the Criterion” (handout)

F, 1.18 DESCARTES—the method of doubt
† Discourse on the Method, Parts 1 & 2; Meditations on First Philosophy, I
Recommended Reading: Leibniz, letter to Foucher (p. 101)

Week 2: M, 1.21 {No Class, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day}

F, 1.25 DESCARTES—cogito ergo sum; will and judgment
† Meditations on First Philosophy, II & IV; Hobbes, Third Set of Objections, regarding Mediation II, with Descartes’ Replies (p. 76-79); Augustine, City of God (handout)
Recommended Reading: 2nd Replies, Definitions 5-7 (p. 72-73)
† PRÉCIS DUE

Week 3: M, 1.28 DESCARTES—proofs for the existence of God
† Meditations on First Philosophy, III & V; Arnauld, Fourth Set of Objections, regarding circularity, p. 86, with Descartes’ Reply (p. 92); Leibniz, letter to Elizabeth (p. 102-104); Anselm, Proslogion (handout); Augustine, Cites Dei (handout)
Recommended Reading: 2nd Replies, Definitions 3-4 (p. 72), Propositions & Demonstrations I-III (p. 74f)

F, 2.1 DESCARTES—problems of mind/body dualism
† Meditations on First Philosophy, VI

Week 4: M, 2.4 DESCARTES—(contd.)
† Descartes-Elizabeth correspondence (handout); Discourse on the Method, Part 5; Malebranche, The Search After Truth (p. 212-215; 220-221)

F, 2.8 SPINOZA—nature, mind, body, “all things are in God”
† Ethics, Part One, Definitions, Axioms, Propositions 1-14, Appendix (p. 144-149; 160-164); Part Two, Definitions, Axioms, Propositions 1-13 (thru 1st Corollary) (p. 164-169)

Week 5: M, 2.11 SPINOZA—knowledge; the geometrical or synthetic method
† Ethics, Part Two, Propositions 14-49
Recommended Reading: Descartes, Reply to Second Objections (p. 70-72); Spinoza, letter to Oldenburg (p. 142-143); “The Spinoza of Market Street” (handout)

F, 2.15 LEIBNIZ—monads as simple substances; the ideality of space & time
† Monadology, §1-59; Discourse on Metaphysics, §1-50, 51, 56-57

Week 6: M, 2.18 {No Class, Presidents’ Day}
F, 2.22 LEIBNIZ—monadic bodies & pre-established harmony
† Monadology, §§60-81; Discourse on Metaphysics, §§14, 26-27, 33-34; New System of Nature
† FIRST PAPER TOPICS DISTRIBUTED

Week 7: M, 2.25 LEIBNIZ— theodicy & possible worlds
† Discourse on Metaphysics, §§1-9, 13; Leibniz: remarks on a letter from Arnauld (p. 248-254); Theodicy (handout); Voltaire, Candide (Ch. 1-6; last page)

F, 3.1 LOCKE—critique of innate ideas; the empiricist way of ideas
† Essay Concerning Human Understanding (p. 316-332)
  Recommended Reading: Leibniz, New Essays on the Understanding (p. 422-425)

Week 8: M, 3.4 LOCKE—the Corpuscularian Hypothesis
† Galileo, The Assayer (p. 21-24); Boyle, Of the Excellency and Grounds of the Corpuscular or Mechanical Philosophy (p. 308-315); Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding (p. 332-337)

F, 3.8 LOCKE—substance; personal identity
† Essay Concerning Human Understanding (p. 359-376)
† FIRST PAPERS DUE

Week 9: {No Class, Spring Holiday}

Week 10: M, 3.18 LOCKE—theory of abstraction
† Essay Concerning Human Understanding (p. 377-386)

F, 3.22 BERKELEY—critique of abstraction; esse est percipi aut percipere
† A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge (p. 436-453)

Week 11: M, 3.25 BERKELEY—empirical realism v. empirical idealism
† Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, I & II (N.B. For II, read p. 475-477; 483-484)

F, 3.29 BERKELEY—spirits
† Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, III

Week 12: M, 4.1 HUME—skepticism of causal connections
† Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (p. 538-564)

F, 4.5 HUME—skepticism of personal identity
† Treatise of Human Nature (p. 525-532)
† SECOND PAPER TOPICS DISTRIBUTED

Week 13: M, 4.8 HUME—skepticism of practical reason
† Treatise of Human Nature (handout)

F, 4.12 HUME—genera of skepticism: Academic, Pyrrhic, Fideistic
† Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (p. 593-560); Treatise of Human Nature (handout); Bayle, Critical and Historical Dictionary, “Pyrrho, Note B” (p. 512-516).
Week 14: M, 4.15 HUME—religious skepticism, part 1
† *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (p. 601-621); “Of Miracles” (p. 577-586)

F, 4.19 HUME—religious skepticism, part 2
† *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (p. 621-640); “Of Suicide” (handout)
‡ SECOND PAPERS DUE

Week 15: M, 4.22 KANT—the Copernican Turn; analytic v. synthetic judgments
† *Critique of Pure Reason* (p. 717-724); *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* (p. 661-672)

F, 4.26 KANT—Intuitions & the Transcendental Aesthetic of space & time
† *Critique of Pure Reason* (p. 729-737)

Week 16: M, 4.29 KANT—Categories & the Transcendental Synthesis of the Understanding
† *Prolegomena* (p. 673-695)

W, 5.1 KANT—Phenomena v. Noumena
† *Prolegomena* (p. 695-716)