

PHIL 2XX: EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

sample syllabus

OVERVIEW

This course offers an introduction to some of the most influential European philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries: Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. We will critically examine the responses these thinkers gave to various questions in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, including the following: What is the relationship between reality and our perception of reality? What is the nature of the mind and how is it related to the body? What is the nature of physical reality? Which of our beliefs, if any, do we have good reason to maintain in the face of radical skepticism? How should just states exercise power? What rights and duties belong to human beings in their natural state?

TEXTBOOKS

René Descartes – *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy, 4th Ed.* – ISBN: 9780872204201

David Hume – *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* – ISBN: 9780872202290

Margaret Atherton, editor – *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period* – ISBN: 9780872202597

Roger Ariew, editor – *Readings in Modern Philosophy, volume 2: Locke, Berkeley, Hume* – ISBN: 9780872205321

ASSIGNMENTS

40% – Reconstructions: four argument reconstructions with commentary, one at the end of each unit. 10% each.

20% – Homework: weekly précis assignments, worksheets on argument analysis, group work, and pop quizzes.

20% – Final exam: multiple choice, text identification, and essay. You can use one letter-sized “cheat sheet.”

20% – Participation: both frequency and quality count, and your regular attendance is factored in as well.

FORMAT

Each class period contains both lecture and discussion. I lecture in a Socratic way, meaning that I frequently ask you to interject and you are responsible for supplying the material as I explain it. For each day we read one or two papers, essays, or articles. Each day I call upon a few students to summarize the day’s readings. These summaries contribute to your discussion grade. The reading load is about 10-15 pages per class period. Most papers are technical and take 1-2 hours to read, depending on your prior philosophical reading experience.

POLICIES

Laptops and tablets are permitted; phones are not. Use common sense and do not bother yourself or others.

Arriving over 15 minutes later is considered an unexcused absence. If I am over 15 minutes late, you may leave.

Attendance and participation are graded subjectively. The more you talk, the more quickly I learn your name.

Late assignments incur a 10% penalty (one letter grade) for each day, unless I have granted an extension.

Extensions, grade disputes, and requests for incomplete grades will be judged on a case-by-case basis.

E-mail is my preferred method of communication. I reply within 48 hours. If I do not, e-mail me again.

The First Rule of Good Discussion: “**Keep an open mind, but not so open that your brain falls out.**”

ACCOMMODATION

Please inform me by the end of the first week of class of any health concerns or documented physical, mental, or learning disabilities. We will work together to help you succeed according to your abilities.

HONOR CODE

I take the Honor Code very seriously. Suspected violations will be reported to the Honor Court and pursued.

READING SCHEDULE AND DUE DATES

Readings are identified by their source:

(MED) Descartes book — (WPEM) Atherton book — (RMP) Ariew book — (ECH) Hume book — (ONL) online

All readings must be completed by class time. You must turn in two précis assignments each week for 10 weeks. The first précis is due on 9/18 and the last on 11/20. All précis assignments must be turned in online before class begins.

(1) EARLY MODERNS ON THE CONTINENT		
Weeks 1-2 Classical Background	Course presentation	M 9/4
	(ONL) Plato : Excerpts from <i>Republic</i>	W 9/6
	(ONL) Aristotle : Excerpts from <i>Posterior Analytics</i>	F 9/8
	(ONL) Ibn Sīnā : Excerpts from <i>Canon</i>	M 9/11
	(ONL) Aquinas : Excerpts from <i>Summa Theologica</i>	W 9/13
	(ONL) Augustine : Excerpts from <i>City of God</i>	F 9/15
Weeks 3-4 Descartes	(MED) Descartes : Meditations 1 and 2	FIRST PRÉCIS DUE M 9/18
	(MED) Descartes : Meditations 3 and 5	W 9/20
	(MED) Descartes : Meditations 4 and 6	F 9/22
	(MED) Descartes : Excerpts from <i>Discourse on Method</i>	M 9/25
	(WPEM) Elisabeth of Bohemia : Selections from her correspondence with Descartes	W 9/27
Week 5 Spinoza and Leibniz	(RMP) Spinoza : Excerpts from <i>Ethics</i> , parts I and II	F 9/29
	(WPEM) Conway : Excerpts from <i>The Principles of the Most Ancient Philosophy</i>	M 10/2
	(RMP) Leibniz : Excerpts from <i>Monadology</i>	W 10/4
	(WPEM) Lady Masham : Selection from her correspondence with Leibniz	F 10/6
Assignment	Reconstruction #1 due online	F 10/6

(2) EARLY MODERN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY		
Week 6 Machiavelli	(ONL) Machiavelli : The Prince (I-VII)	M 10/9
	(ONL) Machiavelli : The Prince (VIII-XVI)	W 10/11
	(RMP) Locke : Excerpts from <i>Second Treatise of Government</i>	F 10/13
Week 7 Hobbes	(RMP) Hobbes : Excerpts from <i>Leviathan</i>	M 10/16
	(ONL) Rousseau : Excerpts from <i>On the Social Contract</i>	W 10/18
	NO CLASS. Midterm break.	F 10/20
Assignment	Reconstruction #2 due online	F 10/20

(3) THE BRITISH EMPIRICISTS

Week 8 Locke	(RMP) Locke : Excerpts from <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> , Part I	M 10/23
	(RMP) Locke : Excerpts from <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> , Parts II-III	W 10/25
	(WPEM) Cockburn : Excerpts from <i>A Defense of Mr. Locke's Essay...</i>	F 10/27
Week 9 Berkeley	(RMP) Berkeley : Excerpts from <i>Principles of Human Knowledge</i> , Part I	M 10/30
	(RMP) Berkeley : Excerpts from <i>Principles of Human Knowledge</i> , Part II	W 11/1
	(ONL) Mermin : Is the moon there when nobody looks? Reality and the quantum theory	F 11/3
Assignment	Reconstruction #3 due online	F 11/3

(4) HUME AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Week 10 Hume	(ECH) Hume : <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> : sections 2 and 3	M 11/6
	(ECH) Hume : <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> : sections 4, 5, and 7	W 11/8
	(ECH) Hume : <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> : section 10	F 11/10
	(ECH) Hume : Abstract of <i>A Treatise on Human Nature</i>	M 11/13
Week 11 Hume's influence	(ONL) Smith : Excerpts from <i>The Theory of Moral Sentiments</i>	W 11/15
	(RMP) Reid : Excerpts from <i>Inquiry into the Human Mind</i>	F 11/17
	(ONL) Russell : The problem of induction (ONL) Strawson : Induction without a problem	M 11/20
Assignment	Reconstruction #4 due online	M 11/20

Thanksgiving Break (Nov. 21 – Nov. 26)

(5) KANT AND THE BIRTH OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Weeks 13-14 Kant	(RMP) Kant : Excerpts from the <i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics</i>	M 11/27
	(RMP) Kant : Excerpts from the <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>	W 11/29
	(RMP) Kant : Excerpts from the <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>	F 12/1
	(ONL) Kant : Excerpts from the <i>Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>	M 12/4
	(ONL) Allison : Excerpts from <i>Kant's Transcendental Idealism</i>	W 12/6
	No reading. Course conclusion and review.	F 12/8
Assignment	FINAL EXAM IN CLASS	M 12/11