

Phi. 125: History of Modern Philosophy

Lecture: MW 10:00 am – 10:50 am

Discussion: F 10:00-10:50 and 11:00-11:50

Smith College

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Office Hours: MW 11:00-12:00 and by appointment

Course Content and Aims

This course explores the history of early modern (17th and 18th century) Western philosophy in the works of Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Leibniz, Berkeley, Hume, Reid and Kant. During this period, philosophers, theologians, politicians and scientists – and often one person was all of these – struggled to construct new, ‘modern’ foundations for society and knowledge, foundations that would withstand challenges stemming from newly discovered and radically different scientific, theological and political ways of thinking. These new ways seemed to entail either that there were no right answers to important philosophical questions about humans, the world and God, or that if there were such answers we could not know what they might be. All thought there should be such answers and that we should be able to know them. All thought this could be achieved only by constructing a unified philosophical system. Elements of their systems and approaches remain with us today, e.g. empiricism, the social contract, a transcendental view of God, but their attempts to build systems combined with their own presuppositions introduce crucial differences in the arrangement and connection of these elements. For instance, what are to us as everyday questions about how we claim to know something as true often turn in the 17th and 18th centuries on what are to us quite abstruse questions about how God acts in the world and the social consequences that follow if that claim is not true. As a result, statements and terms that are mundane to our ears are often used with – to us – very strange meanings.

Two broad philosophical systems, which we will designate anachronistically by the terms ‘rationalism’ and ‘empiricism,’ were developed by the thinkers of the period. The refinement of these rival modes of philosophical explanation, and Kant's attempt to reconcile and synthesize them, are our primary topics of study. Since this is a class in the history of philosophy, we will focus our attention on the development of the positions. Our aims are threefold: to see why the philosophers thought the arguments were strong (especially since we do not share many of their assumptions), to see whether the arguments are consistent in their historical context, and to see how thinkers developed the arguments. We will deal only with European philosophers because the influences on the philosophers we will study were almost entirely in the Western tradition. Moreover, the philosophers in this period were very often responding to each other directly.

Class Meetings

On Mondays and Wednesdays, I will lecture on the assigned reading. However, these will be lectures in name only. I encourage and welcome questions and comments. At the end of the lecture periods on Mon. and Wed., you will write a ‘one minute essay,’ in which you write out questions and comments on the material just presented. These will be the basis for our discussion in sections. It goes without saying that I expect you to participate fully in the discussions.

It is *essential* that you do the reading before coming to the lectures and discussion. Philosophy – and especially philosophy in this period – is often extremely speculative; new concepts are constructed, often with seemingly familiar words. One of your tasks as a reader is to spot these moments of speculation and to ask what the philosopher is trying to do at that moment. Another is to ask whether the philosopher is building a consistent system of concepts as he speculates. Yet another is to dig out how thinkers alter already constructed concepts to address new concerns. All of this means that you must give yourself adequate time for reading. Re-reading is essential.

Course requirements

- 1) Four short papers, two to three double-spaced pages each (15% each; 60% of your total grade). Topics will be distributed; you may, however, write on a comparable topic of your own choosing with my permission. Papers are due in class on 2/20, 3/17, 4/12, and 5/1.
- 2) A self-scheduled final essay examination (25%). About a week before the end of classes, a study guide containing a list of 6-8 questions will be distributed. About one-half of those questions will appear on the final, and you will be asked to write on all of those that appear.
- 3) Attendance and participation (15%). Participation will take various forms. Participation in discussion is expected. Also, as noted before you will be asked to hand in questions or comments on Mon. and Wed. in preparation for discussion on Friday. In addition, in the second week of classes you'll submit a one-page précis, or paraphrase, of the argument in an assigned passage. The purpose of the exercise is to give you practice in expounding an argument in words of your own. It will also give you an idea of what I expect in your written work as the précis will be given a provisional letter grade only.

Note: I will not regularly call roll and am not likely to miss your occasional absence, but I am certain to notice regular nonattendance in the discussion sections. In a border-line case, e.g., between a B and a B+, faithful attendance and contribution to class discussion may make a crucial difference.

Late policy: Grades on late work (i.e., that turned in at any point after it is due) will be lowered one step (e.g., from A- to B+) per day.

Texts

At the bookstore:

Baird and Kaufmann, Philosophical Classics, Vol. III: Modern Philosophy (4th ed.)

Berkeley, Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous

Handout in class: Selections from the Objections and Replies to the Meditations

Secondary Sources and Reference Materials:

Secondary sources can be helpful, but only when they are used to supplement your reading of the primary sources and when read with care and a critical eye. In their introductions to each philosopher, Baird and Kaufmann supply helpful suggestions for secondary sources. Many are available in the Smith and other 5-College libraries.

The following reference works are available in the reference section of Neilson library:

P. Edwards, ed. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy

C. Brochert, ed. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, supplement

E. Craig, ed., Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy

J. Dancy, ed., A Companion to Epistemology

J. Kim and E. Sosa, eds., A Companion to Metaphysics

Regarding the Web: You should feel free to use anything on the websites of the Library and the Philosophy Department. Beyond that, however, I do **not, not, not** recommend using the Web as a philosophical resource. The commentary available on the Web is extremely uneven in quality and coverage, and the translations and editions available are usually not the best nor the most up-to-date. 'Nuff said.

Lecture Topics and Reading Assignments

- January 30 *Overview and Thematic Introduction*
- February 1 *Descartes: Descartes' Antecedent Scepticism*
 Meditations On First Philosophy, B&K, pp. 13-22;
 Objections w/ Replies: pp. 121, 151 (first three ¶s only), 172 (first two ¶s of reply only), 180, 241-2
Precis assigned
- 6 *Descartes: The Discovery of the Self*
 Meditation II, B&K, pp. 23-28;
 Objections w/ Replies: pp. 122-126, 180-185, 243-249
- 8 *Descartes: The Existence of God*
 Meditations III, B&K, pp. 29-38
 Objections w/ Replies: pp. 126-133, 145-150 (study esp. the next to last two ¶ on p. 150)
Precis due
- 13 *Descartes: Of Truth and Falsity, God and Things*
 Meditations IV and V, B&K, 38-47;
 Objections w/ Replies: pp. 151-153 (begin with the fourth ¶ on p. 151), 172-178 (begin with the third ¶ at the bottom of the page "The next point concerns . . .")
- 15 *Descartes: Mind / Body Dualism*
 Reading: Med. VI and correspondence, B&K, 47-61
- 20 *Hobbes: Materialism and the Passions*
 Leviathan, B&K, pp. 65-81
First paper due in class
- 22 No class — Rally Day
- 27 *Hobbes: Laws of Nature and the Social Contract*
 Leviathan, B&K, pp. 82-103
- March 1 *Locke: Empiricism and the new method of ideas*
 Essay Concerning Human Understanding, B&K, 173-198, 204-208, 221-240
- 6 *Locke: On the Origins of Political Authority*
 Essay, B&K, pp. 240-245
- 8 *Leibniz: God, Individual Notions, and Pre-Established Harmony*
 Discourse on Metaphysics, B&K, pp. 249-277
- 13 *Leibniz: Monads Have No Windows*
 Monadology, B&K, 284-292

- 15 *Leibniz: The Best of All Possible Worlds*
Theodicy, B&K, pp. 277-283
- (17 ***Second paper due in discussion sections***)
- 20 No Class — Spring Break
- 22 No Class — Spring Break
- 27 *Berkeley: Matter Doesn't Matter, but Bodies Do*
Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, I & II, pp. 3-60
- 29 *Berkeley: God and Minds*
Three Dialogues, II & III, pp. 44-94.
- April 3 *Hume: Impressions, Ideas and Induction*
An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, B&K, pp. 349-384
- 5 *Hume: Liberty, Necessity and Morality*
Inquiry, B&K, pp. 385-398
- 10 *Hume: The Attack on Natural Religion, and The Upshot of It All*
Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, B&K, pp. 425-479
Inquiry, B&K, pp. 417-425
- 12 *Reid: Responding to Hume*
Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man, B&K, pp. 483-490
Third paper due in class
- 17 *Kant: Reviving Metaphysics and the A Priori Conditions of Sensibility*
Critique of Pure Reason, B&K, pp. 507-531
- 19 *Kant: The A Priori Conditions of Judgment*
Prolegomena, B&K, pp. 553-571
- 24 *Kant: Critiquing Reason*
Prolegomena, B&K, pp. 571-596
- 26 *Kant: The Foundations of Morality and the Categorical Imperative*
Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, B&K, pp. 604-636
- May 1 *Kant: The Categorical Imperative and Autonomy of the Will*
Foundations, B&K, pp. 614-646
Fourth paper due in class
- 3 After Kant
No Reading