

PHILOSOPHY 206.01 THE MODERN PERIOD: DESCARTES TO KANT
MWF 8:20 – 9:15 SB Union 226
Spring Semester 2002

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Course Description: This course will focus on the epistemology and metaphysics (theories of knowledge and reality) of six key figures in Modern Philosophy (17th to 18th Century): Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. Besides answering the question, “what makes this philosophy ‘Modern’?”, we will encounter such problems as the mind/body problem, the tree in the forest problem, (but there’s not even a tree!), the causality problem—in sum, the problem of knowledge, whether knowledge relies primarily upon experience of the world of things outside our heads, or upon *a priori* rational concepts found inside our heads. A key discovery will be whether certain kinds of metaphysical ideas found in epistemology, ethics, and theology, are in some sense “legitimate”; or whether, as Hume says, such ideas must be “consigned to the flames.” Kant had a pretty good answer. But the main objective of the course will be to get you to understand what the heck we are talking about here, and thereby to extend your capacity for philosophical thinking about everyday stuff. Tough reading; short, once per-week writing assignments; exams; a paper, and lots of coffee.

This course also emphasizes philosophical ways of thinking, which involves the close analysis of concepts and the capacity to think critically about them. To do well in this class you will have to slog through *much* difficult reading, suffer through *mind-numbing* lectures and discussions, survive *torturous* writing assignments and exams, and then rack your brains over *even more* painful thinking. But it will be *fun*.

Required Texts: One book is required, which may be purchased at Stony Books, across from the train station. It may or may not be available at the University bookstore.

- Central Readings in the History of Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant. Eds., Cummins and Owen. Second Edition.
- Optional, but recommended: A Dictionary of Philosophy, Anthony Flew (available in most book stores, but not at Stony Books).

Course Requirements:

Paper One: (3 pages) 15%

Paper Two: (3-4 pages) 15%

Midterm Exam: 20%

Final Exam: 20%

Response Papers : 15%

Pop-quizzes: 15%

Papers: I will provide you with paper topics two weeks before the due date. Papers handed in after the due date will be rejected or penalized. Papers must be typed in a normal font, double spaced, and have one-inch margins. Papers must support a clearly defined thesis. I will provide you with details on what I expect, and on how to organize a good paper.

Response Papers: By Friday of each week you must hand in a one-page (typed, double spaced) response paper to the assigned readings. The paper should consist of at least two substantial paragraphs. The first paragraph should be an attempt to explain a certain passage or point made by a specific author. The second paragraph should consist of your reaction to what the author said—agreement, disagreement, confusion, and *why*. Papers will be graded on a five-point scale, and graded mostly on thoughtfulness and effort. At least 50 points (provided you have done 11 papers) gets you an A for 15% of your course grade. Late papers are not accepted.

Pop-quizzes and attendance: Since classes are short, and since latecomers are distracting, please be on time. I will not be taking attendance. However, from time to time (once per week) there will be a pop quiz—not hard, but designed to gage whether you are paying attention or present enough. If you are not here to take the quiz, you cannot make it up.

Participation: Ask questions! No question is too silly or off-base. All of us need to ask questions. Don't be afraid! Find out how many things I don't know!

Exams: Exams will be comprehensive. Exam make-ups will be given *only* for serious reasons accompanied by written documentation.

Plagiarism: To put it bluntly, plagiarism is lying and stealing, and will not be tolerated. Unfortunately, too many students try it. Do not underestimate my ability to spot it. I have sent many a dismayed student to the Office of Academic Judiciary. These days it is easy to get papers off the Internet, but it is also easy for teachers to find them on the Internet. Yet the Internet is not the only source of plagiarism.

However, plagiarism is a complex issue. If you are unsure about how to cite sources properly, please talk to me. If you are having trouble with an assignment, it is always best to talk to me *before* handing in your paper. I would rather see you struggle with a topic and learn something, rather than fail you for dishonesty.

University Services:

- Writing Center: If you have writing issues that need extra attention, please take advantage of the Writing Center's tutorial services. These instructors help all students, from first-year to doctoral. Keep in mind that they will *not* proofread or copy-edit your work. Call 632-7405 for an appointment, or stop by Humanities 198. Check out <<http://ws.cc.sunysb.edu/writrhet/description/writctr.html>> for more information.
- Disability: If you have a mental or physical disability and require special assistance, please contact Disabled Student Services (DSS), Humanities 133, 2-6748. All information is strictly confidential.
- Ombud: If you are having a conflict with the teacher or other students, and you need to speak confidentially to a neutral party, please consult the Ombudsperson in Humanities 114, 2-9200.

Course Schedule. This schedule is subject to change, but I will inform you ahead of time. Please have the assignments read *before* the day they are listed. Note that some days do not have a reading listed, but that doesn't mean nothing is happening.

Week/Author	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
0. Introduction		1/23 Intro to course	1/25
1. DESCARTES	1/28 <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> ; Meditations 1 and 2	1/30	2/01 Meditation 3
2.	2/04 Meditations 4 and 5	2/06	2/08 Meditation 6
3. LEIBNIZ	2/11 <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> , 1-3 (p. 81-82); 7-9 (p. 84-85)	2/13 <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> , 19-22 (92-94); XXVI-XXVII (p. 96); 33-34 (p. 100)	2/15
4.	2/18 <i>The Monadology</i> (entire, pp. 103-110)	2/20	2/22
5. LOCKE	2/25 From <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> . Book I, Chapter II. "No Innate Principles of the Mind" (pp. 116-124).	2/27 Book II, Chapter I-II, "Of Ideas in General and Their Original" (pp. 127-135).	3/01 Chapter XII "Of Complex Ideas" (pp. 145-6). Paper One Due
6.	3/04 Chapter XXIII "Of Our Complex Ideas of Substances" Sec. 1-16 (pp. 155-160). Book III, "Of Words"; Chapter I. "Of Words or Language in General" (pp. 182-186).	3/06 Ch. VI. "Of General Terms" (186-191, includes essences, real and nominal) "Of the Names of Substances" (pp. 200-201).	3/08 Chapter IX. "Of Our Knowledge of Existence"; Chapter XI "Of Our Knowledge of the Existence of Other Things" (pp. 240-244).
7. BERKELEY	3/11 Recommended reading: <i>Principles of Human Knowledge</i> (pp. 260-278)	3/13 Required reading, <i>The First Dialogue between Hylas and Philonous</i> (279-297)	3/15
8.	3/18 Finish <i>Dialogue</i>	3/20 Review	3/22 Mid-Term
9. SPRING BREAK	3/25 HAVA 	3/27 GOOD 	3/29 TIME 
10. HUME	4/01 <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , Sec. II "Of the Origin of Ideas," etc. (pp. 332-357).	4/03	4/05 Sec. XII "Of the Academical or Skeptical Philosophy" (pp. 385-392).
11.	4/08	4/10 Sec. X Of Miracles (pp. 369-378)	4/12
12. KANT	4/15 <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> . Selections, (pp. 408-429).	4/17	4/19
13.	4/22 <i>Critique</i> (pp.431-475)	4/24	4/26 Paper Two Due
14.	4/29 Finish Kant	5/01	5/03
15. Wrap up and review	5/06 Last class	5/09 NO CLASS, OPTIONAL REVIEW SESSION	5/10 FINAL EXAM: FRIDAY MAY 10, 8:00 AM – 10:30 AM