

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
FALL 2009-10
PHIL 214 HISTORY OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY
TUES. & THURS. 17:00 – 18:15 PM NICELY 324

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Office Hours: After class, and by appointment.

Course Description: This course serves as an introduction to the Modern period (17th to 18th centuries) as well as fulfills a humanities requirement. We will focus on the epistemology and metaphysics (theories of knowledge and reality) of four key figures: Descartes, Leibniz, Hume, and Kant. After a brief introduction to the main themes of this period, we will grapple intensely with its main philosophical concerns: the nature of mind, matter, God, scientific method, causality, and knowledge attained by reason and experience. We will attempt to determine whether certain “metaphysical” ideas should be, as Hume says, “consigned to the flames,” or whether we cannot do without them. But the main objectives of the course will be to get you to understand what is at stake in this fascinating material, and to extend your capacity for philosophical thinking about everyday stuff. You can expect short but interesting and difficult readings; short, once per-week writing assignments, a longer final paper, and *some fun*.

This course mainly emphasizes philosophical thinking, which I take to mean the slow, careful, reflective reading and analysis of texts and concepts. Classes will be discussion-driven and centered on student written responses to the assigned readings. Lectures will be minimal. My goal is not only to introduce this vital period of philosophy and western cultural history, but to develop the habit of reading and thinking philosophically. In sum, the goal of the course is to achieve *enlightenment*.

Required Texts: Texts are available at the AUB Bookstore.

- Descartes, *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Hackett).
- Course packet (Including Leibniz’s *Discourse on Metaphysics* and selections from Hume’s *Enquiry*)
- Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Hackett)

Course Requirements:

- Reading Response papers: at least 10, making up 60% of course grade
- Final research paper, 40% of course grade

Reading Response papers: Each week, a Response paper is due, consisting of your brief responses to several substantial questions about the assigned readings (for due dates, see Course Schedule, below). Occasionally, you will submit *your own* questions and answers. The Response questions are posted on Blackboard under “Assignments.” Simply download the question form and type in your responses, leaving the questions in place. Save to your disk, print, SIGN YOUR NAME, staple the pages, and hand in at the end of class. Each response paper is graded on a four-point scale (4 = A, 3 = B, 2 = C, 1 = D, 0 = F) according to the following criteria:

- Engagement and thoughtfulness: The writer demonstrates serious and sustained engagement with the text and questions. This means that you really tried to understand the reading and that you had something appropriate and interesting to say about it. Responses that do not *themselves* ask questions appropriate to the text will get no more than 2 points. The minimally appropriate length for each question is approximately 50 words. More is probably better; but what matters most is that you have sincerely engaged the question.
- Clarity: The writing is clear, that is, word choices have been carefully considered and the words are arranged to facilitate comprehension *for the reader* (i.e., the sentences are grammatically correct, syntactical units are kept together, and flow of ideas is logical and organized. For more information, see “writing guides” on Moodle.

- **Mechanics:** Minimal grammatical, punctuation, and spelling mistakes. Responses must be typed in 12 point, Times-Roman, SINGLE-spaced.

These criteria are for your guidance, and I try to follow them closely. Do your best to fulfill them in an *excellent* manner, and you will get 4 points. However, be aware that additional factors may weigh in my judgment. For example, if you are excellently “engaged,” but the mechanics are sloppy, you’ll get docked. Conversely, if your mechanics and clarity are perfect, but your engagement is light, don’t expect to get 4 points. Also, if you repeatedly make the same mechanical mistakes, after I have repeatedly told you to fix them, I tend to grade more harshly. But progress makes me happy.

Notice that these assignments are to be done *before you come to class*, because the topic of discussion for every class will be *your answers to these questions*. In addition, Response papers not completed or not in your hands by the beginning of class will be docked one point. Two days late, 2 points; more than three days, you get 0 points. Your lowest Response score will be dropped from your final grade calculation. *Do not e-mail me any work, unless you have asked and I say you can.*

Final Paper—Written Dialogue: This assignment is designed to promote the idea that philosophy is done best in active dialogue with others. At the 5th week of the semester, you will choose a class partner with whom you will begin written discussions over e-mail (at least once per week) pertaining to any issue raised by the readings, class discussions, or response papers. By the 10th week or so, you should decide on a specific topic on which you and your partner will together compose a 15 page written dialogue. You will refine your dialogic discussion during finals week and submit it on the Final Exam date. In its final, refined form, you and your partner will take opposing positions on a specific issue. Each of you will demonstrate a strong understanding of the issue, recognition of its problems and complexities, logical development of the dialogue, and clear writing. The dialogue will be similar in form to the dialogues we will be reading all semester. Additional grading criteria are similar to those of the Response papers: engagement, thoughtfulness, clarity, and mechanics. Each person, however, is to do his or her own work and will be graded independently.

Attendance: Class attendance and participation are vital components of this course and will affect your grade both directly and indirectly. If you do not arrive by the time I take attendance, or if you leave the classroom for more than five minutes, you will be marked absent. For every absence beyond three, your course grade will be reduced by 1/3 of a letter. If you are *absent more than a eight times*, you automatically fail the course. I accept excuses *only for extreme circumstances that you must discuss with me in person and provide documentation*—no exceptions. Also, please do not ask me if you missed anything in class the day you were absent. Assume you missed everything! Any important notices will be posted on Moodle.

Participation: in class discussions is strongly encouraged. Ask questions, make comments, and respond (respectfully) to other students. No question or comment is too silly or off-base. Everyone has questions, and surely others have the same questions. Don’t be shy. A philosophy class is one of the very few places you will have the opportunity to express and examine opinions. But you should expect to have them challenged. Occasionally, I may call on you unexpectedly. Read and respond beforehand and *always bring the assigned text to class*.

Class conduct: You will be marked absent for the following behaviors I consider disrespectful: Cell phones going off; text messaging in class; leaving the room to make or answer phone calls; playing games or reading non-class material during class. During class discussions, be respectful of me and others by listening to what is going on, rather than talking among yourselves. Also, as a courtesy to me, *do not make preparations to leave class until I say class is over*.

Grades: Criteria and Calculation: I want you to understand how your grades are assigned and calculated, so that you can know better what I expect and so that you can exercise more control over your own progress. There are two main parts to the grading process: Criteria and Calculation. Above, I have indicated the criteria I consider when grading your Response and Final papers. Additional grading criteria are posted on Moodle. For grading calculation, see the document titled “How to Estimate and Calculate Your Grades.” This will show you completely explicitly how all calculations are made, so that you can do them yourself. But here is a brief explanation: All grades are recorded on Moodle’s “Gradebook,” (as well as on the assignments themselves), so you can view them as soon as

I have put them up. To estimate your grade at any point in the semester, simply figure your average, and then check the Grade Scale (see “How to . . .”). For your Final Grade, *your lowest Response grade will be dropped*. Add up your remaining points, and check the Grade Scale (see “How to . . .”). The reason I initially assign *points* to your papers, and then convert them to letters, is so I can make distinctions that are more fine than the letter grade system allows.

Plagiarism: The general objective of college is to become a better writer, thinker, and learner. Plagiarizing severely undermines that objective and harms not only you, but all students and professors. Plagiarism is the intentional or careless use of someone else’s writing or ideas as if they were your own. It is the same as stealing and lying, and no amount of it will be tolerated in my class. **If you intentionally plagiarize anything in this class, you will automatically fail the course, and possibly be dismissed from the university.** This includes any submitted work whatsoever (including essay drafts, single sentences and ideas, using dictionary definitions, encyclopedia entries, or any part thereof, paraphrasing, whether from books, internet, magazines, friends, wherever). Unfortunately, I catch plagiarizers *every semester*. I am an experienced reader and can usually tell, simply by reading, when a student has plagiarized. Sometimes I can tell because the writing does not match the assignment. I also use Google and other resources. You can, of course, easily avoid plagiarism simply by *citing your sources properly*. If you are unsure of how to cite sources properly, check BB for brief guides, or consult the MLA guide in the library. But *you are responsible for any plagiarism*. If you are struggling with an assignment, please come and talk to me. I am here to help.

Turnitin. Unfortunately, due to a few people’s insidious attempts to plagiarize, I must force everyone to submit all assignments to Turnitin.com, *in addition* to submitting a hard copy to me. Failure to submit your work to Turnitin results in an automatic 0 for the assignment. Here is how it works: As their website says, “Every paper submitted is returned in the form of a Originality Report. Results are based on searches of billions of pages from current and archived instances of the Internet, millions of student papers submitted to Turnitin, and commercial databases of journal articles and periodicals” (http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_solutions.html).

To use Turnitin, go to: (Instructions forthcoming)

The following is from http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_what_is_plagiarism.html

What is Plagiarism?

Many people think of plagiarism as copying another's work, or borrowing someone else's original ideas. But terms like "copying" and "borrowing" can disguise the seriousness of the offense:

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, to "plagiarize" means

- to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
- to use (another's production) without crediting the source
- to commit literary theft
- to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

In other words, plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward.

But can words and ideas really be stolen?

According to U.S. law, the answer is yes. The expression of original ideas is considered intellectual property, and is protected by copyright laws, just like original inventions. Almost all forms of expression fall under copyright protection as long as they are recorded in some way (such as a book or a computer file).

All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not (see our section on "fair use" rules)

Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism. See our section on [citation](#) for more information on how to cite sources properly.

What is citation?

A "citation" is the way you tell your readers that certain material in your work came from another source. It also gives your readers the information necessary to find that source again, including:

1. information about the author
2. the title of the work
3. the name and location of the company that published your copy of the source
4. the date your copy was published
5. the page numbers of the material you are borrowing

Why should I cite sources?

Giving credit to the original author by citing sources is the only way to use other people's work without plagiarizing. But there are a number of other reasons to cite sources:

1. citations are extremely helpful to anyone who wants to find out more about your ideas and where they came from.
2. not all sources are good or right -- your own ideas may often be more accurate or interesting than those of your sources. Proper citation will keep you from taking the rap for someone else's bad ideas.
3. citing sources shows the amount of research you've done.
4. citing sources strengthens your work by lending outside support to your ideas.

Doesn't citing sources make my work seem less original?

Not at all. On the contrary, citing sources actually helps your reader distinguish your ideas from those of your sources. This will actually emphasize the originality of your own work.

When do I need to cite?

Whenever you borrow words or ideas, you need to acknowledge their source. The following situations almost always require citation:

1. whenever you use quotes
2. whenever you paraphrase
3. whenever you use an idea that someone else has already expressed
4. whenever you make specific reference to the work of another

5. whenever someone else's work has been critical in developing your own ideas.

(end of website)

Citation Mechanics: See Moodle

Moodle: This section is under construction!

The Writing Center:

If you have writing issues that need extra attention, please take advantage of the Writing Center. Their instructors help all students, from first-year to doctoral. Keep in mind that they will *not* proofread or copy-edit your work. Walk in or make an appointment: 9 am - 5 pm, Monday – Friday. West Hall 336; Ext. 3157; E-mail: writing@aub.edu.lb

Course Schedule: This schedule is subject to change, although any changes will be announced well in advance. To be prepared for class discussions, read the assigned material *prior* to class time. *Always* bring the assigned material to class. Bring whatever is assigned for Tuesday to Thursday's class as well.

Week & Theme	Tuesday	Thursday
1. Introduction to course	6/10 Main Themes, Galileo's "Two Properties"	8/10 Discussion of Galileo's "Two Properties"
2. Descartes	13/10 <i>Discourse on Method</i> , Parts 1-3 Response 1 due	15/10
3.	20/10 <i>Discourse on Method</i> , Parts 4-6	22/10 Discussion Response 2 due
4.	27/10 <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> ; Meditation 1	29/10 Discussion Response 3 due
5.	3/11 <i>Meditations</i> 2 and 3	5/11 Discussion (No response this week)
6.	10/11 <i>Meditations</i> 4, 5, and 6	12/11 Discussion Response 4 due
7. Leibniz	17/11 <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> , 1-9	19/11 <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> , 10-13 Response 5 due
8.	24/11 <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> , 14, 15, 17--end	26/11 "Common Concept of Justice" Response 6 Due
9 Hume	1/12 <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , "Of the Origin of Ideas" (pp. 17-22); "Of the Ideas of Association" (23-24)	3/12 Discuss "Sceptical Doubts" (pp. 25-39) "Sceptical Solution" (pp. 40-55) Response 7 due
10.	8/12 "Of Probability" (pp. 56-59) "Of the Idea of Necessary Connection" (pp. 60-79)	10/12 Response 8 due
11.	15/12 "Of Miracles" (pp. 109-131) "Miracles and the Supernatural" from <i>The Philosophy Gym</i> (at end of course packet)	17/12 "Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy" (pp. 149-165). Response 9 due
12. BREAK	22/12 BREAK	24/12 BREAK
13. BREAK	29/12 BREAK	31/12 BREAK
14. Kant's <i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics</i>	5/01 "General Question of the Prolegomena" and "General Question"	7/01 Response 10 due
15.	12/01 "Main Transcendental Question, First Part"	14/01 Response 11 due
16.	19/01 Continued reading	21/01 Review (last class) Response 12
17. FINAL EXAM	26/01	28/01 Final Paper Due