

Early Modern Philosophy

Professor Elvira Basevich, Ph.D.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will provide a rigorous introduction to early modern philosophy. The readings survey philosophical inquiry about the nature of knowledge, reality, causation, the self, as well as human cognition and justified belief formation. We will also touch on the topics of the philosophy of science and the philosophy of religion, particularly on the questions of whether or not god exists and how human beings can obtain confirmation about the ontological status of god, the natural world, and the natural laws governing it. The course objective, detailed below, is for students to acquire the skills, patience, and intellectual prowess necessary to give a coherent and convincing account of these issues.

NO REQUIRED BOOKS

All other required readings are online on our Canvas course site under the “Files” link.

STUDENTS MUST BRING HARDCOPY OF READINGS TO CLASS EVERYDAY

COURSE OBJECTIVES

After completing this course students will be able to:

- 1) Explain several of the major theories about knowledge and reality in early modern philosophy.
- 2) Identify premises and conclusions in the context of written and oral arguments.
- 3) Identify the evidence philosophers advance for their views and learn to provide evidence for their own views.
- 4) Recognize the relation between, and development of, a set of ideas in early modern philosophy, especially as it concerns the nature of god, matter, and causation.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

1/8: Introduction

1/10: Descartes, “Letter to the Sorbonne” & *Mediation 1*

1/15: MLK, Jr. Birthday Day—No Class

1/17: Descartes, *Mediation 2*, **FIRST SHORT RESPONSE DUE**

1/22: (1) Descartes, *Mediation 2*, cont’d (2) Descartes, *Mediation 3*

1/24: Descartes, “Objection and Replies”

1/29: (1) Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, Part I (2) Correspondence with Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia

1/31: John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk I, Chp II, §1-24.

2/5: John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk I, Chp II, §12-24.

2/7: John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk II, Chp VIII & XXII

2/12: Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I

2/14: Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I cont'd

2/19: **Midterm Review**

2/21: **Midterm**

SPRING RECESS 2/24-3/3

3/5: Leibniz, *Monadology*

3/7: Leibniz, *Monadology*

3/12: (1) Leibniz, *New Essay on the Human Understanding*, "Preface"

(2) Peer Review, **FIRST DRAFT OF FINAL PAPER DUE (2-3 pages)**

3/14: Leibniz, "Principles of Nature and Grace Founded on Reason"

3/19: George Berkeley, *Of the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part I, §1-15

3/21: Berkeley, *Of the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part I, §16-37

3/26: David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

3/28: Hume, *Enquiry*, cont'd, **SECOND SHORT RESPONSE DUE**

4/2: Hume, *Enquiry*, cont'd

4/4: Hume, "Of Miracles"

4/9: Vico, *The New Science*, "Poetic Wisdom"

4/11: Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Essay 6, chp. 5

4/16: Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, cont'd

4/18: **FINAL PAPER DUE**

FINAL GRADE EVALUATION TOOLS

1) Class attendance and participation (10% of final grade)

Students must come prepared to class, having read the material *beforehand* and be ready to contribute to classroom discussion. Asking relevant and pointed questions to the instructor and in response to fellow classmates is an excellent way to improve this component of the final grade.

2) Reading Responses (30% of final grade)

Students must complete THREE reading responses that *summarize* and *explain* the main arguments in the reading. The responses must be **typed, double-spaced, 1 inch margin, and at least 500 words** long (roughly 2 pages). Late papers will not be accepted.

3) Presentations (10% of final grade)

Students are responsible for giving a 10-15 minute presentation of the reading material for their assigned week. Students must (1) briefly summarize the reading, (2) raise a series of questions or interpretive problems about the reading, and (3) provide a detailed, proof-read handout. If a student decides to use technology for the presentation, it is the student's responsibility to come to class early for the necessary technical set-up.

4) Midterm Exam (25% of the final grade)

Students will receive a week in advance the exam prompt that will include questions they are responsible for answering on the exams.

5) Final Paper (25% of the final grade)

6-8 pages, original thesis-driven research paper. Full MLA citation is necessary. It is due in two stages. (1) First draft is due 3/12. It must be 3-4 pages. Failure to submit the first draft will result in an automatic full grade deduction for the final grade of the assignment. (2) The final draft due on the last day of class 4/18. Detailed instructions will be provided.

POLICIES

- CLASSROOM CONDUCT

The classroom is a public space for serious work. Everybody in the classroom is expected to behave as a mature and thoughtful person who genuinely cares about what others have to say. Please be respectful to the instructor and your peers.

- NO IN-CLASS ELECTRONIC DEVICES

All cell phones, laptops, and other electronic devices must be turned off or silenced AND stored out of sight.

- TIMELY SUBMISSION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

Papers are due at the **beginning** of class. Do **not** make it a habit to walk in late on the day a paper is assigned. If you cannot hand in a paper on the due date, *e-mail it to me the day before it is due*. Late papers are not accepted.

- GET IN TOUCH!

Please feel free to talk to me about any learning issue that you might have that could impact your success in the course. Visit me during my office hours or e-mail me with any questions you might have. I am a resource to help you learn. If you are confused or unsure about the readings or my expectations from you, do let me know.