

PHIL320: Modern Philosophy
University of Maryland, College Park
Spring 2018

Logistics

| Meeting time & place | Instructor | Contact | Office & office hours | Prerequisites | Website |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| MW 3:30–4:45pm KEY 0126 | Aleks Knoks, MA, MSc | aknoks@umd.edu | Skinner 1107C, W 2:00–3:30pm | 6 credits in PHIL | ELMS ¹ |

Course description

This course is a critical examinations of five representative thinkers of the modern period: Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Hume, and Kant. Its direct goal is to provide you with a systematic introduction to modern philosophy with an eye to contemporary philosophical concerns. Its more far-reaching goal is to help you improve your skills in reading, understanding, and analyzing complex (philosophical) texts, as well as develop your skills in philosophical writing.

Course goals and learning outcomes

Students will:

- develop skills in reading, understanding, and analyzing primary texts;
- sharpen skills in philosophical thinking and writing;
- gain a comprehensive overview of the key ideas and arguments of early modern philosophy, as well as see how these ideas and arguments resonate in contemporary philosophy;
- learn to interpret classical authors in the best tradition of the history of philosophy.

Required texts

This course focuses on close reading of primary texts. Most important among these are (1) René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*; (2) John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; (3) Gottfried Leibniz's *Monadology*; and (4) David Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. I'll be assuming that you are in possession of reliable editions of these four texts. So I strongly recommend that you obtain them in book format. One thing you could do is purchase the following anthology—it contains all four texts:

- Ariew R. & Watkins E. (eds.): *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Resources*. Hackett Publishing Co.

Other historical and contemporary texts that we're going to read will be made available online.

Grading policy

- **Participation** (10%): Discussion is very important for philosophy, and this class is no exception. Part of your grade is determined by how actively you participate in class discussion. How can you participate? For starters, you can jump in with your thoughts and questions whenever they arise, or ask questions about the assigned readings, or do the in-class assignments.
- **Study guides and worksheets** (30%): Almost all of the reading assignments will come with either a study guide or a worksheet. Study guides will ask you to answer specific questions on the reading. They have three purposes: (1) encourage you to do the reading before class, (2) provide

¹<https://umd.instructure.com/courses/1240556>

a source of easy credit, and most importantly, (3) help you understand the text. The questions on the study guide will appear in the same order as they do in the text, so you should do the study guide while you are reading. As the course progresses study guides will be increasingly intermingled (and eventually substituted) with worksheets. Worksheets also ask questions about the reading, but these questions are less specific: you'll still need to demonstrate understanding of the text, but you won't be provided as much guidance.

There will be 13 study guides/worksheets. You need to do 10 for full credit (30 points), and you can do two more for extra credit. It's crucial that you do your own work. Identical answers will receive a zero. Late study guides/worksheets won't be accepted, except in highly extenuating circumstances.

- **Term paper** (5% + 5% + 25%): You're required to write a research paper in the range of 3000–4000 words. I'll provide you with a list of paper topics. This assignment will help you develop philosophical writing skills. The paper is due April 30 at 11:59pm. But you'll have to submit a draft version on April 9 and an outline on March 12. This is to encourage you to start working on the paper in timely manner and give me a chance to provide you with some feedback. Papers submitted after April 30 will be penalized at a rate of one grade-increment per day (e.g., B to B-). **Late** outlines/drafts won't be accepted for credit.

| Assessment | Points |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Participation | 10 |
| Study guides / worksheets | 30 |
| Term paper | |
| (1) Outline | 5 |
| (2) Draft | 5 |
| (3) Final version | 25 |
| Final assignment | 25 |

- **Final assignment** (25%): The default option here is a comprehensive in-class final exam taking place on Tuesday, May 15, 1:30–3:30pm. The details, including the location and format, will be announced in due time.

Your grade will be the weighed average of all the above grade components. The grading scale in this course is as follows—the official grade description can be found here:

| | A+ | A | A- | B+ | B | B- | C+ | C | C- | D+ | D | D- | F |
|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----|
| Final % | 98–100 | 94–97.9 | 90–93.9 | 88–89.9 | 84–87.9 | 80–83.9 | 78–79.9 | 74–77.9 | 70–73.9 | 68–69.9 | 64–67.9 | 60–63.9 | <60 |

I am happy to discuss your grades with you, and if I have made a mistake I'll correct it. Formal grade disputes must be submitted in writing and within 1 week of receiving the grade. You should be aware of the University of Maryland's policy on *arbitrary and capricious grading* and understand the process of appealing a final grade.

Electronic device policy

No computers, phones, or tablet devices are permitted during our class meetings. Why? Well, research suggests that electronic devices interfere with learning.² If there are some special circumstance that reasonably warrants an exception to this policy, let me know and I'll accommodate you.

Course procedures and policies

Consult the following webpage for the official procedures and policies for this course:

www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html

²See e.g., Sana F. et al. (2013): Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers. In: *Computers & Education* 62: pp. 24–31 or Mueller P. A. and Oppenheimer D. M. (2014): The pen is mightier than the keyboard: advantages of longhand over laptop note taking. In: *Psychological Science* 25 (6): pp. 1159–1168.

Tentative course schedule

| Week | Date | What to read? | Assignment | Topic |
|------|------|--|------------|--|
| 1 | 1/24 | Syllabus | | Introduction, logistics |
| 2 | 1/29 | Aristotle on Causality (SEP) | | Prior knowledge test, Aristotle on causes |
| | 1/31 | Le Monde (fragments); Meditations (Letter, Preface, Synopsis) | SG-01 | Mechanistic explanations; background for Meditations |
| 3 | 2/5 | Meditation I | | Med I: The great doubt |
| | 2/7 | Meditation II | SG-02 | Med II: The mind, which is distinct from the body |
| 4 | 2/12 | Meditation III | | Med III: God's existence |
| | 2/14 | Meditation IV | SG-03 | Med IV: the problem of false judgment |
| 5 | 2/19 | Meditation V | | Med V: the nature of material things |
| | 2/21 | Meditation VI | SG-04 | Med VI: the duality of mind and body |
| 6 | 2/26 | Objections & Replies (selection) | | (Selected) Objections and replies |
| | 2/28 | Pryor's 'The skeptic and the dogmatist' or Chisholm's 'A version of foundationalism' | WS-05 | Skepticism or foundationalism |
| 7 | 3/5 | Locke's <i>Essay</i> , Book I | | Locke 1: innate ideas |
| | 3/7 | Essay, Book II (selection) | SG/WS-06 | Locke 2: theory of ideas |
| 8 | 3/12 | Essay, Book II (selection) | Outline | Locke 3: c'd |
| | 3/14 | Essay, Book IV (selection) | SG/WS-07 | Locke 4: knowledge |
| 9 | 3/19 | No reading, no class | - | - |
| | 3/21 | it's Spring break! | - | - |
| 10 | 3/26 | Essay, Book IV (selection) | | Locke 5: probability |
| | 3/28 | Parfit's 'Personal Identity' (tentative) | SG/WS-08 | Personal identity or full belief vs credence |
| 11 | 4/2 | Monadology 1–30 | | Leibniz 1: monads |
| | 4/4 | Monadology 30–60 | SG/WS-09 | Leibniz 2: God |
| 12 | 4/9 | Monadology 60–90 | Draft | Leibniz 3: the world |
| | 4/11 | Lewis' 'Possible worlds' (tentative) | SG/WS-10 | Possible worlds |
| 13 | 4/16 | Hume's <i>Enquiry</i> 1–3 | | Hume 1: on ideas |
| | 4/18 | Enquiry 4–6 | SG/WS-11 | Hume 2: skeptical doubts |
| 14 | 4/23 | Enquiry 7–9 | | Hume 3: skeptical solution |
| | 4/25 | Enquiry 10–12 | SG/WS-12 | Hume 4: proof, probability, skeptical philosophy |
| 15 | 4/30 | Setiya's 'Hume on practical reason' (tentative) | Term paper | Instrumental reason or problem of induction |
| | 5/2 | Kant's <i>Prolegomena</i> 1 (selection) | | Beginning Kant's transcendental philosophy |
| 16 | 5/7 | Prolegomena 2 (selection) | SG/WS-13 | C'd |
| | 5/9 | No reading | | Overview, concluding remarks |
| - | 5/15 | at 1:30–3:30pm | Final exam | |

SG = Study guide / WS = worksheet, due by 3:30pm on the listed day (before class)
 Paper outline, paper draft, and its final version are due by 11:59pm on the listed day

Changes to the syllabus

This syllabus is subject to change. Students will be notified in advance of important changes that could affect, e.g., grading.

Copyright notice

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