

History of Western Philosophy: Modern

Philosophy 362

Spring 2014

Instructor: Dan Flory

E-mail: dflory@montana.edu

Office hours: 1-2 PM MWF, and by appointment

Office: 2-106 Wilson Hall

Office phone: 994-5209

Course Description

The early Modern era in Europe (roughly 1600-1800) was an extraordinarily productive time for Western philosophy, one that includes the works of Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, and others. It has been variously called “the Age of Reason” and “the Age of Enlightenment,” due to the fact that philosophers (including “natural philosophers,” or what we would now call scientists) proposed new and ground-breaking theories concerning nature, knowledge, morals, politics, and religion. The Western world’s sense of itself changed profoundly during this time, the consequences of which we are still living with and dealing with during the 21st century. For example, the *U.S. Constitution* and the *Declaration of Independence* are Enlightenment documents profoundly rooted in the ideas of John Locke; the current philosophical project of “naturalized epistemology” in philosophy is largely an inheritance of Hume, Kant, and debates about rationalism versus empiricism; contemporary discussions of the ‘self’ and ‘mind’ would be almost inconceivable without Descartes; and our political and social institutions would be vastly different without the influence of the early Modern era in Europe. Ideas and theories originating from this era in Europe are in many ways foundational to contemporary thought – for good and for ill – and our task in this course will be to grasp some of the ways in which that is so. Topics we will investigate include:

- what is the human ‘self’? is it the Christian conception of the ‘soul,’ ‘mind,’ or something different?
- what is ‘knowledge’? what consequences do different conceptions of this idea have in science, morals, and religion?
- what is ‘reason’? what role does it play in the lives of human beings? what role should it play?
- what is ‘man’? that is, what is the proper conception of ‘the human’? what sorts of consequences does such a conception have for actual human beings?
- what are ‘natural rights’? how do they apply to different sorts of human beings?
- how do gendered and raced aspects of discussions about ‘man’ and ‘rights’ change their application?
- what is the proper form of government? how might it be legitimated?
- can religion or religious concepts (e.g., ‘miracles’) be supported by natural knowledge?

We will explore these issues mainly through the **careful readings of primary texts** (listed below), supplemented by discussions, quizzes, written essays and exams, and lectures. Our overall aims will be to develop a thorough and analytical understanding of some of the more important philosophical questions considered during the Modern period in the West, various philosophers’ attempts to answer these questions, and a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of these answers.

Required Texts

- Margaret Atherton (ed.), *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period* (Hackett, 1994).
- René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*, tr. Donald Cress, 4th Edition (Hackett, 1998).
- Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (ed.), *Race and the Enlightenment* (Blackwell, 1997).
- David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard H. Popkin, 2nd Edition (Hackett, 1998).
- David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinberg, 2nd Edition (Hackett, 1993).
- Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, tr. James W. Ellington, 2nd Edition (Hackett, 2001).
- John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Hackett, 1980).
- materials on D2L.

Required Assignments

- one mini-research essay (6-8 pp., double spaced): 30%
- two mid-term exams: 15% each
- five reading quizzes: 20%
- participation and industry in class: 20%

Interpretation of Grades

Letter grades in the course will be awarded according to the criteria described below:

- A** Achievement that is outstanding relative to basic course requirements—for example, written work that conveys a superior understanding of the material and is free of grammatical errors. Has a special quality—for example, an essay that provides particularly insightful analysis, criticism, or reflection.
- B** Achievement that is significantly higher than basic course requirements; e.g., a well-written and well-produced essay. May contain a few minor flaws that could be overcome without difficulty. Shows a solid understanding of the material.
- C** Achievement that fulfills basic course requirements. However, may contain significant flaws—e.g., an essay that fulfills the assignment's basic requirements, but does not do it in a clear or noteworthy way. Shows some understanding of the material, but presents it partially, incompletely, or awkwardly. May fail to address properly one or more major assignment requirements. Awkward handling of source materials may be in evidence. May contain grammatical errors or clumsy writing that interfere with the essay's readability.
- D** Achievement that is worthy of course credit, but is not satisfactory. For example, an essay that forces the reader to do far too much work to understand it, due to numerous and/or serious grammatical errors, incomplete or inadequate presentation of materials, poor reasoning, or poor writing. May also fail to address properly one or more major assignment requirements, without which the essay fails to address the primary aims of the assignment.
- F** Achievement not worthy of course credit.

Other Course Policies and Information

Academic Dishonesty. All work for this course must be written by the person submitting it for evaluation. It must also be written for **this** course. These requirements include anything submitted for credit in the class. **Anyone found guilty of plagiarism, cheating, forgery, or other forms of academic dishonesty will fail this course** and the incident will be reported to the Dean of Students. (See the *MSU Student Conduct Guidelines* for further information.)

Academic Philosophical Resources. For your research essays for this course (see below), you **must** use academic philosophical resources. Usually, an academic philosophical resource is an essay published in a recognized philosophy journal, a recognizably philosophical anthology, a philosophy book, and/or is listed in *The Philosopher's Index* (see below). Academic philosophical essays and books typically have footnotes or endnotes, explore concepts or theories in extended depth (i.e., for several pages), focus on argument or conceptual analysis, and have the sort of character possessed by the books and essays we will read for this course. (**Note: book reviews and encyclopedia articles do not count as academic philosophical resources**). Typically, but not always, they are written by professional philosophers. **For the purposes of this course, the academic philosophical resource you use for your research paper must be listed in *The Philosopher's Index*.**

Assigned Readings. Philosophy requires a solid comprehension of texts. My assumption is that you will make every effort to **read the assigned material twice and come to class prepared to discuss it**. The best way to achieve the comprehension needed to discuss philosophy texts intelligently is to **read the material carefully and more than once**: first for an overall grasp, then a second or additional times (generally more slowly) for a deeper, more detailed understanding.

Course Prerequisite. This course **presupposes that you have already had at least one course in philosophy and** thus have a solid general understanding of what philosophy is as a form of disciplinary knowledge. If you have not yet taken any philosophy courses, you are not prepared for this course and should probably drop it.

Other Course Policies and Information (continued)

Attendance, Participation, and Industry. A portion of your grade (20%) will depend on your **active participation and industry in class**, which I will take to be illustrated by **thoughtful discussion, comments, and questions** regarding the course's topics and materials. This aspect of your grade **presupposes regular attendance**. Missing numerous class sessions (i.e., three or more) should lead to the expectation that your grade will be negatively affected, and missing **twelve** or more (i.e., 30% or more of the course) for **any** reason should lead to the expectation that you will not do satisfactorily or, in extreme cases, not pass the class. In addition, only rarely or never saying anything in class should lead to the expectation that your grade may be negatively affected.

Copies. Make copies of your submitted work and keep them until you receive your final grade.

E-reserve and Online Readings. Some of the course readings will be made available to you through D2L or are accessible online through various databases. **These readings are required texts** for this course. As such, you will need to **print out and bring them to class** so that we may study and discuss them in detail.

Essay Format. Your written, out-of-class assignments for this course must be word-processed and clearly readable in 10 to 12 point font. Space the lines as instructed, use approximately one-half to one-inch margins, place your name, assignment description, and course and section number in an upper corner of the first page, title your essay, number your pages, use a standard citation format, and staple or paper clip multiple-page essays together. There is no need for cover or backing sheets, plastic binders, folders, etc.

Incompletes. Incomplete grades are generally for students who become ill or have other emergencies late in the semester. Students eligible for Incompletes should have consistently completed four-fifths of the assigned work during the semester in a timely fashion. If you feel you merit an Incomplete, talk to be about it ASAP.

Late Papers. Late assignments are generally frowned upon, may receive a lower grade than they would otherwise, or **may not be accepted** for credit. If you have difficulty meeting a deadline, contact me ASAP.

Mini-Research Essays. A mini-research essay is a small-scale academic research essay that further develops the philosophical analysis of some topic we have discussed in class. In addition to course materials, it also incorporates independent research. The purpose of this kind of essay is to help you to take a topic we have discussed and analyzed and independently develop the philosophical discussion of it. This type of assignment requires you to show not only a competence in the topic as we have discussed and analyzed it (namely, by **citing and discussing in some detail at least two sources we have covered in this course**), but also to extend its **philosophical analysis** by means of **independent academic research**. In keeping with this purpose, mini-research essays must use in some significant way **at least two academic philosophical resources** (see above) that discuss this topic beyond the ways in which we have discussed it in the course. The best papers, all things being equal, will probably incorporate more than two resources from outside class readings.

Research Resources. A number of research resources for philosophy, containing articles and books that may be used for writing essays in this course, are owned or licensed by the Montana State University – Bozeman Library system. These resources may be identified and in many cases accessed on-line through the MSU Library system's databases; in other cases you may obtain these materials physically from the books and journals the MSU Library system owns, or you may borrow them through Interlibrary Loan (ILL). In particular, your research into topics arising in this course will be greatly facilitated by **The Philosopher's Index database**, to which the MSU Library system offers access on-line.

Other Course Policies and Information (continued)

Reading Quizzes. Several reading quizzes will be given during the semester to ensure that you are reading the course materials carefully. **Quizzes will be given without warning during the first five minutes of class and may not be made up.** A total of six quizzes will be given; if you have taken all of them, your lowest score may be dropped.

Required Texts. This course is about the **analysis of texts**. The assigned readings exist in books or online resources that you **must have with you on the days we discuss them**. As such, if you come to class without these texts on the relevant days, you will be counted as **absent**.

Schedule of topics and assignments

- 8 January Introduction to the course: philosophy and the “Age of Reason” in Europe
- 10 January Descartes’ Project of Knowledge: Goals, Method, and Procedure
How Secure is Our Knowledge? Does It Need Absolutely Certain Foundations?
What are the Consequences of these Ideas? What is the *Cogito*?
Reading: *Discourse on Method*, 1-22
Recommended: Cress, “Editor’s Preface,” *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, vii-ix
- 13 January Meditation I
What Can Be Doubted? How Far is Skepticism Possible? the Dreaming Argument;
the Evil Genius Argument
Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 59-63
- 15 January Meditation II
Must Our Knowledge Be Certain? What is a Human Being? What is a Mind?
A “Thinking Thing”; the Wax Argument; the Hats and Clothes Argument
Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 63-69
- 17 January Meditations III, IV, & V
Clear and Distinct Perceptions; Error; Can God Be a Deceiver?
Proofs for God’s Existence; Necessary Existence; Truth
Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 69-92
- 20 January **Martin Luther King Day – No class**
- 22 January Meditations VI
Imagination vs. Intellect; Sensation; Animals
What is the Relation of the Mind to the Body? What is the Body for Descartes?
Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 92-103; *Discourse on Method*, 23-33
- 24-27 January Princess Elizabeth and Margaret Cavendish on Descartes
Reading: *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period*, 9-21; 22-45
Recommended: Atherton, “Introduction,” *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period*, 1-6
- 29-31 January Anne Conway’s Monism and Rejection of Descartes
Reading: *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period*, 46-76
- 3-5 February Mary Astell’s Cartesian Argument for Educating Women
Reading: Astell, *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period*, 96-125
Review for Midterm #1
- 7 February **Midterm #1**

Schedule of Readings, Topics, and Assignments (continued)

- 10, 12, 14, 19 February Locke on Social Contract Theory and the Proper Form of Government
 Reading: *Second Treatise of Government*, 7-30; 42-68, 91-124
 Recommended: Macpherson, "Editor's Introduction,"
Second Treatise of Government, vii-xxi
- 17 February **Presidents' Day – No class**
- 21-24 February Hume's Moderate Skepticism: Whence Does Our Knowledge Arise?
 What is Human Understanding? How Does it Work?
 Reading: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1-37
- 26-28 February What is Causality? Probability and Necessary Connection; Limits of Skepticism
 Reading: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 37-53; 102-114
- 3 March What Are Miracles? Can They Occur?
 Reading: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 72-90
- 5-7 March Hume on Natural Religion
 Reading: *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 1-43
 Recommended: Popkin, "Introduction," *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, vii-xix
- 10-14 March **Spring Break—No classes**
- 17, 19, 21 March Hume on Natural Religion and Immortality
 Reading: *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 44-89, 91-97
 Review for Midterm #2
- 24 March **Midterm #2**
- 26-28 March Race in the Age of Reason; Science, Hume, and Beattie
 Reading: *Race and the Enlightenment*, 1-37
- 31 March What is Enlightenment?
 Reading: Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" [1784]
 from *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, ed. and tr. Ted Humphreys (Indianapolis:
 Hackett, 1983), 41-48 (**D2L; print out and bring to class**);
 Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" *A Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow
 (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 32-50 (**D2L; print out and bring to class**);
 "Kant on Women" handout (**D2L; print out and bring to class**)
- 2, 4, 7 April Kant and the Possibility of Knowledge
 Reading: *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 1-17; 17-34; 35-59
- 11-14 April Kant, Race, and Herder
 Reading: *Race and the Enlightenment*, 38-78
- 18 April **University Day Holiday – No class**
- 16, 21, 23 April Consequences of Kant: Blumenbach, *Encyclopedia* entries, Cuvier, and Hegel
 Reading: *Race and the Enlightenment*, 79-94; 104-8; 110-136; 142 (last paragraph);
 150-3
- 25 April **Final Paper due**