

University of Washington

Modern Philosophy (PHIL322)

Spring 2020

Class:

MW 2:30pm-4:20pm, classes will be conducted on Zoom.
There are no in-person classes.

Instructor:

Anthony Fisher arjf@uw.edu
office SAV M382; office hours on Zoom only:
Friday 2-3pm and by appointment.

Course description: This course surveys the history of philosophy in the Early Modern period, starting with René Descartes and the rise of mechanist philosophy. We will examine criticisms of Descartes's philosophy by Prince Elisabeth of Bohemia and study Nicolas Malebranche's developments of the Cartesian system. We will explore further reactions to Descartes by Anne Conway and Margaret Cavendish and proceed to study Gottfried Leibniz's philosophical system and developments by Emilie Du Châtelet. Then we will venture into the empiricist tradition with a close reading of George Berkeley and David Hume, finishing with Immanuel Kant's major contributions to the larger debate of the period. We will focus mostly on metaphysical and epistemological themes in these thinkers but with a sensitivity to the scientific considerations that helped motivate these thinkers to offer original and ground-breaking systems of nature. Along the way we will cultivate an appreciation for the importance of the history of philosophy and the value in investigating what thinkers of previous eras argued for and how it relates to philosophy today.

Required textbooks:

- (1) Descartes, 1998. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, Fourth Edition. Trans. Donald A. Cress (Hackett)
- (2) Berkeley, 1982. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. Ed. Kenneth Winkler (Hackett)
- (3) Hume, 1993. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Second Edition. Ed. Eric Steinberg (Hackett)
- (4) Kant, 2002. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Second Edition. Trans. James W. Ellington (Hackett)

These textbooks can be ordered through the UW bookstore, with free shipping. We will use these editions of the texts, but you can access other versions for free at earlymoderntexts.com. Other readings will be made available online on Canvas.

Learning outcomes: On successful completion of the course, students will be able to demonstrate: i) a detailed understanding of the concepts, problems, and arguments that motivated Early Modern philosophers, ii) a thorough knowledge of the theories and arguments by these philosophers in their historical context, especially with respect to the development of each philosopher's thought, and iii) an enhanced ability to examine philosophical texts critically, especially primary material from the Early Modern period.

Assessment:

[...]

Course schedule:

Week 1

Mon 30 Mar: Introduction to history of philosophy and the Early Modern period

Wed 1 Apr: Descartes, (1641) *Meditations* 1 and 2 [11pgs] (optional reading: *Discourse on Method* pt. 1 and 2 [13pgs])

Week 2

Mon 6 Apr: Descartes, (1641) *Meditations* 3 and 4 [19pgs] (optional reading: *Discourse on Method* pt. 3 [6pgs])

Wed 8 Apr: Descartes, (1641) *Meditations* 5 and 6 [17pgs] (optional reading: *Discourse on Method* pt. 4 [5pgs])

Week 3

Mon 13 Apr: Princess Elisabeth, (1643) 'Correspondence with Descartes, May-July 1643' [8pgs]

Wed 15 Apr: Malebranche, (1674-75) *The Search After Truth* (bk. 6, pt. 2, ch. 3) [7pgs]

Week 4

Mon 20 Apr: Conway, (1690) *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (chs. 7-9) [30pgs]

Wed 22 Apr: Cavendish, (1666) *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (I chs. 16, 31; II ch. 6) [14pgs]

Week 5

Mon 27 Apr: Leibniz, (1686) *Discourse on Metaphysics* (secs. 8-22) [12pgs]

Wed 29 Apr: Leibniz, (1714) *Monadology* [20pgs] (**paper topics distributed**)

Week 6

Mon 4 May: Du Châtelet, (1740) *Foundations of Physics* (chs. 1, 6, 7) [34pgs]

Wed 6 May: mid-term review (**take-home mid-term assigned**)

Week 7

Mon 11 May: Berkeley, (1710) *Principles of Human Knowledge*, Introduction (secs. 1-25) [15pgs] (**mid-term due**)

Wed 13 May: Berkeley, (1710) *Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part 1 (secs. 1-33) [13pgs]

Week 8

Mon 18 May: Hume, (1748) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (secs. 1-3) [15pgs]

Wed 20 May: Hume, (1748) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (secs. 4-5) [23pgs]

Week 9

Mon 25 May: no class, memorial day (**draft paper due**)

Wed 27 May: Hume, (1748) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (secs. 6-7) [17pgs] (**peer comments on paper due**)

Sun 30 May – **paper due**

Week 10

Mon 1 June: Kant, (1783) *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Preface, pp. 1-8 [8pgs] & Preamble, pp. 9-22 (secs. 1-5) [14pgs]

Wed 3 June: Kant, (1783) *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Second Part, pp. 35-63 (secs. 14-39) [29pgs] (**take-home final assigned**)

Last day of classes: Friday 5 June.

Final examination week: 6-12 June. (**take-home final due at end of exam week**)

Grades due: 16 June by 5pm.