

PHILOSOPHY 3121: MODERN PHILOSOPHY

(syllabus excerpts)

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Course Objectives

- ≡ The student will read and gain a greater appreciation of some classics of early modern European philosophy.
- ≡ The student will gain an understanding of many of the major philosophical ideas, methods, systems, and themes from this period in the history of philosophy.
- ≡ The student will be able to make connections between and comparisons with the ideas, methods, systems, and themes from other periods in the history of philosophy.
- ≡ The student will be able to read and analyze a text closely and critically.
- ≡ The student will be able to formulate coherent ideas and to develop arguments in their defense.
- ≡ The student will be able to express his or her ideas and arguments in rigorous, lucid, and stylish prose.
- ≡ The student will be able to present his or her ideas and arguments orally in a public forum.

Fall 2015
(Tuesday, 6:05-9:45 pm)

First day of class:

- ≡ Course practicalities.
- ≡ Introduce and problematize the history of early modern philosophy. (For example, what counts as "early modern philosophy"? How do we demarcate it from medieval philosophy and Renaissance philosophy?)
- ≡ Introduction to Pyrrhonism.

Unit 1: Skepticism and the Limits of Knowledge

Meeting 1:

Required reading:

Montaigne "Apology for Raymond Sebond"

Supplements: Sextus Empiricus Outlines; Pierre Bayle Dictionary, "Pyrrho"

Meeting 2:

Required reading:

Descartes Meditations on First Philosophy, meditations 1 & 2
Descartes Discourse on the Method, parts 1-4

Supplements: Dominik Perler "Skepticism and Metaphysics"; Buridan Summulae (selections)

Unit 2: Religious Toleration

Meeting 3:

Required readings:

Montaigne selections from Essays: "Of Cripples", "Of Custom", "Of Conscience", "Of Freedom of Conscience"

Supplement: Pierre Bayle Philosophical Commentary (selections)

Meeting 4:

Required reading:

Locke Letter Concerning Toleration

Unit 3: Natural Theology

Meeting 5:

Required reading:

Hume Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion

Supplement: Paley Natural Theology (selections), chapters 1-6

Meeting 6:

Reading:

Hume Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion

Unit 4: Substance and Mode

Meeting 7:

Readings:

Descartes Principles of Philosophy, Part 1

Supplement: Aristotle Categories 1-5 and Physics 1.7-9; Hobbes Elements of Philosophy (selections); Spinoza Ethics, Book 1, props. 1-15

Meeting 8:

Required readings:

Descartes Meditations on First Philosophy, meditations 5 & 6
Correspondence between Descartes and Elizabeth of Bohemia

Descartes Discourse on the Method, part 5

Descartes Principles of Philosophy, Part 2, sections 1-4; Part 4, sections 188-207

Meeting 9:

Required reading:

Anne Conway The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophers, chapters 1-3 and 6-9

Supplements: Selections from Hobbes Elements of Philosophy and Elements of Law; Spinoza Ethics, Book 1, props. 1-15; C. Merchant "The Vitalism of Anne Conway"

Meeting 10:

Required Reading:

Leibniz Monadology

Supplement: Leibniz Discourse on Metaphysics sections 1-16

Meeting 11:

Required reading:

Berkeley A Treatise Concerning Human Knowledge, Part 1

Supplement: Locke An Essay concerning Human Understanding (selections)

Unit 5: Education and the Rights of Women

Meeting 12:

Reading:

Mary Astell A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part 1

Supplement: E. O'Neill "Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History"

Meeting 13:

Reading:

Mary Astell A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part 2, chapters 1-3

Spring 2016
(Wednesday, 6:05-9:45 pm)

Readings

Most readings will be available from the Internet, either as PDF files that can be downloaded from Blackboard, or from a website noted in the syllabus. Please see the schedule for details. Alternative versions of most texts are acceptable.

I will ask you to buy two books, since we will be reading the whole of each work in this course:

[1] David Hume Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.

[2] George Berkeley A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge.

I will be using editions published by Hackett Publishing. I strongly recommend that you acquire these editions, as it will make it easier to refer to the text in lectures and classroom discussions. However, if you run across another, cheaper edition for either work, you are free to purchase it.

You will notice that I list several readings for each session. Some are quite long, and many are difficult. Do not panic. If you are pressed for time, look for readings marked with an asterisk ("*"). These are the readings that you should focus on, if you can only read some. Readings marked with an "S" are supplements, that is, texts that the student is not required to read, but that the instructor has included as they might deepen one's understanding of the other readings and classroom discussions. Students may make reference to supplements in their written assignments.

The student is responsible for acquiring the required texts and reading them well in advance of the day they will be discussed. (Your success on the daily writing assignments will depend upon this.) Issues with Blackboard should be brought to my attention immediately. Whenever possible, students should bring a copy (print or electronic) of the required texts to class.

Lest you panic

As you will quickly discover, I see the history of philosophy as an endeavor that is continuous with present-day professional philosophy. I will routinely make connections with and references to Ancient Greeks, medieval Arabic and Latin thinkers, and contemporary scholars working in universities as we speak. If you do not recognize these names or notions, do not think that you are not prepared for my class. I do not expect that you will know all these people, ideas, and terms. I recommend that you devote a small portion of your notebook to these references and asides. Write them down, and look them up if and when it pleases you. If you want to follow up on something, I suggest that you start by doing a search at the on-line Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://plato.stanford.edu/>).

Tentative Schedule

Meeting 1:

- ≡ Course practicalities.
- ≡ Introduce and problematize the history of early modern philosophy. (For example, what counts as "early modern philosophy"? How do we demarcate it from medieval philosophy and Renaissance philosophy?)

- ≡ Problematizing the Canon.
- ≡ Argument reconstructions and evaluations: a hands-on demonstration. (Don't miss this!)

Reading:

Eileen O'Neill, "Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History"

Meeting 2:

Readings:

Diogenes Laertius Lives of Eminent Philosophers, selections on Pyrrho
Sextus Empiricus Outlines on Pyrrhonism, selections
Pierre Bayle Dictionary, "Pyrrho"
Descartes Discourse on the Method 1-4 (*)
Descartes Principles of Philosophy Part 1, sections 1-11
Dominik Perler "Skepticism and Metaphysics" (S)

Meeting 3:

Readings:

Descartes Discourse on the Method 4-5 (*)
Descartes Principles, Part 1, sections 29-50
Emilie Du Châtelet Foundations of Physics, Preface and Chapter 1 (*)
Mary Astell A Serious Proposal, Part 2, chapters 1-3 (S)

Meeting 4:

Readings:

John Locke An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book 1, chapter 1
George Berkeley Treatise, Preface (*)
Locke Essay, Book 1, chapters 2-3 (S)

Meeting 5:

Readings:

Descartes Principles, Part 1, sections 13-28 (*)
Paley Natural Theology, chapters 1-6 (*)
Emilie Du Châtelet Foundations of Physics, Chapter 2
Mary Astell Serious Proposal, Part 2, chapter 3, pp. 178-82 (S)

Meeting 6:

Required reading:

Hume Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (*)
Paley Natural Theology, chapters 1-6 (S)

Meeting 7:

Reading:

Hume Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (*)
Emilie Du Châtelet Foundations of Physics, Chapter 2 (S)

Meeting 8:

Reading:

Immanuel Kant Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics, Preface and Preamble
Kant The Critique of Pure Reason, Part II, Div. II, Book 2, chapter 1 and chapter 2, "The Antinomy of Pure Reason Fourth Conflict of the Transcendental Ideas" (A452/B480-A461/B489) (*)

Meeting 9:

Readings:

Descartes Principles of Philosophy, Part 1, sections 51-70
Spinoza Ethics, Book 1, propositions 1-15 (*)

Meeting 10:

Readings:

Spinoza Ethics, Book 1, props. 1-15
Anne Conway The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophers, chapters 1-3, 9 (*)

Meeting 11:

Required Readings:

Conway Principles, chapters 6-7
Descartes and Elizabeth, correspondence (*)
Descartes and Gassendi, objections and replies (*)
Henry More The Easy, True, and Genuine Notion, and Consistent Explication of the Nature of a Spirit

Meeting 12:

Readings:

John Buridan Questions Concerning Aristotle's *On Generation and Corruption*, Book 1, question 13
Albert of Saxony Questions Concerning Aristotle's *Physics*, Book 3, question 3
Locke An Essay concerning Human Understanding, Book 2, chapter 27 (*)
Robert Pasnau Metaphysical Themes, 1274-1671, chapter 29 (S)

Meeting 13: Class meets in Costas Library (Classics Department), **6 pm**, for the following event:

**Locke on the Diachronic Identity
of Persons and Substances**

Wednesday, 5/11 @ 6:00pm in Costas Library (2405 Boylan Hall)

Professor Jessica Gordon-Roth, Philosophy, Lehman College & Graduate Center
Respondent: Professor Andrew Arlig, Department of Philosophy

Meeting 14:

Readings:

Berkeley A Treatise Concerning Human Knowledge, Part 1 (*)

Locke Essay, Book 2, chapter 23 (S)