

Renaissance and Modern Philosophy

Spring 2013 TTh 11:50-1:30 Pierce Hall 206

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Office Hours: W 2-4, and by appointment. (I'm willing to meet anytime I can. Email me to set up a time.)

Course Description

This course is an introduction to a number of the major themes and figures of seventeenth- and eighteenth- century European philosophy. We will discuss the central problems of this period and the philosophical principles of its leading thinkers. Although the course will try to survey the historical and philosophical landscape, our focus will be on the metaphysics and epistemology (and their limitations) found in the philosophy of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. In particular, we will address ourselves to four interrelated problems: The Mind/Body Problem, Primary/Secondary Qualities, Causation, and the Problem of Knowledge. In this class, students should gain a basic understanding of these issues and why they troubled early modern philosophers. They will evaluate the solutions of those problems given by the authors, and learn how they might propose and defend solutions of their own. We aim to inculcate a respect for the philosophical enterprise, the ability to engage in it, and, hopefully, the desire to do so.

Course Objectives

Students should gain a basic sensibility to good and bad argumentation. They should be able to identify the parts of arguments they encounter, as well as the ability to analyze arguments to specify their strengths and weaknesses. They should develop the reading, verbal, and writing skills needed to recognize and construct coherent and persuasive arguments. Students should also acquire a basic understanding of the important issues of interest to early modern philosophers, especially in Metaphysics and Epistemology. They should gain an understanding of Rationalism and Empiricism as general positions, as well as a suggestion of how modern debates have developed out of early modern dialectics.

Text

There is only one textbook for this course:

Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins (eds.), *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*. 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009). ISBN-13: 978-0-87220-978-7.

This text should be available at the Oxford College Bookstore. Additional material will be made available via Blackboard. Please make sure you have signed onto the course.

Policies

All policies here outlined are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

Class Organization

Class meetings will consist primarily of guided discussions concerning the assigned reading. As noted below, students are expected to engage the discussion meaningfully.

One aim of this class is to teach the ability to argue convincingly. Stating your point of view loudly, assertively, or simply rudely is *not* equivalent to a convincing argument. Nor are insults, condescension, or *ad hominem* attacks legitimate refutations of another's position. In the course of discussion, try to keep your own statements modest while remaining sensitive and attentive to what others have to say. Effective response to criticism is an essential feature of good philosophy. Feel free to speak your mind, but allow others the same privilege.

Attendance

I will not record attendance in this class. However, I will pay attention to your participation, and it will play a part in your final grade. Missing one or two classes will not be a problem, but missing three or four will be trouble. Besides, you will not gain much from the (rather dense) readings if you do not attend class.

You do not need to alert me to absences. However, if you do miss a class, you are responsible for the material covered. Make sure to do the assigned reading and ask a classmate for a summary of the discussion and notes. If you have any further questions, you are welcome to ask me.

Readings

Special care has been taken to prevent the assigned reading from becoming onerous. In the ebb and flow of college life, it may nevertheless become difficult to stay on top of the reading. Also, note that some sessions require more reading than others. As a result, it is imperative that students *plan ahead*. Read ahead when you have the opportunity, so that you do not have to read too much when more is assigned or when you are otherwise occupied.

Be aware that reading philosophy is more difficult and time-consuming than reading for other contexts. Reading difficult and unappealing texts is an important skill that will be useful in any future work you do, and you will find the class much more and useful if you do the reading. We will discuss how to read philosophy in class.

In any case, you are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned texts. That means reading and comprehending the material to the point that *you can ask meaningful questions*. Asking for a summary of the reading is not a meaningful question. Rather, you should be able to, for instance, point to a specific passage and ask what is happening therein. At the very least, you should understand the thesis of the text, and the argument(s) in its favor.

Electronics

The use of computers and other electronic devices (iPads, cellphones, etc.) in class has a tendency to distract attention and interfere with classroom discussion, even for those not actively using them. They are *not to be used in class*, except when necessary for a presentation (or for some other compelling purpose).

Assignments

Class Discussion

Students will be called on (randomly) to initiate discussion regarding an assigned text. Students will be expected to briefly summarize the position stated in the reading and to propose questions for group discussion.

Argument Critique

A short written argument critique will be required. More information about this assignment will be provided.

Papers

Two 3-4 page papers will be required in this course. Papers must be submitted to the instructor *by hard copy and by SafeAssign* (through Blackboard). Topics for the papers will be assigned.

Exams

A midterm and a final will be administered in this course. More detail will be provided.

Evaluation

Evaluation in this class will be based on overall performance. Students should therefore strive to perform well in all aspects of the class. That said, a *rough* guide to the consideration given to each component is 20% for class participation, 10% for the argument reconstruction, 20% for each essay, and 15% for each exam.

Honor Code

The Honor Code is in effect in this class, as it is in all classes at Oxford College. Academic and personal integrity are serious matters, and will be treated as such in this course. The instructor and students alike are responsible for upholding both the spirit and the letter of the Code. Students must understand its content—especially regarding academic honesty, integrity, and plagiarism—and should clarify any questions they might have. All students are also expected to act with civility, personal integrity; respect other students' dignity, rights, and property, including their intellectual property; and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their own efforts. Details about the Honor Code are available online:

http://oxford.emory.edu/audiences/current_students/Academic/academic-success/student-honor-code/index.dot.

Philosophy is a collaborative enterprise. Ideas are best developed in discourse where criticism and suggestions are freely exchanged. You should not interpret the honor code to impact your ability to

work together, and you are encouraged to do so. However, anything represented as your own work must be your own, with the remainder of submitted material properly attributed to its source(s).

Citations

Plagiarism is not the same thing as incorrect citation style. I am not very concerned with how you cite sources, so long as they are cited in a way that enables the reader to find the source.

Nevertheless, there are standard conventions for citing sources, and it is worthwhile to begin using them early in your academic career. You will find some models on the course website. Additionally, there are software applications available that can help with citations (e.g., EasyBib, EndNote, and Zotero), and you are encouraged to learn how to use at least one of these. See

<http://oxford.library.emory.edu/conduct-research/plagiarism-and-academic-honesty/citing-your-sources> for more information.

Accommodations

Students requiring special accommodations should contact the Oxford College Office of Access and Disability Resources at (770) 784-8415 to register. This includes medical accommodations for temporary illnesses.

Assessment

Student work submitted as part of this course may be reviewed by Oxford College and Emory College faculty and staff for the purposes of improving instruction and enhancing Emory education.

Final Note

As much as I find it distasteful (for the very reasons I am about to cite), my time at Oxford has indicated the necessity of the following.

This is *college*. This institution provides resources, including professors and your fellow students, that you can use to edify and prepare yourself for your future. However, students are presumed to be adults, with responsibility for their own behavior and education. The resources provided will not come to you. You must seek them out and employ them to your own advantage. Do the reading. Write and re-write drafts of your papers. Use office hours. Use the writing center. Ask for help where and when you need it. If you get a bad grade, figure out where you were mistaken and work hard to improve. I am always willing to offer help, if you are prepared to seek it. On the other hand, if you fail to meet expectations, I am not going to chase after you. I will simply evaluate your performance accordingly.

College is the transition to independent and professional life. It is the opportunity to become the person you want to be. Treat each other with respect and act in a way that demands it. Among other things, this means addressing each other appropriately—for your instructors, ‘Professor’ or ‘Doctor’. Value your own time and that of others.

You can benefit tremendously from this course, from each other, and from Oxford, but your seriousness, commitment, and effort are required.

Schedule

The schedule is subject to change. I anticipate falling behind, in which case students are still responsible for keeping up with the reading in line with class discussion. (Bb) indicates material on Blackboard.

| Date | Class | Assignment |
|--------------------|---|--|
| <i>January 15</i> | Welcome | |
| <i>January 17</i> | Introduction: Content and Methods | Reading philosophy websites (Bb) |
| <i>January 22</i> | Casting Aside the Past: The Method of Doubt | <i>Meditations</i> : Letter of Dedication; Preface to the Reader; Synopsis; Meditation I |
| <i>January 24</i> | A Tale of Two Substances I: Mind | Meditation II |
| <i>January 29</i> | The Divine Cause: God | Meditation III, IV |
| <i>January 31</i> | Argument Analysis | Analysis Worksheet (Bb) |
| <i>February 5</i> | A Tale of Two Substances II: Body | Meditation V; <i>Principles</i> II.36-52 (Bb) |
| <i>February 7</i> | Causes and Circles | Meditation VI; Passions of the Soul I.10-12, 31, 34-35 (Bb); Third and Fourth Sets of Objections and Replies (pp. 76-86) |
| <i>February 12</i> | Four Problems of Modern Philosophy; Writing Philosophy Papers | Argument Critique Due |
| <i>February 14</i> | Rationalist Responses: Occasionalism and Spinoza | Spinoza, selections from the <i>Ethics</i> ; Malebranche, selections from <i>The Search After Truth</i> |
| <i>February 19</i> | The Monad | <i>Monadology</i> 1-45; <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> 8-12 |
| <i>February 21</i> | Notions, Entelechies, Essences | <i>Monadology</i> 46-70 |
| <i>February 26</i> | Causation and the Principles of Divine Will | <i>Monadology</i> 70-90; <i>Discourse</i> 1-7, 14-22, 32-35 |
| <i>February 28</i> | Truth and Necessity | <i>Discourse</i> 23-29 |
| <i>March 5</i> | Leibniz Summary | |
| <i>March 7</i> | Midterm Exam | |
| <i>March 12</i> | SPRING BREAK | |
| <i>March 14</i> | SPRING BREAK | |
| <i>March 19</i> | Locke's Empiricism | <i>Essay</i> I.ii.1-9; II.i.1-5, 24-25; II.ii.1-3; II.viii.1-26; II.xxiii.1-12, 22-32; III.iii.15-18 |
| | | First Paper Due |
| <i>March 21</i> | Berkeley's Rejection of Material Substances | Dialogue I |
| <i>March 26</i> | Berkeley's Idealism | Dialogue II |
| <i>March 28</i> | Objections and Replies | Dialogue III |
| <i>April 2</i> | Hume on Knowledge and Experience | Enquiry 1, 2, 3 |
| <i>April 4</i> | CLASS CANCELLED | |
| <i>April 9</i> | The Limits of Experience and Science | Enquiry 4, 5, 6, 7 |
| <i>April 11</i> | Implications for Ethics and Religion | Enquiry 8, 10, 11 |
| <i>April 16</i> | The Skeptical Challenge | Enquiry 12 |

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| <i>April 18</i> | Kant: The Synthetic <i>A Priori</i> | <i>Prolegomena</i> , Preamble and First Part |
| <i>April 23</i> | Kant's Solution to the Skeptical Challenge | <i>Prolegomena</i> , Second Part |
| <i>April 25</i> | Summary and Conclusion | Second Paper Due |
| <i>May 8</i> <i>9am-12pm</i> | Final Exam | |