Modern Philosophy

Contents

Course Information

Instructor

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- Piskor 109
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Course Materials

- Ariew, Roerger and Eric Watkins, eds, (2019). *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources.* Hackett Publishing.

Course Description

In the 16th-18th centuries, a scientific revolution shattered medieval certainties and philosophers worked to rebuild human knowledge from the ground up. While

Descartes tried to find firm foundations for knowledge, scientists and mathematicians like Galileo and Newton revolutionized scientific methods. Meanwhile, thinkers like Locke, Hume, and Kant wrestled with mind-bending questions: How do we know anything at all? What is the relationship between our minds and the external world? Can reason alone deliver truth, or must we rely on experience? This course will examine the ideas and thinkers that laid the foundations for our world, with a special focus on learning how to understand the worldviews of others through deep engagement with their texts and ideas.

Course Goals

1. Students will deepen their understanding of the position and arguments of philosophers in the Modern period.
2. Students will improve their ability to read and understand texts from an intellectual context that is not their own.
3. Students will improve their ability to follow and evaluate arguments on their own merits.
4. Students will improve their ability to explore and defend philosophical positions in written and oral communication.

Assignments and Grading

|Participation | 15%| |Quizzes | 20%| |Oral Exams | 30%| |Argument Paper | 35%|

Participation

Participation includes your engagement with the course, both in and out of the classroom. You can demonstrate this engagement in a number of ways, including being prepared for class, asking questions and making contributions in class discussion, discussing questions with me outside of class, and actively working in group work. Having completed the readings before class is an essential element of participation.

The material in this course is not easy, and two essential components of participation are a willingness to make errors, and a compassion for others who make mistakes. This means you should be willing to share your ideas, even if you are not sure they are correct; it also means you should be considerate of how you respond to others.

Rubric

||**Exemplary (4.0)**|**Good (3.0)**|**Adequate (2.0)**|**Poor (1.0)**| |**Readiness to Learn**|Student is always in class, having done all assignments, has relevant materials, and comes prepared with questions and ideas.|Student is always in class, having done all of the assignments, and has all of the relevant materials.|Student misses class, and/or has not done the work, or come prepared to discuss the topics of the day.|Student frequently misses class, and is regularly unprepared for the

topics of the day.| |**In-Class Contributions**|Student makes frequent constructive and insightful contributions to class conversations and group work.|Student's contributions are infrequent, but constructive and insightful.|Student makes frequent contributions which are not constructive, or rarely contributes.|Student's contributions actively diminish the learning environment (e.g., are off topic or attack others).| |**Virtuous Participation**|Student regularly follows the code of intellectual conduct, and corrects themselves when failing to do so.| Student regularly follows the code of conduct, but does not recognize or improve upon unvirtuous behavior.|Student often violates the code of intellectual conduct and does not make serious efforts to improve.|Student frequently violates the code of intellectual conduct without making serious efforts to improve.|

Code of Intellectual Conduct 1. Fallibility Principle – I recognize that I might be wrong. 2. Principle of Charity – I will put the views of others in the best possible light. 3. Truth-Seeking Principle – I will seek truth, not victory. 4. Principle of Clarity - I will be clear and precise in all of my claims. 5. Burden of Proof Principle – If I make a claim, I am obligated to defend it. 6. Response Principle – If a claim is successfully defended, I should believe it. If no claim is successfully defended, I should suspend judgment.

Quizzes

Every class, you will take a short, multiple choice quiz that asks you about the positions taken in the reading assigned for that day. After completing the quiz, you will work with classmates to identify passages from the text that help us answer the questions. These passages, then, will form the basis of our discussion in class. During the class period, you will be able to put down a new answer on the quiz. It is these, final, answers, that will be graded.

There are a few purposes to these quizzes. One is that they will help you test your own understanding of the text. If you are frequently off-base with your initial answers, this is a sign that you should stop by my office to chat about how to approach the texts. The second is that they will help you focus during our discussions, because you'll know what you are trying to get out of the text. This will help you better practice your critical reading skills throughout class. Finally, they will help you build a deeper understanding of the positions we are discussing.

Because these quizzes are designed to help you prepare for, and better understand the class sessions in which they are given, missed quizzes cannot be made up. However, I will drop your *two* lowest quiz grades, recognizing that sometimes life gets in the way.

Oral Exams

At three points in the semester, I will ask you to schedule a meeting with me to discuss the views of one of the philosophers we have focused on. I'll ask you to begin the conversation by doing two things: 1. You should **summarize** the

core themes of that thinker's philosophical project. What are they trying to do? What are their main positions? 2. You should **critically engage** that thinker's project in one of the ways below.

From there, we'll have a philosophical conversation! I might ask you to elaborate on what you've said, or I might ask about ideas you haven't touched on, or I might push back on your own ideas. As you will see from the rubric below, the goal is not encyclopedic knowledge of that thinker's project that you can give off the top of your head. Instead, I am looking for an understanding of the core commitments of the project (you should know the big ideas off the top of your head), and an ability to talk through the complex parts. That is, I am looking for your ability to reason through the answers to my questions, to use the text to support your analysis, or indeed, to use the text on the fly to find the answer to a question. You can bring in a page of notes, which you may want to use to highlight (or even copy down) key passages. If you do bring notes, I will ask you to give me a copy of them.

Rubric

||**Exemplary (4.0)**|**Good (3.0)**|**Adequate (2.0)**|**Poor (1.0)**| |**Understanding**|Demonstrates comprehensive and nuanced understanding of philosophical positions. Accurately explains key concepts, arguments, and their implications. Recognizes important distinctions and qualifications within positions. Can articulate how different elements of a theory connect and support one another.|Demonstrates solid understanding of philosophical positions. Accurately explains core concepts and arguments with only minor gaps or imprecisions. Grasps the main thrust of positions and can articulate their key commitments. May miss some nuances or subtleties but shows no fundamental misunderstandings.|Demonstrates basic understanding of philosophical positions but with notable gaps or inaccuracies. Captures some key elements but may oversimplify, conflate distinct ideas, or miss important qualifications. Understanding is sufficient to engage with the material at a surface level but lacks depth or precision in places.|Demonstrates minimal or confused understanding of philosophical positions. Makes significant errors in explaining concepts or arguments.| |**Critical Engagement**|Uses one of the templates for critical engagement in a way that shows deep consideration of the philosophical position(s). Shows creativity in engaging in a way that goes beyond points raised in class conversation. |Uses one of the templates for critical engagement and has a creative idea that goes beyond class discussion, however, the student does not dig deeply into their question or position and its implications.| The student does not use one of the templates appropriately, but does go beyond summary to critically engage with the source material. Critical engagement does not go beyond positions and questions raised in class. | Offers minimal or confused critical engagement. Struggles to move beyond description to analysis. May offer irrelevant criticisms, misunderstand what would constitute a genuine objection, or fail to engage critically at all.| |**Thoughtfulness**|Responds to questions with careful consideration, taking time to think through questions. Acknowledges complexity, uncertainty, or

limitations in own understanding when appropriate. Engages directly with the question asked rather than deflecting to prepared material. Adjusts responses based on follow-up questions, showing flexibility and genuine dialogue.|Responds to questions in a considered and direct manner. Generally addresses what is being asked and shows willingness to think through implications. May occasionally revert to prepared material but largely engages with questions as posed. Acknowledges when uncertain or when questions point to complications, though may not explore these as fully as possible.|Responds to questions but with limited flexibility or depth. May frequently revert to rehearsed answers even when they don't quite fit the question. Shows some effort to engage thoughtfully but responses can feel superficial or formulaic. May avoid acknowledging uncertainty or complexity, or may struggle to adapt when questions take unexpected directions.|Responds to questions in a hasty, superficial, or evasive manner. Frequently misses the point of questions or retreats to memorized material regardless of relevance. Shows little evidence of thinking through questions in the moment. May be unable or unwilling to acknowledge gaps in understanding or to engage with complications when raised.|

Paper Project

In this paper, you will enter into the philosophical discussion begun and carried through the Modern period. The central aims of the assignment are for you to practice philosophical argumentation, clear writing, and the practice of dialogue through your writing. To engage in that dialogue, we (and I am part of it too!) will write this paper in three parts:

1. *Argument Paper* – the first step is a traditional argumentative paper. In this paper, you will take up a question asked by one of the philosophers we read this semester, and argue for a position on that question. To do so, you should (a) motivate the question - explain *why* the question comes up and why it matters, (b) explain the view of at least one Modern philosopher on that question, (c) make a claim about your own position on that question and supported it with argument(s), and (d) defend your position against at least one objection arising from the literature. The paper should be 6-7 pages long, and it should be engaged with at least one Modern philosophical text from those we read this semester.

2. *Reply* - the reply should be a philosophical reply, rather than a peer review. This means that you should be focused on the ideas expressed, rather than writing concerns (such as organization, spelling, or syntax). I recommend considering it as a public letter. That is, you can write it directly to the author of the paper, but in a style that presumes it will be widely read. For example, you might ask the author to clarify unclear notions, or to suggest alternative arguments or explanations. You might also offer objections, counter-arguments, and problematic cases. Consider yourself a philosopher engaged in dialogue with another philosopher. This paper should be approximately 2-3 pages long.

3. *Follow-up* - the follow-up is then your chance to reply to the questions and challenges raised by both my reply, and the reply of your classmate. You might do so by answering our questions, refuting our objections, or changing your arguments in light of them. That is, it is perfectly fine to recognize that an objection is a good one, and you could use your follow-up to address how you might change your view in response to it. The follow-up does not need to address every issue raised in the replies (you can choose the important ones), but be careful not to simply avoid a question or challenge because it is difficult to answer. Your follow-up should be 3-4 pages long.

The whole project is worth 35% of your grade, with 5% being earned by submitting the Argument Paper and the Reply paper on time with appropriate effort, and the remaining 30% is a grade earned for the entire project upon final submission. It is the whole project, rather than each individual part, that receives a grade because the most important part of this project is that engage in continuous thinking, reflection, and engagement with your ideas - whether that means changing them, refining them, or defending them.

Rubric

	Exemplary (4.0)	Good (3.0)	Adequate (2.0)	Poor (1.0)
Understanding	The paper demonstrates a strong command of the discussed positions and ideas.	The paper demonstrates an understanding of the key ideas, but misses nuances.	The paper misunderstands one or more central positions or ideas.	The paper frequently misunderstands central positions or ideas.
Charity	The paper presents all views fairly, and in the best possible light.	The views are expressed fairly, but not always in their strongest form.	Views are misrepresented as being weaker than they really are.	Views are presented in clearly problematic ways inconsistent with the original texts.
Intellectual Creativity	The author frequently contributes his/her own ideas to the paper.	The author makes a novel contribution, but does not go far beyond his/her sources.	The author has a novel idea, but does not develop it with a supporting argument.	The author does not contribute any ideas of his or her own.
Soundness	The arguments presented in the paper are valid and based on true premises.	The paper's arguments are thoughtfully constructed, though have minor errors.	The central arguments of the paper are clearly invalid or rely on unsupported claims.	The paper makes little effort to make sound arguments, and instead simply asserts key claims.
Support	The paper supports all of its claims with relevant evidence.	The paper provides some, but not sufficient, evidence for its claims.	The paper fails to support key contentions with evidence.	The paper makes little effort to provide supporting evidence.
Clear Communication	The paper explains its jargon, and is free from syntactical and typographical errors.	The paper is readable and largely free from errors, but needs additional proof-reading.	The paper has errors which inhibit the clarity of the author's claims.	The paper makes frequent errors that inhibit readability.
Diligence	The paper draws on a range of sources, and makes use of important and relevant work.	The paper draws		

on a range of sources, and misses essential relevant work.|The paper draws on a limited number of sources and misses essential relevant work.|The author makes little effort to build off the relevant literature in the field.| |**Intellectual Humility**|The author's claims always match his or her evidence (not claiming more than his/her evidence shows).|The author occasionally makes claims that go beyond his/her evidence in subtle ways.|The author makes claims that go well beyond what his or her evidence actually shows.|The author makes claims that are not based upon supporting arguments.| |**Intellectual Honesty**|The author notes the contributions of others, and always uses their sources fairly.|The author always uses their sources fairly, but does not always accurately note the contributions of others (e.g., not using a proper citation format).|The author uses sources unfairly (e.g., taking quotes well out of context), and has an inadequate bibliography.|N/A (Papers with more substantive problems with intellectual honesty will be considered plagiarized).|

Resources

I've written several guides to reading, researching, and writing Philosophy papers. I highly recommend you take a look, even if you are a major: * Reading Philosophy * Doing Research in Philosophy * Writing Philosophy

Course Policies

Respect for your classmates

We are a community, and every one of us is a part of it. Contributing to a healthy community is important, both because it affirms that each of us belongs and has a place here at St. Lawrence and in Philosophy courses, but also because we all learn better when we feel we can trust each other. We can trust each other to listen and think carefully about what we say. We can trust each other to value us as people, and to respect our dignity. We can trust each other to challenge us, but to do so with humility, recognizing that we all get things wrong.

As part of upholding this community, I expect that you will: * Listen attentively while your classmates, or me, are talking. * Arrive to class on time * Show respect for your classmates, and avoid making disrespectful comments about their contributions, or showing clearly disrespectful body language in response to them. * Be welcoming of your classmates ideas and contributions, and avoid making aggressive comments targeting your classmates or any group of people.

Late Assignment Policy

Here's how I think about due dates: they are there for you. What does that mean? Well, one thing due dates help you do is structure your work, so that you are not hit with too many obligations at the same time. Another is that they help you learn how to work under a deadline, an experience you will have throughout your time at SLU and in your working life. Due dates also help make

sure you are prepared for class. My policies on due dates are based on these goals.

Daily quizzes cannot be made up or submitted late, because their purpose is to help you prepare for and engage in that day's class discussions. Recognizing, however, that things happen and you may need to miss class or might be less prepared than you would have liked to be, I will be dropping the two lowest quiz grades.

For the paper, you may need flexiblity. It's a big project and conflicts with other responsibilities may get in the way. Part of learning how to work under deadlines is planning ahead in a professionally responsible way to get more time. I am willing to grant extensions if you plan ahead and ask for one (at least 24 hours before the paper is due), but will refuse to grant an extension if you regularly ask for one (asking for more time in a professionally responsible way is perfectly reasonable, but developing a habit of needing it is not). When you ask for an extension, please specify how much extra time you will need. Please note that I will be less flexible with extra time on the argument paper, because your classmate writing a reply to you will need time to do that work.

Academic Honesty and AI Use

A major commitment of the University is "to the intellectual development of the student" (St. Lawrence University Aims and Objectives) which can be achieved only by strict adherence to standards of honesty. At St. Lawrence, all members of the community have a responsibility to see that these standards are maintained. Consequently, St. Lawrence University students will not engage in acts of academic dishonesty as described in the Academic Honor Code, contained in the Student Handbook.

As part of this policy, you may not use Generative AI tools (like ChatGPT or Google NotebookLM), except tools designed solely for grammatical improvement on text you have already written (such as Grammarly). However, you may not provide text into Generative AI tools like ChatGPT and ask it to rewrite or otherwise fix your text. Similarly, you cannot use Grammarly's advanced functions (such as those in the Pro version) that suggest and apply rewrites to your text. The difference is this: tools like Grammarly that provide local suggestions to fix particular pieces of writing, and which you can then decide to accept or not, still require you to make decisions about the appropriateness of particular changes, and to see why the change is suggested. Asking a LLM to fix or improve a block of text instead encourages you to trust a more extensive rewriting without understanding why it was rewritten in the way it was, or whether that rewrite improved your essay. Further, these tools often cause problems for philosophical thinking, since they attempt to bring your sentences in line with common ways of speaking which can introduce ambiguities in a precise style of writing like philosophy. You may not always know if your use of a grammatical tool counts as 'rewriting' or not - please remember you can

always ask me!

You may not use Generative AI to write text, summarize ideas, generate or brainstorm your own thesis or arguments, or outline your paper. The reason for this policy is that these are all foundational skills this class is designed to help you improve. Using AI effectively to do these tasks requires that you are able to do them as well, otherwise you will be unprepared to evaluate what the AI generates. You may or may not engage with AI in your writing processes outside of this class and outside of your time at St. Lawrence. This course will help you build the foundational skills to use these tools critically, and to evaluate how others use them.

Accessibility

It is the policy and practice of St. Lawrence University to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you have established permanent accommodations with the Student Accessibility Services (SAS) Office in the past and want to use them in your current courses, please activate your accommodations so you can discuss with your professors how they will be implemented.

If you do not yet have services through the SAS Office but have a disability or temporary health condition that requires accommodations, please contact them directly to start the process of requesting accommodations and to receive guidance with the next steps.

Contact information for Student Accessibility Services: Telephone: 315.229.5537
Email: studentaccessibility@stlawu.edu
Website: https://www.stlawu.edu/offices/student-accessibility-services

Title IX Statement

MEMBERS OF THE ST. LAWRENCE COMMUNITY—students, employees, and guests— should expect to be free from retaliation, discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct, behavior that is inherently abusive of the humanity that each of us brings to the campus community. St. Lawrence University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of discrimination, harassment, and sexual misconduct. St. Lawrence strongly encourages students to report retaliation, discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, or sexual assault to St. Lawrence University's Title IX office. Discrimination on the basis of sex includes discrimination on the basis of assigned sex at birth, sex characteristics, pregnancy and pregnancy related conditions, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

If you speak with a faculty member about an incident that involves a Title IX matter or matter of other discrimination or harassment, that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX Coordinator that you shared that experience. This is

true even if you ask the faculty member not to disclose the incident. Moreover, if you disclose an incident of retaliation, discrimination, harassment, or sexual misconduct in an academic assignment, the faculty member must also report that experience to the Title IX Coordinator.

Once a report is made, the reporting individual can expect to receive email outreach from the Title IX Coordinator, who will provide resources and possible resolution options. If the impacted person is not a threat to themselves or others, the impacted person will be free not to respond to the offer to meet. You can find more information for resources and reporting options at: https://www.stlawu.edu/offices/title-ix/reporting-options-confidential-and-nonconfidential-resources.

Title IX also protects students who are pregnant or need assistance for pregnancy related conditions. If you are pregnant, the Title IX Coordinator can assist you in understanding your rights and options as well as provide supportive measures. Lindsey Tropper (Cohen) is the Title IX Coordinator at St. Lawrence University (Student Center Room 302; lcohen@stlawu.edu; 315-229-5334).

Calendar

Unit One – Foundational Concepts in The Philosophy of Mind

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments Due
W. 1.15	Minds and Computers		
M. 1.20	Dualism	Carter, Ch. 1-2	
W. 1.22	Behaviorism	Carter, Ch. 3	Homework #1
M. 1.27	Identity Theory	Carter, Ch. 5	
W. 1.29	Functionalism	Carter, Ch. 6	Homework #2

Unit Two - Computability

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments Due
M. 2.3	Formal Systems	Carter, Ch. 7	
W. 2.5	Computability	Carter, Ch. 8	Homework #3
M. 2.10	Universal Machines	Carter, Ch. 9	

Unit Three – Computationalism and GOFAI

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments Due
W. 2.12	Computationalism	Carter, Ch, 10	
M. 2.17	Computationalism, Continued	Fodor, "Methodological Solipsism…"	
W. 2.19	Techniques	Carter, Ch. 11-12	Homework #4
M. 2.24	Machine Reasoning and Language	Carter, Ch. 13-14	
W. 2.26	Human Reasoning and Language	Carter, Ch. 15-16	Homework #5
M. 3.3	Meaning and Representation	Carter, Ch. 17-18	

Unit Four – Deep Learning and LLMs

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments Due
W. 3.5	Neural Networks	Carter, Ch. 19	Homework #6, Research Bank Due
M. 3.10	ChatGPT	Lee and Trott, "A Jargon-free…"	

W. 3.12	LLMs and Understanding	Titus, "Does ChatGPT have semantic understanding?"	Homework #7

Spring Break – No Class on 3/17 or 3/19

Unit Five – The Ethics of AI

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments Due
M. 3.24	Can AI be conscious?	Chalmers, "Could a Large Language Model be Conscious?"	
W. 3.26	Can AI be creative?	Brainard, "The Curious Case of Uncurious Creation"	Argument Outline Due
M. 3.31	Ethical AI Decision-Making	Geisslinger, et al. "Autonomous Driving Ethics"	
W. 4.2	AI and Moral Responsibility	Goetze, "Mind the Gap"	Peer Review of Outlines Due
M. 4.7	Deepfakes and Misinformation	Rini, "Deepfakes and the Epistemic Backstop"	
W. 4.9	Algorithmic Bias	Fazelpour and Danks, "Algorithmic Bias"	
M. 4.14	Epistemic Injustice and AI	Kay, et al. "Epistemic Injustice in Generative AI"	
W. 4.16	Group Presentation		Research Paper Draft
M. 4.21	Group Presentation		
W. 4.22	Group Presentation		
M. 4.28	Group Presentation		
W. 4.30	Wrapping Up		