

### Jason Potter

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Web Site: <http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/potter/index.aspx> (Please note: all handouts, along with lecture notes, reading and lecture plan and this syllabus are available at this web site or on the CU Learn site.)

Office Hours: 4:00-5:00 P.M. M-W-F; Hellems 15 (in the west basement of Hellems).

### Course Description

An introductory survey of seminal European philosophical works of the 17th and 18th centuries, including writings by Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, Berkeley, and Kant. This will take us from Rationalism, through Empiricism to Idealism, and then on to Kant's Transcendental Idealist cure for the shortcomings he found in each of these schools. Overall, we will concentrate on three central issues: the nature of reality; the nature of mind; and the nature of knowledge. This will lead us into various more specific topics, such as: appearance vs. reality; substance and attribute; the metaphysics of God; causality; self-consciousness, consciousness, and personal identity; the nature of mental representation (ideas); the mind-body problem; experience vs. reason; idealism vs. realism; and skepticism vs. certainty.

### Course Objectives

There are many reasons to study early modern philosophy. At the very least, the philosophical works you will read in this course form key links in the chain of thought which led to the modern, western, scientific account of the world and its fundamentally secular approach to human life. While there are many high ambitions lurking, I do have a set of "least" ambitions for our time and efforts here:

1. That you learn to identify arguments, the chief tool of philosophical work.
2. That you learn to express your thoughts clearly.
3. That you make progress in the fine art of assessing, analyzing and criticizing arguments.

4. That you leave here knowing a) what, generally speaking, the thinkers from Descartes to Kant were trying to accomplish; b) some of the tools they invented for the task; and c) why otherwise normal people like myself would boldly claim we cannot understand the modern, specifically western world if we do not understand what Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, Berkeley and Kant thought about the questions and problems we will study together in this course.

### Required Texts

1. Rene Descartes, *Meditations, Objections and Replies*, edited by Ariew and Cress
2. Gottlieb Leibniz, *Monadology*, translated by Simon Sparks (available on CU Learn)
3. John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Abridged/Edited with Introduction by Kenneth Winkler
4. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Second Edition
5. George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, edited by Robert M. Adams
6. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, abridged with Introduction by Eric Watkins, translated by Werner S. Pluhar.

Reading assignments are available online through the *Readings and Lectures* page schedule on the website, along with daily lecture topics and assignment dates.

Supplementary Packet (available on the website and on CU Learn), containing:

- (i) helpful hints for writing philosophy papers,
- (ii) a list of abbreviations used in grading papers,
- (iii) a model history-of-philosophy paper, and
- (iv) a very brief but amazingly informative survey of informal logic.

### Course Requirements & Percentage of Final Grade

(1) Attendance/Class Participation<sup>1</sup>

10%

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<sup>1</sup>Not everyone is amenable to public speaking and discussion, but unfortunately for those reticent to speak, philosophy is a discussion sport. If you can bring yourself to speak in class, you will find it easier to understand the issues and arguments, largely because we often do not know what we think until we try to say it or write it. It is also much more likely that I will detect and retain an awareness of your development as a student of philosophy, and as a thinking being, if you express yourself in speech. However, I will not consciously use class participation to decide a grade. Class attendance does count, and reaps an easy reward. Those who attend all but 2 classes or less get an automatic 100 for this 10% of the course. If you miss *any* classes beyond 2, this part of your overall grade begins to drop from 100 by 5 points for every class missed until you reach an F grade for that 10%.

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| (2) 10 Reading Summaries and 1 Group Reading Report <sup>2</sup> | 20% |
| (3) First Paper  | 25% |
| (4) Second Paper   | 25% |
| (5) Final (take-home)  | 20% |

Extremely Generous Rewrite Option:

You may rewrite your first paper, using criticisms and suggestions on the graded paper as a guide, and then turn it in at the final exam date for the course; the grade you receive on the revised paper will replace the grade you originally received. Never *assume* that just because you make changes to the original paper, I will necessarily raise your grade. I may notice deficiencies I missed in the first reading. Therefore, if you choose to revise the paper, make a serious stab at those revisions recommended!

Notes on Course Requirements:

(1) The first paper will be on one of a list of assigned possible topics drawn from our readings in Descartes, Locke and Leibniz. The second paper will be on topics drawn from our readings in Hume, Berkeley and Kant. Paper topics will be available on the website well in advance of their due dates. All papers must be typed, whether on paper or in digital file format, and turned in by 5:00 p.m. on the due date either to my office, my mailbox in Hellems 169, or through paper's assignment item on CU Learn. Late papers, other things being equal, are a Really Bad Thing.

(2) Since a philosophical essay is *not* like other kinds of essays you may have written in college (or elsewhere), it is strongly recommended that before preparing your papers, you read very carefully the helpful hints for doing philosophy papers, the list of abbreviations used in grading papers, and the model history-of-philosophy paper (all to be found in the supplementary packet available at the Reserve Desk in Norlin). I do assume that you have already learned how to write essays in English.

(3) The final exam will be a comprehensive, take-home, open-book exam covering the entire course. It will consist of 10 yes/no questions, 10 short-answer questions, and one long essay question (taken from four possible essay questions given to the class in advance).

**Clarifications, Rules of the Road, Regrettable Necessities & Errata**

(1) What your grade means:

A: Superior work

B: Good work

C: Work with some strengths, balanced against clear weaknesses

D: Work with few strengths, many weaknesses

F: Work that brings CPR to mind (and I don't mean the Critique of Pure Reason)

(2) Late papers are a Really Bad Thing. The usual excusing conditions must exist if I am to make exceptions to this rule: earthquake, civil emergency, Ebola outbreak, hospitalization, and the like.

(3) Breaches of academic honesty will receive the harshest allowable university penalty. However, I do think it is worth noting that to cheat in philosophy is to cheat yourself, since you undermine the potential development of your own mind (which *is the point of any education worth having*).

(4) You are responsible for the entire reading assignment--not just what we discuss in class.

(5) Reading assignments in philosophy tend to be both challenging and time consuming. You might want to take this into account when planning your spring semester. This course is as difficult as any technical course you take (calculus, for example). Do not assume it is a cakewalk....you will regret that assumption later.

(6) Readings should be done prior to the class for which they are assigned. If this involves a range of days, you should have everything read by the first day in the range.

(7) Total points possible: 100.

(8) What to expect from me: prompt and honest feedback, clear lectures, sufficient contact outside class (e.g., office hours, e-mail, the web site).

(9) Since the institution of privacy protections for students in the late 1990s, it is no longer possible to leave papers in the Philosophy Department office for distribution to those who are not in class the day that an assignment is returned. *It is your responsibility to get your assignments back* if you are not there the day I return your work. I suggest you email me when you are hopeful that I will bring work to class that has been returned on some previous date, so that I can bring it to the next class session. Since students often do not pick up their final papers, please let me know in advance if you would like detailed comments on yours (otherwise, I will only grade, not comment). Also, if you want your final paper returned to you, please give me a self-addressed, stamped envelope for that purpose when handing in the paper in December.

(10) I am happy to discuss grades with you after assignments are returned, but please save these discussions for office hours.

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<sup>2</sup> To be explained in class on the first day.

(11) Arrangements to extend deadlines for papers, to be excused for class absences, etc., can only be made in person. *Do not email me about these things* except to warn me about a problem and to arrange a meeting to discuss them.

(12) This syllabus is subject to revision.

### **Assignment Schedule**

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| Reading Summaries: | See Schedule of Lecture Topics (available on CU Learn or the course website)   |
| Group Reports:     | See Schedule of Lecture Topics (available on CU Learn or the course website)   |
| First Paper:       | Topics available September 23 on CU Learn, paper due October 24 by 5:00 p.m.   |
| Second Paper:      | Topics available October 28, paper due December 2 by 5:00 p.m.   |
| Final Exam:        | Distributed December 11 via CU Learn, due at 1:30 p.m. on December 14 in Hellems 177 (Optional Revised Paper due same day by 5:00 p.m. in my office or mailbox). |

### **Disability Statement**

If you have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Disability Services Office in Willard 322 (phone 303-492-8671).

### **One Last Thing**

Since I find it very helpful to speak with each of you at least once, there will be required, short (10-minute) meetings during office hours the first three weeks of the semester to discuss your progress. I will bring a sign-up sheet with me to class during the first week so you can arrange a time and date that suits you. Don't put this off too long, or we will have a buffalo stampede that will make all of us grumpy.