

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)

Office Hours: 1:00-1:50 p.m. M-W, Hellems 15 (west basement), 2:00-2:50 p.m. Fridays in Hellems 164B.

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 cure (called Transcendental Idealism) for the shortcomings he found in each of these. 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 such specific topics 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 fine reasons to study philosophy. I will not attempt to persuade you of these here (we will discuss the value in studying the modern period in philosophy on our first day together). 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. 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 important elements in the modern, specifically western world if we do not understand what Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, Berkeley and Kant thought about the questions and problems raised in this course.

Required Texts

Central Readings in the History of Modern Philosophy, edited by Cummins & Owen, 1991 (Wadsworth). Some copies of this book are available at the CU Bookstore (or the bookstore on the Hill), but others are available through Amazon, and I will be arranging for a book packet through the CU Bookstore that will be ready sometime during the second week of classes. Meantime, I will upload Descartes' *Meditations* to the class website so students unable to find the book right away can begin the readings.

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), 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) Attending/Participating in Class ¹	10%
(2) 5 Quizzes and 1 Group Report	25%
(3) Midterm	25%
(4) A Philosophical Journal (x2)	15%
(6) Takehome Final Exam	25%

Notes on Course Requirements:

(1) There will be five in-class, ten-minute quizzes. The first quiz will be on Descartes, the second on Leibniz, the third on Locke, the fourth on Hume, the fifth on Kant. The dates of these quizzes will be outlined as outlined in the Schedule of Lecture Topics, Readings, and Dates for Papers and Examinations.

(2) The philosophical journal consists of your ongoing to attempt to consider the questions and problems being raised in the writings of these philosophers, and to reflect seriously on them and attempt to work through some of the problems they pose. These will be collected and graded twice during the semester, once after midterms, the other during the final examination period.

(3) The group report will consist of a synopsis of the main ideas contained in the reading for the class day on which the group report is due. There will be as many of these group reports as can be fit into the semester, and the group sizes, dates of presentation for each, and which students belong to which groups, will be determined by the beginning of the second week of classes.

(4) The midterm will consist of 10 yes/no questions, 10 short-answer questions, 2 reading identifications and one long essay on one of three topics that will be known two weeks in advance of the test. The takehome final will have the same format.

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

(2) Late written assignments are A Really Bad Thing (this includes reading reactions and journal submissions). The usual excusing conditions must exist if I am to make exceptions to this rule: earthquake, civil emergency, Ebola outbreak, hospitalization, or an movie-of-the-week sad story.

(3) Breaches of academic honesty will receive the harshest allowable university penalty.

(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 semester.

(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: 1,000.

(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) Let us take a one-day "cooling off" period following receipt of grades for each assignment.

(10) This syllabus is subject to revision.

¹Not everyone is amenable to public speaking and discussion. Philosophy is a discussion sport, as you may have discovered if you have read Plato's dialogues, and as you will discover during this course. 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. However, I will not use class participation to decide a grade. Class attendance does count, and reaps an easy reward. Those who attend all but 3 classes or less get an automatic A for this 10% of the course. If you miss *any* classes beyond 4, you should come see me about the information you have missed, and it would be wise to check on the web site for my lecture outlines, as well as with your classmates who may have notes they are willing to share.

Assignment Schedule

Group Reports: TBA

Quizzes: TBA

Journals: March 9, May 2

Midterm: March 12

Takehome Final: May 5, 4:30 pm in our classroom

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 month of the semester to discuss your progress. I will bring a sign-up sheet with me to class and 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.