

Jason Potter

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Web Site: <http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/potter/> (Please note: all handouts, along with lecture outlines, study guides and this syllabus are available at this web site.)

Office Hours: 12:00-12:50 P.M. MWF; Hellems 274.

Course Description

A 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 traditions. 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

Readings will either be available online through the *Readings and Lectures* page schedule on the website, along with a daily lecture topic and readings schedule, with assignment dates. Two copies of the first edition and one copy of the second edition of Cummins, R. and D. Owen (eds.), Central Readings in the History of Modern Philosophy. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999 are on 2-hour reserve at Norlin.

Supplementary Packet (available on the web site, or for copying on reserve at Norlin), 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 ¹	10%
(2) First Paper (7 pgs)	30%
(3) Second Paper (7 pgs)	30%
(4) Final exam (takehome)	30%

¹Not everyone is amenable to public speaking and discussion. Since I assume you have all taken philosophy courses before, you know that 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 A for this 10% of the course. If you miss *any* classes beyond 2, your grade begins to drop for this part of the course. 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.

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 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 handed out at least 2 weeks in advance of their due dates. All papers must be typed, on paper, and turned in by 5:00 p.m. on the due date either to my office or to my mailbox in Hellem 169. Emailed, digital copies do not count. 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.

(3) The final exam will be a comprehensive, takehome, open-book exam covering the entire course. It will consist of 10 yes/no questions, 10 short-answer questions, and one long essay question.

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 the 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.

(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

First Paper: Topics available September 25, paper due October 26
Second Paper: Topics available Oct. 30, paper due December 4
Final Exam: Distributed December 15 via CU Learn, due at 8:30 a.m. on Dec. 17 in HLMS 229
(Optional Revised Paper due same day by 5 pm 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.

Schedule of Lecture Topics, Readings, and Dates for Papers and Examinations

Note: if a reading is listed for a particular date, that's the date on which you must have the reading done!

Week Topic, (Reading)

Week #1

Aug. 24 (1) Introduction, (2) syllabus, (3-16) some historical, cultural and intellectual background concerning the early modern period (1620-1796) (List of philosophers)

Aug. 26 Why study the history of modern philosophy? Background to the *Meditations*: (1) mechanism vs. teleology; (2) Geometry of Matter vs. Rich Phenomenal Life World; (3) the Mathesis Universalis; (4) the 'frameworks clash' in *The Meditations*; (5) short refresher on validity and soundness (No readings--Logic Handout; History handout)

PART I: RATIONALISM

Aug. 28 Meditation 1: The quest for certainty, methodological skepticism, and the critique of common sense. (READINGS: Meditation I; OBJREP.ZIP 63-67)

Week #2

Aug. 31 Meditation 2: The cogito and the nature of the ego. (READINGS: Meditation II; OBJREP.ZIP 68-77)

Sep. 2 Med. 2 continued: the wax, Descartes' truth criterion and the role of rational intuition in applying it; Background for Meditation 3: Descartes' taxonomy of ideas, the distinction between objective and formal reality, and the grades of being. (READINGS: Meditation II *continued*; Handout #1—SAVE THE HANDOUTS!)

Sep. 4 Meditation 3: Stepping through Descartes's proof for God's existence from the nature of ideas. (READINGS: Meditation III; OBJREP.ZIP 78-89; plus Handout #2 & 2Suppl)

Week #3

Sep. 7 Labor Day (no class)

Sep. 9 Meditation 3 continued: Criticism of Med. III proof, Other Proofs, the Cartesian Circle. (bring Handouts 2 & 2Suppl with you)

Sep. 11 Meditation 4: Why God isn't a deceiver; how error is possible. (READINGS: Meditation IV; OBJREP.ZIP 90-94)

Week #4

Sep. 14 Meditation 4 cont'd/Meditation 5: The nature of the external world, Descartes's Med. 5 "ontological" proof for God's existence, and the role of Med. 5 in preparing for Med. 6's proof for the existence of an External World (EW). (READINGS: Meditation V; OBJREP.ZIP 95-106, plus Handout #3)

Sep. 16 Meditation 6: The existence of the external world and the mind-body problem. (READINGS: Meditation VI; OBJREP.ZIP 107-115)

Sep. 18 Meditation 6 cont'd: wrapping up Descartes. Intro to Leibniz. (no new readings)

Week #5

Sep. 21 Leibniz's world: The Monadology. (READINGS: To Come Online)

Sep. 23 More on Leibniz's world (same readings)

Sep. 25 Leibniz' most famous argument: The actual world is the best of all possible worlds! (Handout #4) (Same readings)

****First Paper Topics Available on Web/CU Learn.****

Week #6

Sep. 28 You ain't nothing but a Pangloss: Critical analysis of Leibniz's argument. Introduction to Locke. (Same reading.)

PART II: EMPIRICISM

Sep. 30 Locke against innate ideas. (READINGS: 111-124)

Oct. 2 More on Locke against innate ideas. (same readings)

Week #7

Oct. 5 Locke on acquired ideas and mental powers. (READINGS: 127-129 (§9 inclusive), 134-138top (plus pp. 135-139 of Cummins/Owen First Edition [On Reserve at Norlin], i.e., Book II, Chapter XI), 142-146top (plus pp. 150-152 of First Edition [On Reserve at Norlin], i.e., Book II, Chap. XXII)

Oct. 7 Locke on acquired ideas and mental powers. (no new readings; Handout #5)

Oct. 9 Locke on qualities and substances (READINGS: 138top-142middle, 155-166)

Week #8

Oct. 12 Locke's critique of substance (no new readings)

Oct. 14 Locke on consciousness and personal identity. (READINGS: 129-134, 166-176)

Oct. 16 Family Weekend (no class)

Week #9

Oct. 19 Introduction to Hume's revisionary empiricism: "mental geography" (READINGS: 325-335)

Oct. 21 Hume's theory of ideas (same readings; Handout #6a)

Oct. 23 Hume's critique of metaphysical and epistemological realism about causation: "Just one thing after another" (READINGS: 335-357)

Week #10

Oct. 26 Hume's positive account of causation (same readings)
****First Paper Due****

Oct. 28 Critical analysis of Hume's theory of causation. (same readings)

Oct. 30 Hume on Induction (no new readings; Handout #6b)
****Second Paper Topics Available On Web/CU Learn****

Week #11

Nov. 2 How Hume became a skeptic about the external world (no new readings)

Nov. 4 Finishing Hume: mitigated skepticism and the 'common life'; Introduction to Berkeley's extreme reaction to Locke, known as Phenomenalism or Berkeleyan Idealism (READINGS: 279-297)

Nov. 6 Berkeley on material substance: are there mind-independent bodies in space? (READINGS: 297-307)

Week #12

Nov. 9 Berkeley on existence: *esse is percipi*; if so, how is a *persisting world possible*? (READINGS: 307-323)

Nov. 11 Berkeley on abstraction; critical analysis of Berkeley's idealism (same readings)

PART III: BEYOND RATIONALISM AND EMPIRICISM

Nov. 13 The Old problem of Objectivity: Kant's Copernican revolution and the reconciliation of rationalism and empiricism and the New problem of Objectivity. (READINGS: 393-416, plus Handouts #7-#8)

Week #13

Nov. 16 The Strategy of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (same readings...bring Handouts #7 & #8!)

Nov. 18 The Transcendental Aesthetic and transcendental idealism. (READINGS: 416-427)

Nov. 20 Kant's proofs that math'l (geometric and arithmetic) judgments are synthetic a priori (same readings)

Week #14

Nov. 23 Fall Break (no classes)

Nov. 25 Fall Break (no classes)

Nov. 28 Thanksgiving (no classes)

Week #15

Nov. 30 From the Transcendental Aesthetic to The Refutation of Idealism: Kant's reply to Descartes and Berkeley.
(READINGS: 454-456)

Dec. 2 From the Logical Deduction/Metaphysical Deduction to the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories.
(READINGS: 427-439)

Dec. 4 The Transcendental Deduction. (READINGS: 439-454)
****Second Papers Due****

Week #16

Dec. 7 Transcendental Deduction cont'd (no new readings)

Dec. 9 The Second Analogy: Kant's reply to Hume. (READINGS: 456-463)

Dec. 11 LAST DAY OF CLASS: Special Review Session for Final Exam.

Dec. 15 Takehome Exam distributed via CU Learn.

Dec. 17 Final Exam due 8:30 a.m. HLMS 229, followed by ... CAKE PARTY!