

PHI 202: History of Modern Philosophy

Connecticut College, Spring 2016
TuTh 10:25-11:40 a.m., 205 Blaustein

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Office: 326 Blaustein
Office Hours: TuTh 12-1 p.m. at
the Blue Camel Café, *or* by
appointment.

I. Course Description

Can we *really* know that anything exists outside of our minds? What, for that matter, *is* the mind, and what is its relation to the body? Does God exist? If God exists, what *is* God (is God human-like, or not at all)? What does sense perception reveal, and what are its limits? What does it mean to say that striking a match *causes* a flame to occur? Do you have any good reason to believe that the sun will rise tomorrow? What, if anything, can we know through reason alone?

These questions lie at the foundation of contemporary philosophical inquiry. How we approach these questions today is largely indebted (whether we know it or not!) to how these and other questions arose and evolved during the extraordinarily rich philosophical climate that flourished in Western Europe in the early modern era (roughly, the 17th–18th centuries). This period in philosophy arose alongside, and was deeply informed by, revolutionary advancements in science that eventually led to the overthrow of what had been the dominant philosophical-scientific worldview in Western Europe for centuries (a blend of Christian theology and Aristotelian science).

This course provides a survey of the works of six major figures central to the development of Western philosophical thought in that era: Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. We will study some of their major works in *metaphysics* (the branch of philosophy that deals with, roughly, the nature and existence of *things*) and *epistemology* (the branch of philosophy that deals with, roughly, how we *know* things). We will compare the different ways that philosophers of the early modern era take up and respond to questions in these two domains. We will also examine how these questions, and the parameters of the debates surrounding these questions, were understood in the historical contexts in which they arose, and how they evolved over time.

II. Course Goals

1. *Reading Philosophy*. You will learn how to identify a thesis in a philosophical piece of writing, as well as the arguments offered in support of it, or offered as objections to it.
2. *Writing Philosophy*. You will learn how to reconstruct, explain, and evaluate philosophical arguments.
3. *Mastering Content*. You will develop a broad understanding of the views and arguments of some of the major Western philosophers of the early modern era, by coming to see how these views and arguments arose within their historical contexts and learning how to assess them on their own terms.

III. Texts

The texts listed below should all be in the college bookstore. If you plan on ordering these books online, please make sure to search by the ISBN I've listed; it is important that you use the editions listed here. In the electronic version of the syllabus, the ISBNs are hyperlinked to the books at Amazon.com.

- René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, ed. John Cottingham (Cambridge University Press, 1996). ISBN: [0-521-55818-2](#)
- Benedict Spinoza, *The Ethics: Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (Hackett, 1991). ISBN-13: [978-0-87220-130-9](#)
- John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (abridged), ed. Winkler (Hackett, 1996). ISBN-13: [978-0-87220-216-0](#)
- George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, ed. Merrihew Adams (Hackett, 1979). ISBN: [0-915144-61-1](#)
- David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Hackett, 2nd edn, 1993) ISBN-13: [978-0-87220-229-0](#)

Optional, but recommended:

- Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Kemp Smith (Palgrave Macmillan, 2nd edn., 2007). ISBN-10: [0230013376](#)

Note: The only reason that Kant's *Critique* is optional is that we will be reading only a relatively small part of this enormous book. (The *Critique* is also a bit pricier than the other books required for the course.) I will upload copies of the text onto Moodle when the time comes.

IV. Course Requirements

Breakdown of final grade (see below for details on each)

1. Attendance and participation, 10%.
2. Weekly reading exercises, 10%.
3. Paper 1 (400-600 words, ~1-2 single-spaced pages), 10%
4. Paper 2 (400-600 words, ~1-2 single-spaced pages), 10%
5. Paper 3 (600-800 words, ~2-2.5 single-spaced pages), 15%
6. Paper 4 (800-1,000 words, ~2-3 single-spaced pages), 20%
7. Final paper (1,500-3,000 words, ~4-7 pages), OR final exam, 25%.

1. Attendance and participation, 10%. I will be keeping track of attendance. If you miss more than four class sessions (which is equivalent to 2 weeks of class!) without giving me any prior notification, you may fail the course even if you complete all the assignments.

You will also be expected to participate and be actively engaged in discussion. This includes regularly asking questions, responding to other students' questions, and contributing

in other ways toward making our classroom a safe, respectful space in which every student can feel comfortable expressing his/her thoughts and asking questions.

2. Weekly reading exercises, 10%. Every Tuesday, there will be a short graded exercise. There will be 12 exercises (one per each week of instruction, minus the first and last weeks of the semester). All exercises will be graded on a pass/no pass (P/NP) basis.

The exercises may vary. Exercises may include short quizzes on the reading assigned for that day; reconstructions of a small argument in a given piece of provided text; or critical reactions to some aspect of the reading assigned for that day. The purpose of these weekly exercises is to make sure you've done the reading, as well as to prime you to be actively engaged in the main topic of discussion for that day. Carefully doing the reading for that day should be sufficient preparation for these exercises; there won't be any "curveball" questions).

Your final grade for this portion of the course will be determined by the percentage of exercises that you pass. You can miss/not pass up to 2 exercises *without any penalty*. This means that the percentage of exercises you pass in the course is equal to the number of exercises you pass divided by 10.

This allows you the opportunity to get extra credit! Maximum extra credit possible is 11/10 quizzes.

Note: If I notice that people are not keeping up with the reading for Thursday's class, or are not showing up as frequently to Thursday's class, I will start to do exercises on Thursdays, *in addition* to Tuesdays. I will then readjust the numbers listed above.

3. Papers, 55% total. You will have four papers, relatively short in expected length, over the course of the semester. These papers gradually increase in terms of complexity and length. This component of the course is central to the course goal of getting you to develop your skills at identifying, reconstructing, explaining, and evaluating philosophical arguments. The structure of each paper is described below:

1. Paper 1. (400-600 words) Pick an argument from Descartes and explain it. Then, pick one of the objections to Descartes (preferably one listed on the syllabus, but if you want to consider a different official objection in the book, ask me). Reconstruct the argument that underlies the official objection, and explain *how* exactly it is (supposed to be) an objection to Descartes's argument. (10%)
2. Paper 2. (400-600 words) Pick and explain an argument from any philosopher we've considered so far in this course. Then, explain how that argument responds, in some way or other, to a *different* view or argument we've considered in this course (making sure to also explain this different view/argument). For example: How does one argument constitute an *objection* to another, and if so, how? Or, how does one argument *build on* the first? There are other possibilities as well; the only requirement is that the two come from the readings and have some interesting relationship to one another. When you write your paper, be very clear about exactly what that relationship is. (10%)
3. Paper 3. (600-800 words) Pick and explain one argument, and *evaluate* that argument. Evaluating an argument means that you will have to provide reasons for why we ought to reject (or accept) the argument you've explained. This might involve arguing that one of the premises in the argument is false. Or it might involve arguing that the premises do not support the conclusion. (15%)

4. Paper 4. (800-1,000 words) Pick and explain two arguments, each from a different philosopher, and explain how these two arguments are related to one another. (This part has the same structure as Paper 2.) In addition, *evaluate* the argumentative exchange you've just explained. (20%)
- For example, suppose that the second argument you explain is an *objection* to the first. Then, you should say whether or not you think that objection *succeeds*, and so, whether or not we should we accept the objection. Explain *why* you think the objection succeeds, or doesn't.
 - Alternatively, suppose that the second argument you explain *builds on* the first argument. Then, you should say whether or not we should accept one or both of these arguments, or not. *Why* should we, or should we not, accept one or both of these arguments?

Note that these papers allow you the freedom to pick any arguments you find interesting in the course up to the due date of the paper (no skipping ahead!). The one constraint is that you cannot *repeat* a view/argument in more than one paper.

4. Final (25%). You have the choice of either a final exam or a final paper.

- The final exam will consist of short essay questions (think: a few paragraphs per question), plus one somewhat longer essay. I will provide a study guide.

- The final paper will be based on a topic of your choosing (which you will have to get approved by me). You will be expected to carefully reconstruct and analyze *at least* one of the philosophical views we've examined in this course, as well as provide an evaluative stage, where you will argue that we ought to accept or reject (or modify, or expand on) the view(s) you've discussed in your paper. This evaluative stage should include some argumentative back-and-forth; you might, for example, explain what a *potential objection* to the evaluative claim you've made might be; why that potential objection might be persuasive; and why it doesn't succeed. The final paper should be 1,500-3,000 words.

V. Class Policies

• **Laptops.** I don't allow the use of laptops in class. Studies have shown that using laptops to take notes is less effective than writing notes by hand, impeding long-term memory and comprehension. (See, e.g., Mueller and Oppenheimer (2014).) Laptop use can also be distracting – to you, to your classmates, and to me.

Accommodations can be made for those who, for medical reasons, need to use laptops for note-taking. Please get in touch if this applies to you.

• **Late papers.** All papers should be emailed to me by 11:59 p.m. on the due date. Every day that your paper is late, your paper grade will go down a "step." (For example, if your paper is one day late, then if your paper is an A paper, you will get an A-.) I will accept late papers up to 5 days after the due date; after 5 days, you will receive a zero on the assignment.

If you require an extension, please get in touch with me no later than 48 hours in advance of the deadline. I will not assign extensions after that period, unless you can provide me with a written note from your dean, or documentation for a medical or family emergency.

- **Re-writes.** You are allowed, but not required, to re-write Paper 1 and/or Paper 3. I've listed due dates for re-writes on the class schedule, below. If you choose to re-write a paper, your initial grade, and your re-write grade, will be averaged. No extensions will be granted for re-writes.

- **Grades.** How are final grades calculated? First, the letter grades for each element of the final grade are converted into a number on the 4.0 scale. (A = 4.0, A- = 3.7, B+ = 3.3, B = 3.0, and so on). Second, these numbers are weighted to reflect the percentage of each element of the final grade. (For example, if you have an A for attendance/participation (10%), that is $4.0 \times .10 = .4$.) Finally, those weighted numbers are summed. That number is then converted back to a letter grade, and that is roughly your final grade. I'm happy to keep you updated on your current grade in the class. Just ask.

You may receive a "slash grade" on an assignment (e.g., B/B+). Slash grades also correspond to a precise number on the 4.0 scale (e.g., a B/B+ = 3.15).

VI. Miscellaneous Notables

- **The Amount of Required Reading.** You may notice that the *number of pages* of required reading per class meeting is often minimal; Descartes's *Meditation 1*, for example, is just 12 paragraphs long! Though the writing is short, it is often extremely dense. You should read the required reading more than once in order to get a good sense of what's going on.

- **Office Hours.** At a small college like ours, office hours are an important extension of the classroom. In office hours, we can talk one-on-one about philosophical problems you want to understand better, or about how to improve your philosophical writing, or anything else related to philosophy (which is pretty much anything!).

- **Writing Clinics.** I plan on occasionally holding writing clinics outside of the classroom. You are not required to go to these, but you are highly encouraged to do so! Learning how to identify, reconstruct, and evaluate arguments is one of the most valuable and translatable skills that professional philosophers have to offer. In our writing clinics, you will get a crash course on, e.g., how to identify (and avoid making!) common logical fallacies; how to extract an argument from messy and disorganized bits of text; how to identify necessary and sufficient conditions; how to put an argument into logical form; and so on.

These clinics will be advertised to all students in philosophy, so they will also be good opportunities to get to know other majors/minors/philosophy enthusiasts! Dates/locations to be announced soon.

V. Campus Policies

Statements have been provided by the college.

- **The Connecticut College Honor Code**

Academic integrity is of the utmost importance in maintaining the high standards of scholarship in our community. Academic dishonesty is considered to be a serious offense against the community and represents a significant breach of trust between the professor, the classmates, and the student. There are many forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, submitting the same work in two courses without prior approval, unauthorized

discussion or distribution of exams or assignments, and offering or receiving unauthorized aid on exams or graded assignments. Students violating the Honor Code may be referred to the college's Honor Council for resolution.

- **Office of Student Accessibility Services**

If you have a physical, mental, or learning disability, either hidden or visible, which may require classroom, test-taking, or other reasonable modifications, please see me as soon as possible. If you have not already done so, please be sure to register with the Office of Student Accessibility Services. You can do so by going to the Office of Student Accessibility Services, which is located in the Academic Resource Center (ARC) on the second floor of Shain Library in Room 236, or by contacting the Office at 860-439-5240 or 860-439-5428, or by email to sas@conncoll.edu.

- **The Academic Resource Center**

The Academic Resource Center (ARC) offers services to support your academic work, such as study skills workshops, time management, coaching, and tutoring. Our offices are located on the second floor of Shain. Please visit us or call 860-439-5294 for more information or to schedule an appointment.

- **The Roth Writing Center**

The Roth Writing Center provides one-to-one peer tutoring (free of charge) to help student writers of all abilities during all stages of the writing process. To make an appointment, call x2173 or stop by the Writing Center at 214 Blaustein. If you're a confident, experienced writer, we can help you to push your ideas and polish your style; if you're a relatively inexperienced and not-so-confident writer, we can also help you, by working on grammar or organization or whatever you need. Writing Center tutors are trained to help you to discover what you think through writing. Working with a tutor gives you the opportunity to share your work-in-progress with an actual reader, so that you can get useful feedback on that work *before* you have to turn it in for a final grade. For further information, visit the Writing Center web page at <http://write.conncoll.edu/>.

- **Title IX Statement**

As a faculty member, I am deeply invested in the wellbeing of each student I teach. I am here to assist you with your work in this course. If you come to me with other non-course-related concerns, I will do my best to help.

It is important for you to know that all faculty members are mandated reporters of any incidents of gender-based discrimination. This means that I cannot keep information confidential about sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, or other forms of gender-based discrimination. Darcie Folsom, the Director of Sexual Violence Prevention and Advocacy, can advise you confidentially, as can Counselling Services and any of the College chaplains. Darcie can also help you access other resources on campus and in the local community. You can reach Darcie at 860-439-2219 or darcie.folsom@conncoll.edu, and her office is in Cro 222.

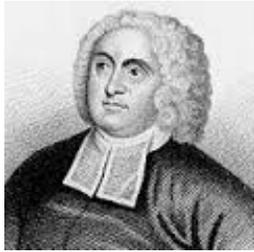
Policies on student sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, and non-discrimination policies are in the Student Handbook, which can be found on Camelweb, in the "Documents/Policies" section, under the Student Life section.

Course Schedule

Schedule is subject to revision

Date	Topic	Readings
Tu 1/26, Week 1	Introduction to the course	No readings
Th 1/28	Historical background, Descartes's aims in the Meditations	Descartes's "Dedicatory Letter to the Sorbonne," pp. 3-6. <i>Optional:</i> Descartes's Synopsis of the Meditations, pp. 9-11
Tu 2/2, Week 2	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>DESCARTES</u> (1596-1650)</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">The method of doubt</p>	Descartes, <i>Meditation I</i>
Th 2/4	The cogito	1. Descartes, <i>Meditation II</i> (focus on everything up to AT 29) 2. Objections (in the section, "Cogito ergo sum") and Descartes's replies, pp. 68-70.
Tu 2/9, Week 3	The wax, and Descartes's theory of ideas	1. Descartes, <i>Meditation II</i> (AT 30-end) 2. Descartes, <i>Meditation III</i> (up to AT 40)
Th 2/11	The cosmological proof of the existence of God	Descartes, <i>Meditation III</i> (to end) 2. Caterus's objection ("Objective reality"), pp. 84-85.
Tu 2/16, Week 4	Belief and the will	Descartes, <i>Meditation IV</i>
Th 2/18	The essence of body & the ontological proof of God's existence	1. Descartes, <i>Meditation V</i> 2. Caterus's objection (unlabeled on the page, but in the section, "Whether God's essence implies his existence"), pp. 97-99.

Tu 2/23, Week 5	The real distinction between mind and body	1. Descartes, <i>Meditation VI</i> (up to AT 81) 2. Arnauld's objection ("The real distinction between mind and body"), p. 108, beginning with "So far as I can see..." to p. 110.
Th 2/25	Mind and body interaction	1. Descartes, <i>Meditation VI</i> (to end) 2. (Handout) Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia's objection and correspondence with Descartes Paper 1, Due Monday, 2/29
Tu 3/1, Week 6	<u>SPINOZA</u> (1632-1677)  The geometrical method; proof that no two substances share an attribute	<i>Ethics</i> , Book 1, Props 1-5
Th 3/3	Proof of monism	<i>Ethics</i> , Book 1, Props 6-15
Tu 3/8, Week 7	Mind-Body Parallelism	<i>Ethics</i> , Book 2, Props 1-13
Th 3/10	<u>LOCKE</u> (1632-1704)  Innate ideas	<i>ECHU</i> Book I, sections i-ii, and section iv <i>Optional:</i> Re-write for Paper 1 due Monday, 3/14

Tu 3/15, Week 8	SPRING BREAK!	
Th 3/17		
Tu 3/22, Week 9		
Th 3/24		
Tu 3/29, Week 10	Locke's theory of ideas, and primary and secondary qualities	<i>ECHU</i> Book II, sections i and viii
Th 3/31	Ideas of substances, knowledge of God	<i>ECHU</i> Book II, section xxiii <i>ECHU</i> Book IV, section x Paper 2, Due <u>Friday</u>, 4/1
Tu 4/5, Week 11	BERKELEY (1685-1753)  The relativity arguments	First Dialogue (to p. 30)
Th 4/7	Against matter	1. First Dialogue, continued (pp. 30-42) 2. Second Dialogue, p. 50 (from Hylas: "I think I understand you very clearly...") to end.
Tu 4/12, Week 12	Proof of the existence of God	1. Second Dialogue, p. 45 (first line) – p. 50 (middle of page) 2. Third Dialogue
Th 4/14	HUME (1711-1776)  Hume's theory of ideas	<i>Enquiry</i> II-III Paper 3, due <u>Monday</u>, 4/18

Tu 4/19, Week 13	Causation & inductive inference	<i>Enquiry IV</i>
Th 4/21	Inductive inference, continued	<i>Enquiry IV-V</i>
Tu 4/26, Week 14	Necessary Connection	<i>Enquiry VII</i>
Th 4/28	Hume's critique of arguments for the existence of God	1. <i>Enquiry XI</i> 2. Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> , Appendix to Book I Optional: Paper 3 re-write due Friday, 4/29
Tu 5/3, Week 15	KANT (1724-1804)  The project of Kant's <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>	1. <i>Critique</i> , Preface to the Second Edition; 2. <i>Critique</i> , Introduction, Sections I-III
Th 5/5	The possibility of synthetic a priori judgments	<i>Critique</i> , Introduction, section IV to end Paper 4, Due Monday, 5/9
Tu 5/10, Week 16	Space and time	<i>Critique</i> , Transcendental Aesthetic, Section I (pp. 65-74)
Th 5/12		Review

**** Final papers/exams** must be completed by the last day of finals:
For graduating seniors, that is Monday, May 16 by 5 p.m.;
For everyone else, that is Wednesday, May 18 by noon.