

Philosophy 58: Modern Philosophy (Descartes through Kant)

Fall 2008; Section 1: Caldwell Hall 105

Monday and Wednesday, 6:00-7:15pm

Instructor: Ted Parent

Email: tparent@email.unc.edu

Office: Caldwell Hall 210B

Phone: 919-962-3329

Office Hours: Monday 5:00-6:00pm, Thursday 1:00-2:00pm, and by appointment.

This is a survey of some major philosophers from the 17th and 18th century, with special attention to the metaphysical and epistemological writings of Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. We will attempt to appreciate these writings in their historical context, but also try to assess the arguments for ourselves.

Texts:

Atherton, Margaret. *Women Philosophers in the Early Modern Period*, Hackett, 1994.

Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3rd ed. trans. D. Cress; Hackett, 1993.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Nidditch; Oxford, 1975.

Berkeley, George. *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, Hackett, 1979

Hume, David. *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*; Hackett, 1977.

Kant, Immanuel. *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Carus/Ellington; Hackett 1977.

Course Assignments:

(1) **Every Thursday** (with a few exceptions; see below), there will be an in-class writing assignment (about a paragraph in length) on the reading for that week. Satisfactory performance on these assignments is a requirement for the course, which means that unsatisfactory performance can lower your final grade. However, exemplary performance on these assignments can also act as “extra credit” to boost your final grade.

(2) Paper (maximum length is 5 pages) due **Oct. 17th** worth 1/3 of the final grade.

(3) Paper (max length 5 pages) due **Nov. 14th** worth 1/3 of the final grade.

(4) Paper (max length 5 pages) due **Dec. 12th** worth 1/3 of the final grade.

N.B. Excellent or poor participation/attendance will also affect your final grade.

No late assignments accepted, unless you can provide hard evidence of a legitimate emergency.

NO LAPTOPS IN CLASS. Philosophy often requires a LOT of concentration, and laptops provide too much opportunity for distraction. Relatedly, *please do not be late and remember to turn off your cell phone.*

Despite the policies in boldface, if you have special needs because of a disability (learning disability, attention deficit disorder, psychological, physical, etc.), we can certainly make different arrangements. But please talk to me as soon as possible.

The Virginia Tech Honor Code <http://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/constitution.html> is in effect for this class.

The grading scale for the course is as follows (raw scores will be rounded):

Percentage	Letter Grade	G.P.A. scale
94-100	A	4.0
90-93	A-	3.75
88-89	B+	3.5
83-87	B	3.0
80-82	B-	2.75
78-79	C+	2.5

73-77	C	2.0
70-72	C-	1.75
68-69	D+	1.5
63-67	D	1.0
60-62	D-	0.75
59 and below	F	0.0

Reading philosophy is hard. That's why I recommend reading the weekly material *twice*. But as a first reading, it is sufficient to skim the texts, just to get a sense of the main ideas. After that, read the material again *carefully*. Your earlier skimming should provide a basic "framework" that allows you to process better what you read.

During your second reading, it's best to *read with a pen and note the points of interest*. I do NOT recommend mere underlining/highlighting. Rather, it's best to read as if you were *engaged in a conversation* with the author: Raise questions, ask for clarification, and levy criticisms in the margins. This practice effectively prepares you for class discussion and the assignments.

Be forewarned that the clear majority of my feedback on your work will be critical. Of course I strive to be courteous nonetheless. Yet *please* do not take any of my criticisms personally! Loads of critical feedback is simply how academic philosophy operates. And in this class, the purpose of this is *certainly* not to belittle or discourage you, but to hone your writing/thinking skills.

Speaking of courtesy, I *insist* that discussions proceed in a respectful and well-mannered fashion. Philosophy is difficult, and no one should be made to feel stupid. Relatedly, taking an aggressive tone is inappropriate. It usually signals that the goal is to "win" a dispute, rather than to cooperate in a mutual endeavor to seek the truth. I reserve the right to tell you to leave the session if you violate these basic norms of courtesy.

Tentative Schedule

* indicates a week where there will no in-class writing assignment.

*WEEK ONE

Aug. 31 Introductory session.

WEEK TWO: Descartes

Sept. 5, 7 *Meditations One and Two*.

WEEK THREE: Descartes

Sept. 12, 14 *Meditation Six*; Elisabeth of Bohemia, selections from *Correspondence with Descartes*.

WEEK FOUR: Locke

Sept. 19 *Essay*, Bk. I, chs. 1, 2, 4.

Sept. 21 *Essay*, Bk II, chs. 1, 2, 8, 23, 33.

WEEK FIVE: Locke

Sept. 26 *Essay*, Bk IV, chs. 1, 2, 3 (§§1-6 only), 4.

Sept 28 *Essay*, Bk III, chs. 1, 3; Catharine Cockburn, selections from *A Defense of Mr. Locke's Essay of Human Understanding*.

WEEK SIX: Berkeley

Oct. 3, 5 *First and Second Dialogue*.

WEEK SEVEN: Berkeley

Oct. 10, 12 *Second Dialogue (cont')*; *Third Dialogue*.

*WEEK EIGHT

Oct. 17 Berkeley (cont'). **First paper due Oct 17th**

Oct. 19 **FALL BREAK**

WEEK NINE: Hume

Oct. 24, 26 *Enquiry*, §§1-3

WEEK TEN: Hume

Oct. 31 *Enquiry*, section 4

Nov 2 *Treatise*, Bk. I, Pt. 4, §6; Appendix, §§10-21 [available on Scholar].

WEEK ELEVEN: Hume

Nov. 7 *Treatise*, Bk. I, Pt. 4, §6, Appendix , §§10-21 (cont')

Nov. 9 *Enquiry*, sections 10-11; Lady Mary Shepherd, selections from *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe*.

*WEEK TWELVE: Kant

Nov. 14, 16 *Prolegomena*, Preface and Preamble. **Second paper due Nov. 14th**

WEEK THIRTEEN: Kant

Nov. 21, 23 *Prolegomena*, First Part and Second Part

WEEK FOURTEEN: Kant

Nov. 28, 30 *Prolegomena*, Second Part (cont') and Third Part

*WEEK FIFTEEN: Kant

Dec. 5, 7 *Prolegomena*, Third Part (cont'); Conclusion

Final paper due on Monday, Dec 12 in Caldwell Hall 105.