Course Syllabus

Modern Philosophy (PHIL 3317 A)
Time: Tuesday, Thursday 11:00 AM-12:15 PM
Location: Strake 206

Professor John Boyer
Office: Sullivan 205
Office Hours: Monday & Thursday 10:00 AM-11:00 AM
boyerj@stthom.edu

Goals

The Modern period of philosophy is one of the most important in the development of Western thought. Beginning with Descartes, the so-called “Father of Modern Philosophy,” philosophers of the modern period are notable for their rejection of the ancient and medieval tradition and attempts to start anew. This class will cover seven of the most important figures in the Modern period of philosophy: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkley, Hume, and Kant. Our readings will focus on the epistemological and metaphysical teachings of each philosopher, since these form the foundation for the political, ethical, and scientific thought of the period.

By the end of the course, students should be familiar with the major tenants of each philosopher. Students should understand the development of modern philosophy from Descartes through Kant and be able to give explain how each philosopher relates to this development. Students should also be able to explain how the modern period represents a break from the Ancient and Medieval periods of philosophy. Students are also expected to understand the Thomistic critique of this period found in Gilson’s Unity of Philosophical Experience.

Required Materials


All other readings will be provided on Blackboard in the form of PDFs.

Assignments and Grading

This class requires two papers, a midterm, a final exam, and class participation. In the first paper, the student will analyze one of the main arguments of Descartes. In the second paper, the student will analyze Hume’s critique of causation. Full prompts will be posted on BlackBoard. Papers will be due by end of day on 3/03 and 5/05 respectively.
Final Grade Breakdown and Grade Scale

Papers: 40%
  First Term Paper: 20%
  Second Term Paper: 20%
Exams: 50%
  Mid-Term: 25%
  Final Exam: 25%
Attendance/Participation: 10%

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Attendance and Participation

One of the best ways to learn is to ask questions and to discuss them. This is definitely true of philosophy. Since most students will not have taken any philosophy classes before, questions and discussion are encouraged. Participation has three components:

1. Students must attend every class. If you cannot attend class, you must notify me ahead of time and provide a valid reason for your absence.
2. Students must do all assigned reading and are required to bring the assigned text to class.
3. Students must come prepared with questions about the material and be ready to answer questions and/or participate in class discussions.

Electronic distractions such as computers, smartphones, and tablets (e.g. iPads) may not be used at all during class without the professor’s permission. Students may record lectures if they wish.

Academic Dishonesty

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any student caught plagiarizing or cheating will automatically fail the class and be reported to Student Affairs, per University guidelines. Plagiarism is defined as presenting someone else’s work as your own. This includes paraphrasing an author’s words without attribution. For suggestions about paraphrasing and information on when and how to cite a text to which you are referring, I recommend visiting this guide: http://pleasecampusguides.stthom.edu/plagiarism.

Disabilities

Any student with a documented disability needing academic accommodations is requested to speak with me as early as possible. All discussions are confidential. Students with disabilities will also need to contact Counseling and Disability Services in Crooker Center. The phone number for Counseling and Disability Services is (713) 525-2169 or Ext. 6953.

Disclaimer: This syllabus is subject to change at the professor’s discretion.
Reading Schedule

As a 3000 level course, this class requires a large amount of reading. You are expected to be able to cover a large amount of material and understand it. When reading, try to take away the main points, which we will go over in class. In addition to reading the primary sources, we will also be reading Etienne Gilson’s classic work *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* in order to provide a Thomistic critique of the modern period. This reading schedule is provisional. If you miss a class, you are liable to miss updates to what we are reading for the next class.

**Week 1**
1/18 Descartes: *Discourse on Method*, Parts 1-3

**Week 2**
1/23 Descartes: *Discourse*, Parts 4-6
   Gilson: *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, Ch. 5
1/25 Descartes: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations 1-2

**Week 3**
1/30 Descartes: *Meditations*, Meditations 3-4
2/01 Descartes: *Meditations*, Meditations 5-6

**Week 4**
2/06 Hobbes: *Leviathan*, Selections (PDF)
2/08 Spinoza: *The Ethics*, Definitions & Propositions 1-16

**Week 5**
2/13 Spinoza: *The Ethics*, Propositions 17-42
2/15 Leibniz: *Discourse on Metaphysics*

**Week 6**
2/20 Leibniz: *Discourse on Metaphysics*
2/22 Locke: *Essay on Human Nature*

**Week 7**
2/27 Locke: *Essay on Human Nature*
3/01 NO CLASS (Prof. Boyer Out of Town)
3/03 First Paper Due

**Week 8**
3/06 Locke: *Essay on Human Nature*
3/08 MID-TERM

**Week 9**
3/13-15 SPRING BREAK (No class)

**Week 10**
3/20 Berkley: *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Selections

**Week 11**
3/29 Easter Break (No Class)

**Week 12**
4/03 Berkley: *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue
4/05 Hume: *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

**Week 13**
4/10 Hume: *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*
4/12 Hume: *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Selections

**Week 14**
4/17 Kant: *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*
4/18 Kant: *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*

**Week 15**
4/24 Kant: *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*
4/26 Gilson: *Unity*, Ch. 6-7

**Week 16**
5/1 Gilson: *Unity*, Ch. 8-9
5/3 Gilson: *Unity*, Ch. 12
5/5 Second Paper Due