 Philosophy 206: History of Early Modern Philosophy

Class meets Monday, Wednesday and Friday 2:40-3:55 PM in ???

Your host: Prof. Michael P. Wolf
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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 9:00-11:00 and by appointment

Required Texts

From Descartes to Locke, Smith and Grene, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967).

Both of these books are currently in stock in the book store. There will also be a series of additional readings handed out as photocopies in class, and these readings are noted on the syllabus. To the greatest extent possible, I will try to give you all of these readings in one packet early in the semester.

What Is This Course About?

The Modern period in Western philosophy is an era sandwiched between the Renaissance in Europe and the last half of the nineteenth century. Its scope and shape were profoundly affected by the cultural and intellectual currents that preceded it and in one way or another, the disparate strands of contemporary philosophy are all either descendants of it or reactions against it. For the first time since ancient Greece, the philosophers of this period were not employed by or directly under the control of religious authorities. This led to an openness to new sorts of arguments and philosophical projects on the one hand and a new sense of rigor to secure the requisite sort of knowledge on the other. Most scholars think of Descartes's Meditations as the first great work in this epoch, and feel that it closes with the linguistic turn in analytical philosophy, such as the writings of Gottlob Frege in the 1880s.

Some of the most interesting work in this period is in metaphysics - the theory of what the world is like in its most basic forms and what exists at all - and in epistemology - the theory of knowledge. These topics will be the focus of our course. There is also a great deal of interesting literature on ethics, moral philosophy, political philosophy and aesthetics, but our time is too short to address all of these topics adequately. Most of the philosophers we will look at thought of their views on those topics as outgrowths of the epistemological and metaphysical accounts they offered, so this course can be thought of as a grounding in the details that underlie those other views. We also will stop short of the last phase of the modern period because it would require a reading of the German philosopher Hegel, whose works are notoriously dense thickets of Teutonic jargon. We will focus on getting a picture of the earlier authors instead.

As all of this might suggest, the focus of this course will be on historical detail and not on original critique and analysis. In some classes, I might give you an argument and ask you why it is false. In this class, I will usually offer you one author's argument and ask you to figure out why or how another author objected to it or might have objected to it. Although your insights are always welcome and I would be very excited to hear that you had worked through an argument in a way that had not been presented to you, the first order of business in this class is attention to historical detail. Having said that, the scope of this course does preclude its being a genuine history course. In a genuine history course, we would try to reconstruct the intellectual debate and discourse in which all of these views took shape. For instance, to figure out why Kant is concerned with the conditions for the possibility of experience, we would read not only Descartes, Locke and Hume, but also less
famous figures like Malebranche and Anslem, selections from whole schools of thought like the Scholastics, and the most prominent of his contemporaries like Christian Wolff and Isaac Newton. The volume of material would soon overwhelm us. Instead, this class is a sort of survey of the most important philosophical trends of the time and how they were motivated by one another's strengths and shortcomings.

Assessment

Class participation is an important issue to me, especially in a small class like this. I expect you to come to class with the readings done and ready to discuss them. With this in mind, 10% of your grade will be your participation in class. In this, I will include how regularly you attended class, how much you contributed to discussion, the occasional short writing assignment and anything else you might bring to the fore.

Over the course of the quarter, you will also have to write two papers of about 4000 words, which works out to about 8-10 pages in Times 12-point double spaced with one-inch margins. The two assignments will correspond roughly with the two halves of the course. I will offer you a set of paper topics well in advance of the due date and you may choose from there. You may also suggest your own paper topic and write on it SO LONG AS YOU CLEAR THE TOPIC WITH ME FIRST. Each one of these papers will be worth 45% of your final grade. More information on the assignments and how to approach these papers will be available in class.

A Tentative Syllabus

Class 1. January 3: Introduction

Part 1: Epistemology

Class 2. January 5: The Rationalists
Read Descartes Meditations on First Philosophy (DL, pp. 49-113)

Class 3. January 8: The Rationalists
Read Descartes Meditations on First Philosophy (DL, pp. 49-113)

Class 4. January 10: The Rationalists
Read Descartes Meditations on First Philosophy (DL, pp. 49-113)

Class 5. January 12: The Rationalists
Read Leibniz's "Critical Remarks Concerning..." (handout)

Class 6. January 17: The Rationalists
Read Leibniz's "Critical Remarks Concerning ..." (handout)

Class 7. January 19: The Empiricists
Read selections from Locke An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (DL, pp.345-438)

Class 8. January 22: The Empiricists
Read selections from Locke An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (DL, pp.345-438)

Class 9. January 24: The Empiricists
Read Hume, selections from the Treatise (BHK, pp. 106-156, 182-200) An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, §8 (handout)
Class 10. January 26: The Empiricists
Read Hume, selections from the Treatise (BHK, pp. 106-156, 182-200) An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, §8 (handout)

Class 11. January 29: The Empiricists
Read Hume, selections from the Treatise (BHK, pp. 106-156, 182-200) An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, §8 (handout)

Class 12. January 31: Kant and Transcendental Idealism
Read Kant Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Preamble, Parts 1, 2 (BHK, pp.262-324)

Class 13. February 2: Kant and Transcendental Idealism
Read Kant Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Preamble, Parts 1, 2 (BHK, pp.262-324)

Class 14. February 5: Kant and Transcendental Idealism
Read Kant Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Part 3, Conclusion and "Solution..." (BHK, pp. 325-364)

Class 15. February 7: Kant and Transcendental Idealism
Read Kant Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Part 3, Conclusion and "Solution..." (BHK, pp. 325-364)

Class 16. February 9: Kant and Transcendental Idealism
Read Kant Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Part 3, Conclusion and "Solution..." (BHK, pp. 325-364)

Part 2: Metaphysics and Substance

Class 17. February 12: Mind and Body
Read Leibniz's Monadology (handout) and Descartes's Meditations 1, 2 and 6

Class 18. February 14: Mind and Body
Read Leibniz's Monadology (handout) and Descartes's Meditations 1, 2 and 6

Class 19. February 16: Simplicity, Substance and the Soul
Read Kant "Paralogisms of Pure Psychology", parts 1-3 (handout)

First Paper Due February 16 - Click here for topics

Class 20. February 19: Simplicity, Substance and the Soul
Read Hume A Treatise of Human Nature (BHK, pp.215-221)

Class 21. February 21: Substance and Dependence
Read Descartes "Principles of Philosophy" §51-69 (handout)

Class 22. February 23: Substance and Dependence
Read Leibniz, "Critical Remarks Concerning Descartes's Principles" (corresponding sections)

Class 23. February 26: Substance and Dependence
Read Spinoza, Part 1 of Ethics (DL, pp. 255-91), especially Propositions 4-8, 13 and 14
**Class 24. February 28:** Substance and Dependence
Read Spinoza, Part 1 of *Ethics* (DL, pp. 255-91), especially Propositions 4-8, 13 and 14

**Class 25. March 2:** Phenomenalism or Skepticism?
Read Berkeley *Three Dialogues* (BHK, pp. 5-95)

**Class 26. March 5:** Phenomenalism or Skepticism?
Read Berkeley *Three Dialogues* (BHK, pp. 5-95)

**Class 27. March 7:** What Are Space and Time?
Read selections from The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence (handout)

**Class 28. March 9:** What Are Space and Time?
Read selections from The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence (handout)

*Second Paper Due March 16 - Click here for topics*