

Omar Fakhri

Modern Philosophy

Course Description:

This is an introductory course in modern philosophy. History will be an important component of this class, but this class is a *philosophy* class first and foremost. It is designed to introduce students to philosophy through primary texts written by influential modern philosophers from the western tradition. There are no required prerequisites.

We will begin the course by looking at the fall of the scholastic-Aristotelian system. The rejection of substantial forms and teleology lead to a rebirth of atomistic conceptions of reality, or as it was called in the early modern period, *corpuscularianism*. This atomistic conception was meant to overthrow the old conception and be the new foundation for the new science that we see developing around this time. Descartes, often understood to be the father of modern philosophy, is a paradigmatic example of someone trying to build a rock-solid foundation for the new science. However, the search for a foundation for the new science and the overthrow of the old scholastic-Aristotelian system came with its own problems. One of the most pressing and reoccurring problems is the problem of skepticism: how do we find a hook from our mind to the external, mind-independent, world. In this class, we will consider important modern thinkers who struggled to rebuild a new system or foundation for the new science and respond adequately to the problem of skepticism.

The aim of this class is twofold. The first is for you to learn modern philosophy. The second is for you to take your first step as a philosopher. In our daily lives, it is okay to accept things because that's how things happen to be. But when we enter the philosophy classroom, we want to think hard about our assumptions and why we accept the views that we accept. Like Descartes and the other modern philosophers, we want to question our assumptions and see whether our views and commitments are built on a rock-solid foundation.

Learning Goals:

- Be able to clearly and concisely exposit arguments in premise-conclusion form.
- Be able to critically assess arguments by either objecting directly or indirectly to a specific premise(s), or by showing that the argument is fallacious.
- Be able to understand, state, and describe the main historical problems and positions discussed in the reading and in lecture.
- Be able to write a well-developed philosophy paper that explains the key moves in a given argument and critically evaluate it.
- Be able to articulate and provide reasons for one's own position or lack thereof.

Required Text:

Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources (2nd edition), eds. Ariew and Watkins.

Course Requirements:

- Section Grade 10% – Section attendance and participation is mandatory. Come to sections (and class) having done all the assigned reading.
- Two Papers 20% each – These papers will typically be on a specific part of the reading. The prompt will ask you to expound an argument or a view and to critically evaluate it. Each paper will be about 3 double-spaced pages, with 12pt font and regular margins.
- Précis 15% – A précis is a concise and clear summary of the main claims and arguments of a given text. Being able to identify the main moves and arguments in a difficult text and putting them in your own words is an important skill to have. *The précis should not be shorter than 500 words and no longer than 600 words* double-spaced. The word limit range is important because it will force you to make difficult choices about what to include or exclude in the précis. It will also force you to write concisely and to avoid being verbose.
- Final Paper 35% - The final paper will function as your final for the class. It will ask you to compare and contrast the views or arguments for two or more of the readings. The paper will be about 5-6 double-spaced pages, and it will be due the day your final exam is scheduled.

*LATE ASSIGNMENTS: There is a 1/3 letter grade penalty for every *class*-day a paper is late (e.g. suppose a paper is due on Friday and you turn it in the following Wednesday and the paper receives a B+, then because it is late it will receive a 2/3 letter grade deduction, which means that the paper will receive a B-).

Tentative Schedule:

* = hangout

Week	Readings and Assignments due
1	The fall of the scholastic-Aristotelian system Deely, <i>Medieval Philosophy Redefined</i> , ch. 11* The new science: the experimenters Galileo, <i>Dialogue on the Two World Systems</i> (selections), “Corpuscularianism” Bacon, <i>The New Organon</i> , book 1 The rationalists: Foundation for the new science Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> I-III
2	Foundation (continue) Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> IV-VI Elizabeth correspondence (selections) Necessitarianism Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> I-II Occasionalism Malebranche, <i>Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion</i> , 1-7
3	Précis is due Windowless monads Leibniz, <i>Monadology</i> , <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> (selections) The best possible world Leibniz’s summary of <i>Theodicy</i> The empiricists: Locke’s epistemology and metaphysics

	Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> , selections from books 1 and 2
4	<p>First Paper is due</p> <p>Locke's epistemology and metaphysics (continue) Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i>, selections from book 4 Immaterialism as response to skepticism Berkeley, <i>A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge</i> (selections) Berkeley, <i>Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous</i> (selections)</p>
5	<p>Second Paper is due</p> <p>Space-time Newton, <i>Mathematical Principles</i> (selections)* Leibniz-Clarke correspondence Skepticism: human understanding Hume, <i>Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i>, parts 2-7 Skepticism: morals Hume, <i>Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i>, parts 8 and 10 Skepticism: religion Hume, <i>Dialogues on Natural Religion</i>, parts 2-5, 10-13</p>
6	<p>Final Paper is due</p> <p>Moral sentiments Shaftesbury, <i>An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit</i> (selections) Response to Hume: Reid on skepticism and morality Reid, <i>Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man</i> (selections from Essays 1-3) Kant on pure reason Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>, Preface and Introduction</p>