

Jason Potter

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Web Site: <http://philophizer.com/index.html> (Please note: all handouts, along with lecture notes, readings and lecture plan, and this syllabus, are available at this web site or on the Canvas site.)

Office Hours: 10:00–12:00 P.M. T-Th, in Muenzinger D-120 (or by appointment).

Course Description

A survey of seminal European philosophical works of the 17th and 18th centuries, including writings by Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, Berkeley, and Kant. This will take us from Rationalism, through Empiricism to Idealism, and then on to Kant's Transcendental Idealist cure for the shortcomings he found in each of these traditions. Overall, we will concentrate on three central issues: the nature of reality; the nature of mind; and the nature of knowledge. This will lead us into various more specific topics, such as: appearance vs. reality; substance and attribute; the metaphysics of God; causality; self-consciousness, consciousness, and personal identity; the nature of mental representation (ideas); the mind-body problem; experience vs. reason; idealism vs. realism; and skepticism vs. certainty.

Course Objectives

There are many reasons to study early modern philosophy. At the very least, the philosophical works you will read in this course form key links in the chain of thought which led to the modern, western, scientific account of the world and its fundamentally secular approach to human life. While there are many high ambitions lurking, I do have a set of “least” ambitions for our time and efforts here:

1. That you learn to identify arguments, the chief tool of philosophical work.
2. That you learn to express your thoughts clearly.
3. That you make progress in the fine art of comprehending and then assessing, analyzing and criticizing philosophical texts.
4. That you leave here knowing a) what, generally speaking, the thinkers from Descartes to Kant were trying to accomplish; b) some of the tools they invented for the task; and c) why otherwise normal people like myself would boldly claim we cannot *fully* understand the modern, specifically western political, cultural, intellectual worlds if we do not understand what Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, Berkeley and Kant thought about the questions and problems we will study together in this course.

Required Texts

1. Rene Descartes, *Meditations, Objections and Replies* (available in Canvas and Course Website).
2. Gottlieb Leibniz, *Monadology*, translated by Simon Sparks (available in Canvas and Course Website).
3. John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Abridged/Edited with Introduction by Kenneth Winkler.
4. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Second Edition, Eric Steinberg editor.
5. George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, edited by Robert M. Adams.
6. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Marcus Weigelt, Penguin Classics.

Reading assignments are available online through the *Readings and Lectures* page schedule on the website (and in Canvas), along with daily lecture topics and assignment dates.

Supplementary Packet (available on the website and in Canvas), containing: (i) helpful hints for writing philosophy papers; (ii) a list of abbreviations used in grading papers; (iii) a Checklist to be filled out before submission of any essay assignment; (iv) a model history-of-philosophy paper, and (v) a very brief but amazingly informative survey of informal logic.

Course Requirements & Percentage of Final Grade

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| (1) Attendance/Class Participation ¹ | 10% |
| (2) 10 In-Class Quizzes (2% each) and 1 Group Reading Report ² (5%) | 25% |
| (3) First Paper | 20% |
| (4) Second Paper | 20% |
| (5) Final Exam (in-person) | 25% |

Extremely Generous Rewrite Option:

You may rewrite your first paper, using criticisms and suggestions on the graded paper as a guide, and then turn it in at the final exam date for the course; the grade you receive on the revised paper will replace the grade you originally received. Never *assume* that just because you make changes to the original paper, I will necessarily raise your grade. I may notice deficiencies I missed in the first reading. Therefore, if you choose to revise the paper, make a serious stab at those recommended revisions!

¹Not everyone is amenable to public speaking and discussion. Since you have all taken at least two philosophy courses before, you know that philosophy is a discussion sport. If you can bring yourself to speak in class, you will find it easier to understand the issues and arguments, largely because we often do not know what we think until we try to say it or write it. It is also much more likely that I will detect and retain an awareness of your development as a student of philosophy, and as a thinking being, if you express yourself in person. However, I will not consciously use class participation to decide a grade. Class attendance does count, and reaps an easy reward. Those who attend all but 2 classes or less get an automatic 100 for this 10% of the course. If you miss *any* classes beyond 2, this part of your overall grade begins to drop from 100 by 5 points for every class missed until you reach an F grade for that 10%.

² To be explained in class on the first day.

Notes on Course Requirements:

(1) The first major assignment consists either in an In-Class Midterm Exam (samples of which to be provided through Canvas to familiarize students with its format) or a First Paper. The former will cover the Descartes and Leibniz Units *plus* Locke's attack on the doctrine of innate ideas. The First Paper will be on one of a list of assigned possible topics drawn from our readings in Descartes, Locke and Leibniz. The second major assignment will be a Second Paper, an essay on an assigned set of possible topics drawn from our readings in Hume, Berkeley and Kant. Paper topics will be made available through the associated Canvas assignment folders for the First and Second Papers, respectively, well in advance of the papers' due dates. All papers must be typed and **stored in MS Word word processing format** before being uploaded in Canvas. **If you use Pages, export the original to MS Word before uploading the result of the export process. If you work in Google Docs, the procedure is this: download the Google document in MS Word format to your hard drive, and then upload that file.** Do not send me essays in PDF format, as these are unnecessarily difficult to comment on and my handwriting is too terrible to grade hard copies based on PDFs! All papers are due by 11:59 p.m. on their due dates in the respective paper's assignment folder in Canvas. Late papers, other things being equal, are a Really Bad Thing.

(2) Since a philosophical essay is *not* like other kinds of essays you may have written in college (or elsewhere), it is strongly recommended that before preparing your papers, you read very carefully the helpful hints for doing philosophy papers, a checklist you should go through before submission of any paper for this course, a list of abbreviations I use in grading papers, and a model history-of-philosophy paper (all to be found in the supplementary packet on the course website).

(3) The final exam will be a comprehensive exam covering the entire course and will be taken in-person on the date determined by the Registrar (which won't be settled for a few weeks, but be known by the third or fourth week of the semester). It will consist of 10 yes/no questions, 10 short-answer questions, and one long essay question (taken from four possible essay questions given to the class in advance of the final exam meeting). A sample of such a final (but for PHIL3000) will be provided in Canvas.

Clarifications, Rules of the Road, Regrettable Necessities & Errata

(1) What your grade means:

A: Superior work; **B:** Good work; **C:** Work with some strengths, balanced against clear weaknesses; **D:** Work with few strengths, many weaknesses; **F:** Work with no strengths not offset by clear and compelling weaknesses.

(2) Late papers are a Really Bad Thing. The usual excusing conditions must exist if I am to make exceptions in your case.

(3) Breaches of academic honesty will receive the harshest allowable university penalty. However, I do think it is worth noting that to cheat in philosophy is to cheat yourself, since you undermine the potential development of your own mind (which *is the point of any education worth having*).

(4) You are responsible for the entire reading assignment—not just what we discuss in class.

(5) Reading assignments in philosophy tend to be both challenging and time consuming. You might want to take this into account when planning your spring semester. This course is as difficult as any technical course you take (calculus, for example). Do not assume it is a cakewalk ... you will regret that assumption later.

(6) Readings should be done prior to the class for which they are assigned. If this involves a range of days, you should have everything read by the first day in the range.

(7) Total points possible for the course: 100.

(8) What to expect from me: prompt and honest feedback, clear lectures, sufficient contact outside class (e.g., office hours, e-mail, Canvas, and/or the course website).

(9) Since not all students wish to receive graded final papers with comments, please let me know in advance if you would like detailed comments on yours. Otherwise, I will only grade, not comment. All final exams and papers are returned in Canvas once graded. I do not comment on Final Exams but all are marked to indicate where points, if any, were lost.

(10) I am happy to discuss assignment grades with you after they are returned, but let's talk during office hours or on the phone.

(11) If you need to request an extension on an essay, the chance to take a quiz you missed, hope to be excused for one or more absences, or to make me aware of a situation in your personal life that you think I should be aware of, if you prefer to email me rather than speak to me in person, use the Canvas email system, **not my CU Boulder email address**. I get too many emails each day from non-university sources, whereas, Canvas emails come through and are always from students (rather than from spammers, companies I do business with, friends of mine, etc.). This makes it very unlikely that I will miss an important message from you sent through Canvas email. In cases where you need to reach me **very soon/immediately, just text me at 720-252-0643**. That will more consistently get my attention short of actually coming to talk to me in person.

(12) This syllabus is subject to revision.

Assignment Schedule

Quizzes/Group Reports: See Schedule of Lecture Topics, Readings and Dates for Papers, Quizzes, Group Reports and Exams.

First Paper: Topics available Feb. 13 in Canvas Assignments, paper due Mar. 22 by 11:59 p.m. in Canvas Assignments.

Second Paper: Topics available Mar. 27 in Canvas Assignments, paper due at 11:59 p.m. April 27 in Canvas Assignments.

Final Exam: To be taken In-Person in our classroom on **(TBD)** in 2.5 hours as eventually indicated in the Canvas Assignments list or in the Schedule of Lecture Topics, Readings and Dates for Papers, etc., on the course website. (Optional Revised Paper due May 3 by 11:59 p.m. in the appropriate Canvas Assignments folder).

One Last Thing

Since I find it very helpful to speak with each of you at least once, there will be required, short (10-minute) meetings during office hours the first three weeks of the semester to discuss your progress. I will bring a sign-up sheet with me to class during the first week so you can arrange a time and date that suits you. Don't put this off too long, please.

University-Required Syllabus Statements

Classroom Behavior

Students and faculty are responsible for maintaining an appropriate learning environment in all instructional settings, whether in person, remote, or online. Failure to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation, or political philosophy. For more information, see the [classroom behavior policy](#), the [Student Code of Conduct](#), and the [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance](#).

Requirements for Infectious Disease

Members of the CU Boulder community and visitors to campus must follow university, department, and building health and safety requirements and all applicable campus policies and public health guidelines to reduce the risk of spreading infectious diseases. If public health conditions require, the university may also invoke related requirements for student conduct and disability accommodation that will apply to this class.

If you feel ill and think you might have COVID-19 or if you have tested positive for COVID-19, please stay home and follow the [guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) for isolation and testing](#). If you have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19 but do not have any symptoms and have not tested positive for COVID-19, you do not need to stay home but should follow the [guidance of the CDC for masking and testing](#).

Accommodation for Disabilities, Temporary Medical Conditions, and Medical Isolation

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services to your faculty member in a timely manner so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Information on requesting accommodations is located on the [Disability Services website](#). Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition, see [Temporary Medical Conditions](#) on the Disability Services website.

If you have a required medical isolation for which you require adjustment, please notify your faculty member.

Preferred Student Names and Pronouns

CU Boulder recognizes that students' legal information doesn't always align with how they identify. Students may update their preferred names and pronouns via the student portal; those preferred names and pronouns are listed on instructors' class rosters. In the absence of such updates, the name that appears on the class roster is the student's legal name.

Honor Code

All students enrolled in a University of Colorado Boulder course are responsible for knowing and adhering to the [Honor](#)

[Code](#). Violations of the Honor Code may include but are not limited to: plagiarism (including use of paper writing services or technology [such as essay bots]), cheating, fabrication, lying, bribery, threat, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty.

All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution: honor@colorado.edu, 303-492-5550. Students found responsible for violating the Honor Code will be assigned resolution outcomes from the Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution as well as be subject to academic sanctions from the faculty member. Visit Honor Code for more information on the academic integrity policy.

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation

CU Boulder is committed to fostering an inclusive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. University policy prohibits [protected-class](#) discrimination and harassment, sexual misconduct (harassment, exploitation, and assault), intimate partner violence (dating or domestic violence), stalking, and related retaliation by or against members of our community on- and off-campus. These behaviors harm individuals and our community. The Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) addresses these concerns, and individuals who have been subjected to misconduct can contact OIEC at 303-492-2127 or email cureport@colorado.edu. Information about university policies, [reporting options](#), and [support resources](#) can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Please know that faculty and graduate instructors must inform OIEC when they are made aware of incidents related to these policies regardless of when or where something occurred. This is to ensure that individuals impacted receive outreach from OIEC about resolution options and support resources. To learn more about reporting and support for a variety of concerns, visit the [Don't Ignore It](#) page.

Religious Accommodations

Campus policy requires faculty to provide reasonable accommodations for students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. Please communicate the need for a religious accommodation in a timely manner. See the [campus policy regarding religious observances](#) for full details.

Mental Health and Wellness

The University of Colorado Boulder is committed to the well-being of all students. If you are struggling with personal stressors, mental health or substance use concerns that are impacting academic or daily life, please contact [Counseling and Psychiatric Services \(CAPS\)](#) located in C4C or call (303) 492-2277, 24/7. Free and unlimited telehealth is also available through [Academic Live Care](#). The Academic Live Care site also provides information about additional wellness services on campus that are available to students.