

Jason Potter

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

Office Hours: 1:00-2:00 (sometimes to 3:00) P.M. MTWThF; Zoom Meeting ID: 915 5145 1671.

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 these precursor philosophies. 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 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; sensory experience vs. reason (as sources of knowledge); idealism vs. realism; and skepticism vs. certainty.

Course Objectives

There are many fine reasons to study philosophy. I will not attempt to persuade you of these here (we will discuss the value in studying the modern period in philosophy on our first day together). 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 the 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 assessing, analyzing and criticizing arguments.
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 understand important elements in the modern, specifically western world if we do not understand what Descartes, Locke, Hume, Berkeley and Kant thought about the questions and problems about which they spilled so much ink.

Required Texts

Meditations, Objections and Replies, by Rene Descartes (Ed. Roger Ariew); *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, by John Locke (Ed. Kenneth Winkler); *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, by David Hume (Ed. Eric Steinberg); *Critique of Pure Reason*, by Immanuel Kant (Tr. Marcus Weigelt). All these texts are referred to in the reading schedule as "READINGS".

Supplementary Packet (available on the web site), containing:

- (i) Helpful hints for writing philosophy papers and exam essays,
- (ii) A list of abbreviations used in grading papers and exam essays,
- (iii) A model history-of-philosophy paper, and
- (iv) A very brief but amazingly informative survey of informal logic.

Course Requirements & Percentage of Final Grade

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|---|-----|
| (1) 7 Study Guide Worksheets + 6 Quizzes (2% each) | 26% |
| (2) 12 Pairs of Student-Generated Queries (for Professor and Breakout Room Discussions) (2% each) | 24% |
| (3) Midterm | 25% |
| (4) Timed Online Final Exam (2 Hours) | 25% |

Notes on Course Requirements:

(1) It is strongly recommended that before taking exams or preparing your study guide worksheets, you read very carefully the helpful hints for doing philosophy papers, the list of abbreviations used in grading essays and papers, and the very brief survey of informal logic (all to be found in the supplementary packet). Advice about writing philosophy papers will be of particular use to you in preparing to write the essay(s) contained in the timed, online midterm and final exams.

(2) The dates on which Study Guide Worksheets are due is given in the Reading Assignments and Class Calendar Webpage on the Course Website. Consult that page on the web site for information about what reading concerns the subject matter of any given Study Guide Worksheet. These worksheets consist of a series of questions designed to direct your attention to the important ideas, principles and arguments found in the reading for a particular class session. They are created on the assumption that *first* you will read through the text on your own, and then, with the questions before you, **you will go back for a second reading** during which you will attempt to answer the questions you have been asked. The purpose of these exercises is to help you to achieve a fuller comprehension of these classic early modern philosophical texts by giving

you clues about what is important (and by implication, what is *not*). Some of these study questions will require you to write very short essays. Thus, these assignments are places for you to *work out* what is going on in the reading, so that you may come to more clearly understand what a particular philosopher has written and what it means about what he or she was thinking.

(4) There will be six fifteen-minute in-class quizzes scattered throughout the course. The quizzes could occur at any time, and always will be restricted to the reading assigned for the day **two days prior** to the quiz (so I will have already lectured on the material on which you will be quizzed).

(5) For this remote/synchronous and asynchronous ‘socially distanced’ course, I am not taking attendance but I *am* requiring students to prepare two questions that they upload to a specific assignment folder in Canvas at least one hour before our 9 a.m. start time for classes each day of this Maymester summer session (as indicated on the Reading Assignments and Class Calendar webpage). These questions will be answered by me, or my teaching assistant, *but will also be the subject of the 30-35-minute breakout room sessions* that will start each of our 3-hour class meetings. The purpose of these breakout room sessions will be explained on the first day of class. These Student-Generated Queries are *not graded* except in the sense that *not turning them in* will cause you to lose credit for them, whereas *submitting them* gets you full credit (2% of your final grade for each pair!).

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 that brings CPR to mind (and I don't mean the Critique of Pure Reason!)

(2) Late written assignments are A Really Bad Thing (this includes study guide worksheets). If you have a good (i.e., health-related medical or personal emergency) excuse I will allow makeups of worksheets and quizzes.

(3) Breaches of academic honesty will receive the harshest allowable university penalty. However, I do think it is worth noting that when you cheat in philosophy, you are the primary victim as it hampers the development of your own mind. I do not regard what you are studying here as something you could do without. If you are in this class, I assume that you share this opinion (or have agreed to pretend that you do for the duration of our time together).

(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 summer session.

(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 in our course: 100.

(8) What to expect from me: prompt and honest feedback, clear lectures, sufficient contact outside class (e.g., office hours, e-mail, e-mail list, the web site).

(9) Since students often do not pick up their final exams, please let me know in advance if you would like detailed comments on your essay. Anyone who wishes to have their final exam returned to them should give me a self-addressed, stamped envelope for that purpose, or an email address where I can send you the digital copy.

(10) I am happy to discuss grades with you after assignments are returned, but please save these discussions for office hours.

(11) Arrangements to extend deadlines for exams and worksheets can only be made directly, either by telephone call, Zoom session, or email. *Do not email me about these things* except to warn me about a problem and to arrange a meeting to discuss them.

(12) This syllabus is subject to revision.

Assignment Schedule

Quizzes: To be decided on the spot (distributed via shared screen and returned via email attachment **during class**).

Study Guide Worksheets: See the Reading Assignments and Class Calendar Webpage on the Course Website.

Midterm: 5/20 (90 minutes, timed, distributed and returned through a Canvas assignment folder and due no later than 11:59 pm on 5/20)

Final Exam: 2 Hours, timed, distributed and returned through Canvas. First availability is 8 a.m. on 5/29, due no later than 11:59 on that same day.

Disability Statement

If you have specific physical, psychiatric, or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Disability Services Office in Willard 322 (phone 303-492-8671).

One Last Thing

Since I find it very helpful to speak with each of you at least once, there will be required, short (10-to-15-minute) meetings during the first office hour on Zoom beginning Monday (the first day of class) and ending by the Friday of the second week of this summer session. I sent out a Doodle poll the day before our first class meeting so each of you can arrange a time and date that suits you. Don't put this off too long, or we will have a buffalo stampede that will make all of us grumpy.