

Jason Potter

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E-Mail: jason.potter@colorado.edu (This is the best way to reach me, including to request a Zoom Office Hour Meeting)

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

Zoom Office Hours: By Appointment (Monday through Saturday Only)

Charles Roberts (teaching assistant)

E-Mail: Charles.Roberts-1@colorado.edu (questions about grading should be directed at *both* Charles *and* Jason!)

Course Description

A survey of some seminal European philosophical works of the 17th and 18th centuries, including writings by Descartes, Locke, Hume, 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, sense perceptions, emotions); 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, but what one can find of value in philosophical study will emerge, I hope, in the course of your involvement in this course. 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 broadly secular approach to human life that has gained influence since the Age of Enlightenment (which happens to coincide with the works of Early Modern Western Philosophy we are studying in this course). 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, an important tool of philosophical work.
2. That you learn to express your thoughts clearly, and in *your own words*.
3. That you make progress in the fine art of assessing, analyzing and criticizing philosophical claims and the arguments on which they depend.
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, and Kant thought about the questions and problems about which they spilled so much ink.

Required Texts

All texts in this course will be provided through Canvas, are available in the CU Bookstore or through Amazon, or online and linked on the Course Website under "Online Versions of Course Texts". I recommend that you use the latter only when there is nothing for that text available in Canvas, and/or when you cannot get a hard copy of the following editions of the texts, which should be available through the CU Bookstore or on Amazon (if it is available on Amazon in a Kindle Edition, I have put an asterisk [*] at the end of the title).

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 essays;
- (ii) A list of abbreviations used in grading papers and 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

(1) 7 Online Study Guide Worksheets + 5 Discussion Boards	36%
(2) Midterm Exam (taken online)	32%
(3) Final Exam (taken online)	32%

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 midterm exam and takehome final.

(2) The dates on which Study Guide Worksheets are due is given in the Assignment Schedule available at the course website

under “Lectures, Readings and Assignments Schedule” on the course website. Consult that page on the web site for information about what reading forms 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 or part thereof. 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*). Most of these questions can be answered in a few sentences, but a few will require something in the nature of a short essay. 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 was thinking.

(4) There will be five discussion boards in which I will pose one or more question that everyone in the class must choose from, answering only *one* of them. After offering your own answer, I also ask that you respond to/comment upon the answer given by one of your fellow students.

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 too-many weaknesses, or work that is noticeably incomplete.

(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, the primary victim is your own mind, the primary loss its potential development. 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 I discuss in lectures or comes up in online discussions or the worksheets.

(5) Reading assignments in philosophy tend to be both challenging and time consuming. You might want to take this into account when planning for this course, especially in this extremely short Augmester 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: 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 website).

(9) Since students often do not retrieve 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 alert me by email or in person and make sure I have a good, permanent 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, study-guide worksheets and/or discussion boards can only be made either by email, in-person during Zoom-based office hours, or via text to my cell number.

(12) This syllabus is subject to revision.

Assignment Schedule

Discussion Boards: Available in Canvas. Due dates are indicated both in Canvas and in the “Lectures, Readings, and Assignments Schedule” on the course website. Please respond to **one** of the questions I ask on each of these discussion boards and then offer a peer-review comment on a randomly-assigned answer given by another student to that, or another question.

Study Guide Worksheets: Distributed and returned through Canvas Assignment Folders (See Reading and Class Schedule on the Website or Canvas for due dates/times of these)

Midterm: A Timed, Two-Hour Exam Taken Online via Canvas on 8/16/2025 (Available at 8 am that day, due by noon on 8/18/2025)

Final Exam: A Timed, Two-Hour Final Exam Taken Online via Canvas between 8/21/2025 and 8/23/2025 at 11:59 pm (when the exam access in Canvas closes). Exam is focused **mainly** on readings in the Hume Unit and what is covered in lectures and readings in the Kant Unit indicated for August 19 and 20 **only** (with associated video lectures) and topics covered *since* the Midterm Exam (but the final is comprehensive and so will include *some* material covered on the Midterm).

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 (email: disinfo@colorado.edu; fax: 303-492-5601; phone 303-492-8671).