

Jason Potter

Phone: (720)252-0643)

E-Mail: jason.potter@colorado.edu

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

Office Hours: HLMS W137 3:30–5:00 P.M. M-W 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 Empirical 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*, edited by Ariew and Cress, Hackett Classics. (available initially through Canvas and/or the course website as textbooks were ordered late in the game this time around)
2. Gottlieb Leibniz, *Monadology*, translated by Simon Sparks (available in Canvas).
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 Paul Guyer and Alan Wood (all required readings from this text will be provided in PDF formats in Canvas)

Reading assignments are available online through the *Readings, Lectures & Assignments Schedule* linked on the course homepage on the website (and in Canvas).

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 model history-of-philosophy paper, and
- (iv) a very brief but amazing informative survey of informal logic.

Course Requirements & Percentage of Final Grade

(1) Attendance (10%) & Class Participation ¹ + Short In-class Reading Quizzes ² (10%)	20%
(2) 1 In-Class Group Reading Report ³	5%
(3) Midterm Exam (in-person)	25%
(4) Semester Paper	25%
(5) Final Exam (in-person)	25%

Extremely Generous Rewrite Option:

You may rewrite your Semester Paper, using criticisms and suggestions on the graded paper as a guide, and then turn it in by 11:59 pm on the last day of classes (December 4, 2026); the grade you receive on the revised paper will replace the grade you originally

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 and performance on "in-class reading quizzes" do count, and reap 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.

³ To be explained in class on the first day.

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!

Notes on Course Requirements:

(1) There will be a series of very short, in-person Reading Quizzes that are designed to encourage students to complete the reading(s) on which the class session will be focused. These all consist of three questions and are Pass/Fail. Full credit is only received for answering at least two of them correctly and goes toward your Participation Grade (10% of the final course grade).

(2) The first major assignment consists in an In-Person Midterm Exam⁴ (samples of which will be provided through Canvas to familiarize students with its format). The former will cover the Descartes and Leibniz Units *plus* Locke's attack on the doctrine of innate ideas. To help students prepare for the Midterm and Final Exams, there will be a series of **Advisory Study Guide/Worksheets**. These are *not required*, but completion will give each student access to the *answer sheets* for each, and those answer sheets constitute excellent preparation for the kinds of questions that will be asked on both Midterm and Final Exams. Each Advisory Study Guide/Worksheet is best completed by class time on the date it is due, but will remain available for exactly *one week* after the due date and then the quiz will be closed permanently. Any submissions received before the closing date will be graded and the answer sheet will be provided to the student responsible for the submission. NOTE: These study guide/worksheets *do not count for or against your final grade in this class* (the purpose in grading them is to give the student some idea where they were on the right track, and where they were not)!

(3) The semester paper will be on one of a list of assigned possible topics drawn from our readings in Descartes, Locke and Leibniz and Hume. Paper topics to choose from will be made available through the associated Canvas assignment folder and on the course website by October 30, 2026. The paper 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! The paper is due November 28, 2026 by 11:59 p.m. in Canvas. Late papers, other things being equal, are a Really Bad Thing as it makes it harder for me to get papers graded, commented upon, and returned (which will be needed if you choose to rewrite the semester paper for a better grade as I give considerable advice about where and how the essay can be improved).

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

(2) Late papers are a Really Bad Thing. The usual excusing conditions must exist if I am to make exceptions to this rule: earthquake, civil emergency, Ebola outbreak, hospitalization, and the like.

(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: 100.

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

(9) Since the institution of privacy protections for students in the late 1990s, hard copies of student papers can only be delivered in-person. Since all papers will be delivered as digital files, I will just return them to you in Canvas or via email attachment.

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

⁴ Students with extended-time accommodations need to contact me so we can arrange for the Midterm and Final Exams to be taken at the Testing Center in the Case Building.

(11) Arrangements to extend deadlines for the exams, semester paper, or to be excused for class absences beyond the two free ones, can only be made in person. *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/Group Reports: See Schedule of Lecture Topics, Readings and Dates for Papers, Quizzes, and Group Reports.
Midterm Exam: In-person on TBD (on Descartes, Leibniz, & Locke Units).
Semester Paper: Topics available October 30, 2026 in Canvas. Paper is due at 11:59 p.m. on November 24, 2026, in Canvas.
Final Exam: In-person taken in VAC 1B88 (2.5 hours on TBD)
Revised Paper: Optional Revised Paper due TBD by 11:59 p.m. in the appropriate Canvas Assignments folder on December 4, 2026.

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-to-four weeks of the semester to get to know each other and to discuss any of your concerns about the structure and content of the course. 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, or we will have a buffalo stampede that will make all of us grumpy.

SYLLABUS STATEMENTS

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. Understanding the course's syllabus is a vital part of adhering to the Honor Code.

All incidents of academic misconduct will be reported to Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution: StudentConduct@colorado.edu. Students found responsible for violating the Honor Code will be assigned resolution outcomes from Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution and will be subject to academic sanctions from the faculty member. Visit [Honor Code](#) for more information on the academic integrity policy.

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 temporary illness, injury or required medical isolation for which you require adjustment, **please let me know by sending an email to me through the [Canvas Email System](#) with the subject line [Impediments to Course Participation due to Illness](#).**

Accommodation for Religious Obligations

Instructional faculty members must make every reasonable effort to accommodate all students who have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignment deadlines or required attendance due to a religious observance. Whenever possible, students must notify the instructional faculty member at least two weeks in advance of the expected exam, assignment deadline, or attendance conflict to request an accommodation for religious observance. If the start date of the course is less than two weeks before the date of requested accommodation, students must notify the instructional faculty member on the start date of the course. See the [Student Academic Accommodations for Religious Observances Policy](#) for more information.

In this class, absences due to religious observations and/or obligations are not penalized, nor are late submission of assignments due to such religious observances or obligations penalized. I do ask that students warn me in advance when such a observances or obligations can be foreseen. I will take those into consideration and make an accommodation so that these events will not affect my evaluation of your work.

Student Names and Pronouns

CU Boulder recognizes that students' legal information does not always align with how they identify. If you wish to have a name

other than your legal name appear on your instructors' class rosters and in Canvas, or if you wish to choose pronouns to appear on your instructors' class rosters and in Canvas, visit the [Registrar's website](#) for instructions on how to change your personal information in university systems. Note that if the student information provided in my copy of the class roster does not mention preferred pronouns, I will not know and hope students with such preferences will let me know directly by email or in person so I can accommodate their wishes.

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, marital status, political affiliation, or political philosophy.

Additional classroom behavior information

- [Student Classroom and Course-Related Behavior Policy](#).
- [Student Code of Conduct](#).
- [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance](#).

Sexual Misconduct, Discrimination, Harassment and/or Related Retaliation

CU Boulder is committed to fostering a productive and welcoming learning, working, and living environment. University policy prohibits [protected-class](#) discrimination and harassment, sexual misconduct (harassment, exploitation, and assault), intimate partner abuse (dating or domestic violence), stalking, and related retaliation by or against members of our community on- or off-campus. Denial of an approved accommodation for disability, religious observance, or pregnancy or pregnancy related medical conditions may be discriminatory.

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 OIEC@colorado.edu. Information about university policies, [OIEC reporting options](#), and [OIEC support resources](#) including confidential services can be found on the [OIEC website](#).

Faculty and graduate instructors are required to inform OIEC when someone discloses misconduct regardless of when or where it occurred. This is to ensure that those impacted receive outreach from OIEC about resolution options and support resources. To learn more about reporting and support options for a variety of concerns, visit the [Don't Ignore It page](#).

Mental Health and Wellness

The University of Colorado Boulder is committed to supporting students' mental health and overall wellbeing. If personal, academic, or emotional challenges are affecting your wellbeing or success, [Counseling and Psychiatric Services \(CAPS\)](#), is here to help. CAPS offers counseling, referrals, psychiatric care, crisis support, and much more. Visit CAPS in the C4C, or call (303) 492-2277, 24/7.

Acceptable Use of AI in This Class

I do not object to students using Generative AI tools for study purposes, including to prepare for taking an in-person exam based on the exam study guides which are always provided two-weeks prior to the date of the exam. I strongly recommend that the Advisory Study Guide/Worksheets be completed without the aid of an AI agent, but if you want some machine to produce those, I question your judgment but I cannot prevent it. Those are, as their titles indicated, simply guides to your attempt to understand some of the more-important readings in the course. They are not graded (not even Pass/Fail), but for those that complete them, answer sheets will be provided in Canvas. Your Semester Paper should be written entirely by yourself, but it is fine to run an outline of the essay by one of these agents to see if they have any recommendations concerning what you have left out, or advice about how to revise the structure of the outline. Policing the actual source of the sentences in your essay is not within my power to detect. Let me just advise you that learning to write without these crutches will serve you better because you will have developed your *own* skills at self-expression through language. Lastly, anything you do with an AI agent that substitutes what the agent 'knows' for what *you know* is against your own interests and will leave you less-well-educated when you finish your work in this course. I hope that matters to you.