

History of Modern Philosophy

Prof. William Blattner

Philosophy 385
Fall 2012
MW 9–10.50 AM
Healy 106



Immanuel Kant

Course Syllabus

Course Description:

This course is a survey of modern philosophy from the middle of the 17th through the late 18th century. We will focus on the development of modern theory of knowledge and moral/political philosophy. In the course of this survey we will examine texts from the following authors: Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant.

We shall approach the development of modern philosophy with an emphasis on the theme of enlightenment, as Kant described it:

Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* "Have courage to use your own reason!" – that is the motto of enlightenment. (Kant, *What is Enlightenment?*, 1784)

The century and half from around 1650 until 1800 was a dynamic and creative era in European philosophy. Responding to the extraordinary progress of scientific knowledge from the mid-15th century on, and to the explosive changes in the political and religious structure of Europe from the early 16th century on, philosophers turned towards the individual and his or her faculty of reason as a foundation on which to build a new way of understanding human beings and their relationship to both nature and their fellows.

In this course we will examine these themes as they are expressed in both theoretical philosophy (metaphysics and epistemology) and practical philosophy (moral and political thought). In roughly the first two-thirds of the course we will follow the debates among rationalists, empiricists, and Kant in epistemology and metaphysics. In the final third of the course we will examine contractarian political philosophies of Hobbes and Locke, and the moral philosophy of Kant.

The goals of this course are to provide philosophy majors with a survey of the early modern period of philosophy, as well as an understanding of how large-scale developments in philosophy are driven by and also drive the emergence of particular problems. The survey cannot be exhaustive, of course, but it should provide enough structure for students to be comfortable with modern philosophy, to be able to read further on their own, and to take more specialized courses in the authors, movements, and themes discussed.

This is a four-credit course and is required of all philosophy majors. It meets for one hour and forty minutes twice a week.

Course Requirements:

Students will write three short papers (due dates on the course schedule) and take a final exam.

Late assignments: unexcused late papers will be graded down one grade step (e.g., B+ to B) per two business days late. Please discuss legitimate excuses with me as early as possible. The paper assignments will be posted two weeks in advance of the due date. Plan in advance! Only the strongest of excuses will be accepted to do a make-up mid-term exam, and final exam policy conforms to the College's overall policies on final exams.

Attendance: Attendance is required. If you do miss a class session, do not request a make-up lecture or review session in my office. Get notes from a classmate.

Academic Integrity: As signatories to the Georgetown University Honor Pledge, and indeed simply as good scholars and citizens, you are required to uphold academic honesty in all aspects of this course. You are expected to be familiar with the letter and spirit of the Standards of Conduct outlined in the Georgetown Honor System and on the Honor Council website. As your instructor, I am also obligated to uphold the Honor System and will report all suspected cases of academic dishonesty. If the Honor Council confirms that a violation of the Honor Code has taken place, the violator will receive an "F" grade for the course (not just the assignment).

Course Prerequisites: General education requirements in philosophy; major in philosophy. Seats will be offered to philosophy minors, graduate students, and others if they are available.

Texts to purchase:

Hobbes, *Leviathan*. (Hackett)

ISBN: 978-0-87220-177-4 (\$16.95 new, eBook \$14.95)

Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*. (Hackett)

ISBN: 978-0-915144-86-0 (\$7.95 new, eBook \$6.95)

Ariew & Watkins, eds., *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, 2nd ed. (Hackett)

ISBN: 978-0-87220-978-7 (\$48 new, eBook \$39.95)

Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 3rd ed. (Hackett)

ISBN: 978-0-87220-166-8 (\$9.95 new, eBook \$7.95)

Other texts will be made available electronically.