

Philosophy 322: Early Modern Philosophy

Spring 2009

Northern Illinois University

MWF 11 – 11:50

DuSable Hall 474

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Office Hours: MW 12-1 and by appointment

Description

This course is a survey of European philosophy during the 17th and 18th centuries. We'll be examining closely what important thinkers had to say about a number of central questions in metaphysics and epistemology, many of which are still hotly debated today. Topics include skepticism about the external world, the nature of causation, freedom and determinism, necessity and contingency, personal identity, the mind-body problem, and idealism.

Attendance

Diligent attendance is essential to your success in the class. You'll be responsible for everything we discuss. We'll spend a good deal of time discussing philosophy, which is the best way to learn philosophy. Plus, being a particularly good class citizen will boost your participation grade at the end of the semester. But if you cannot make it to class, that's okay. I don't need you to send me an email explaining why you were absent. You or someone who loves you is either paying for the course or borrowing money so you can take it. I assume that if you choose not to come you have a good reason!

Grades

- 20% Participation, including online reading quizzes
- 40% Two 4-5 page papers
- 40% Cumulative final exam (Wednesday, May 6, 10am)

According to the NIU catalog, A = 'outstanding', B = 'above satisfactory', C = 'satisfactory'. I take those words to have their ordinary English meanings. To do work that is 'above satisfactory' is to do work that is good. You should be proud of doing good work in this course.

A Note About Difficulty

This is an upper-level undergraduate course. It will be difficult. If you are confused, please say so! It is not only acceptable, but expected that you will often be baffled. Being baffled is a normal part of doing philosophy. But your success in the course will depend upon your coming to a somewhat clear understanding of the issues and arguments we discuss. It's your responsibility.

Schedule

The following schedule is subject to change, though the paper due dates will not change:

February 27: First paper due

April 17: Second paper due

'AW' = Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources, edited by Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins (available for purchase in the NIU bookstore in Holmes Student Center)

January 12 – 26: Rene Descartes (French; 1596-1650)

Meditations on First Philosophy (AW 27-55)

January 28 – 30: Nicolas Malebranche (French; 1638-1715)

The Search After Truth, Book 6, Part 2, Chapter 3 (AW 401-404)

February 2 – 12: Baruch Spinoza (Dutch; 1632-1677)

Ethics, Part I (complete); Part II (to Proposition 13) (AW 129-157)

February 16 – 27: Gottfried Leibniz (German; 1646-1716)

Discourse on Metaphysics, Sections 1-16, 30-36 (AW 184-93, 202-207)

Letters to Arnauld (AW 208-214, 217-220)

Primary Truths (AW 225-228)

Monadology (AW 235-243)

March 2 – 6; 16 – 20: John Locke (English; 1632-1704)

Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book I, Chapters 1-2 (AW 270-276); Book II, Chapter 8 (AW 285-290); Book II, Chapter 27 (AW 320-329)

March 23 – April 3: George Berkeley (Irish; 1685-1753)

Treatise Concerning The Principles of Human Knowledge, Part I (Sections 1-33: AW 470-477; Sections 34-156 posted on Blackboard)

April 6 – 20: David Hume (Scottish; 1711-1776)

Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Sections 1-5, 7, 12 (AW 491-512, 514-522, 550-557)

April 22 – 29: Immanuel Kant (German; 1724-1804)

Critique of Pure Reason (AW 634-653)

Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Remarks II and II (AW 594-597)