

History of Modern Philosophy

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Course description:

This is a course on the history of early modern philosophy, focusing on figures from 17th and 18th century European philosophy. We will read Descartes, Elisabeth, Malebranche, Pascal, Conway, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Shepherd, and Kant.

Philosophical topics will include epistemology (what do you know and how do you know it?), the nature of mind and body (are you just your body or are you also something more?), causation and freedom (why do things happen and could they happen otherwise?), and God and the soul (what are these?).

This is simultaneously a history course and a philosophy course. This means that we will be interested in the philosophical positions and arguments offered by the figures we read, and that we will also be interested in the broader cultural and intellectual contexts of these figures.

Prerequisites:

None—this is an introductory course appropriate for all students.

Requirements:

- Pass/fail argument reconstruction. Short. Students must pass this prior to writing the first paper.
- Five minute presentation. Students will work with their instructor and make a brief presentation to start one day of class.
- Three five-page papers.

Readings:

Week 1: *Descartes*

- Descartes, *Meditations 1-3*

Week 2: *Descartes*

- Descartes, *Meditations 4-6*

Week 3: *Elisabeth and Malebranche*

- Elisabeth/Descartes correspondence
- Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, selections on occasionalism

Week 4: *Pascal*

- Pascal, *Pensées*, selections

Week 5: *Conway*

- Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, chapters 8 and 9

Week 6: *Leibniz*

- Leibniz, “A New System of the Nature and Communication of Substances”
- Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, sections 1-37

Week 7: *Spinoza*

- Spinoza, *Ethics*, selections on God and nature (Part 1)

Week 8: *Locke*

- Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, “Of Identity and Diversity” and selections on innateness (from Book II)

Week 9: *Berkeley*

—Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, selections

Week 10: *Berkeley and Hume*

—Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, more selections

—Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, selections on ideas and impressions

Week 11: *Hume*

Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, selections on causation and miracles

Week 12: *Shepherd*

—Shepherd, *Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect*, chapters 1-2

Weeks 13-15: *Kant*

—Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*

—Kant, "What is Enlightenment?"