

SPRING 2007

OFFICIAL VERSION

PHIL 203: EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

Pat Shade

Office: 402 Clough

Hours: WF 11:00-11:50, TR 10-10:50 & by appt.

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COURSE AT A GLANCE:

- **Goal:** To understand and assess the primacy Modern thought gives to *reason*. Our primary issue will be the agency of human reason. Related questions will include: What is reason's nature? What are its powers? What are its means? What are its ends? What are its products? What are its limits? What other powers besides reason do humans have? Which powers should have priority?
- **Course Outline:** Descartes' Rationalist Epistemology and Dualist Metaphysics; Hume's Empiricism and Skepticism; Kant's Critical Philosophy.
- **Books:** Descartes: *Selected Philosophical Writings*; Hume: *Enquiries*; Kant: *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals & Critique of Pure Reason*.
- **Course Requirements:**
 - 20%= **Participation** (Discussion Participation, Prompt, Normal Class Work)
 - 40%= **2 Exams** (1 midterm, and 1 final which includes a cumulative essay question)
 - 40%= **2 Papers**

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:

General Description:

Modern Philosophy arose amidst the excitement of the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution (yet some would argue that it still had one foot firmly rooted in Medieval thought). It can be characterized by two distinctive features:

- (1) it tends to be "*revolutionary*," rejecting the work of predecessors and the authority of tradition, and
- (2) its dominant concerns are *the foundations of knowledge* (both theoretical and practical) and *the power(s) of reason*.

Our goal will be to *understand*, and to formulate critical *assessments* of, the dominant themes of modern philosophy. Topics considered will include: possible foundations of knowledge, the relation of reason to what is "non-rational" (passions, feelings, inclinations, instincts), the nature of reality, what it means to be human, and God's existence.

Main Course Issue:

Two main questions will guide our exploration of our three philosophers. They are: *What can reason accomplish (especially on its own)?* and *What things threaten or impede reason?* As we address these questions, we will consider how reason can help us make progress in the following three areas:

Knowledge	Action	Religious belief and living
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • epistemology – especially finding the foundations of knowledge; • metaphysics – especially proving the existence of mind, soul, and God; • natural science – especially giving an account for causation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • moral action – especially articulating standards of moral behavior; • practical action – especially in solving problems of everyday living in the material world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • faith in the divine; • knowledge of the divine; • developing a proper relationship with the divine.

Some Additional Goals:

- Understand and assess the extent to which modern philosophy is *revolutionary* and “begins anew;”
- Understand the centrality of concerns about knowledge and what is meant by “*philosophy-as-epistemology*;”
- Understand *the primacy of reason* and the mental capacities operative in theoretical and practical matters;
- Formulate your own assessment of *the nature, power, and limits of reason* in solving problems (including those which reason itself generates);
- Formulate your own assessment of the extent to which *human nature* and *the world* is *rational*.

II. COURSE OUTLINE:

A. Thematic Introduction & Some Background History

B. Descartes’ Rationalism:

- A. The Cartesian Revolution: The Subjectivist Turn and Dualism: *Meditations on First Philosophy* and selections from *Discourse on Method*
- B. *Passions of the Soul*

C. Hume’s Empiricism and Skepticism:

- A. Hume’s Revolution: The Primacy of Impressions and “Custom:” selections from *Enquiries*
- B. *Morals*: selections from *Enquiries*

D. Kant’s Critical Philosophy:

- A. Kantian Morality (Part 1): Freedom and Self-Determination: *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*
- B. Kant’s “Copernican” Revolution: The Necessary Conditions of the Possibility of Experience: selections from the *Critique of Pure Reason*
- C. Kantian Morality (Part 2): Faith and Reason: selections from the *Critique of Practical Reason*



III. REQUIRED BOOKS:

- **Descartes:** *Descartes: Selected Writings*, ed. John Cottingham.
- **David Hume:** *Enquiries*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge.
- **Immanuel Kant:** *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. Lewis White Beck.
- **Immanuel Kant:** *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith

There will also be some shorter readings distributed in class.

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Participation	= 20%
2 Exams (@20%)	= 40%
2 Papers ((@20%)	= 40%

A. PARTICIPATION: Philosophical thinking requires active engagement in learning and testing key ideas and methodologies. The following are designed to promote this. Your participation grade will be the average of items 1 and 2, with serious consideration given to item 3.

[1] **Discussion Participation:** *Qualitative* participation is vital to learning to think philosophically and is expected throughout the semester. You should carefully prepare for class; this means actively reading (see “Reading Philosophy” handout) and reflecting on the day’s assignment (noting key

definitions and arguments and formulating questions) *prior* to class. This will prepare you to listen with understanding and to actively participate in class discussion. Discussion participation involves (i) contributing your own views, questions, and reactions to the readings and class discussion, and (ii) carefully listening to, questioning, and responding to the views of others. Aim to participate regularly, but avoid dominating class discussion. (If you're shy or reserved, let's talk about that individually.)

When determining your discussion participation grade, I will look at the *quality* and *pattern* of your participation over the course of the semester. The *quality* of your work is gauged in terms of its (i) **clarity**, (ii) **insight**, and (iii) **sophistication**. In assessing the *pattern* of your work, I will look at (i) **consistency**, (ii) **effort**, and (iii) **improvement and progress** (or regress) you have made in critically discussing materials throughout the semester.

Minimal participation, low attendance, tardiness, inattention, and disruptive (e.g., leaving the class) or dominating class-room behavior will result in a low participation grade. If you are concerned about your participation performance, please don't hesitate to talk with me.

Attendance: You are expected to attend all classes. If you must miss a class, you are responsible for all material covered and assignments distributed or collected. Since I consider attendance a factor of participation, I don't distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. (If you're not present, you can't contribute.) If you miss more than 2 classes (which is the equivalent of a week), your participation grade will drop 1/3 letter grade per missed day. *Also*, you are expected to contact me so we can discuss your attendance.

[2] **Student Prompt and Assessment:** Each of you will pair up to prepare and present a prompt for class discussion **once** during the semester (both members should contribute equally). The prompt itself (2a) should be the result of your work together as a pair. The follow-up assessment (2b) should be done individually by each partner.

Goal: There are a number of reasons I use prompts, but the chief is that they *give students the opportunity to participate in class discussion in a focused and sustained manner*. As I note when discussing participation, philosophical thinking requires active engagement in learning and examining key ideas and methodologies. I've learned that prompts play an integral part of this process and complement normal discussion participation. Students usually find them to be a valuable growing experience.

(2a) The Prompt itself: Prompts are not mere summaries of the reading. Instead, they are focused *explorations* of a key position or argument. The prompt itself has three parts: an explication of a key idea, a discussion of its significance, and then consideration of a key challenge to it.

• **Explication of a key position or argument:**

(i) Identifying and developing a *key position or argument* will be the usual route to pursue in prompts. (You may pursue a creative alternative so long as you discuss it with me at least two days prior to prompting.) You'll want to present the position or argument as clearly as you can, identifying key ideas as you go.

A *position* is the perspective or stance a philosopher takes on an issue. Typically, philosophers support positions by means of *arguments*. An argument is a set of claims (the premises) which are given in support of another claim (the conclusion). Premises give us reasons for believing the conclusion. (One consequence of the structure of an argument is that the truth or plausibility of the conclusion depends on the truth or plausibility of the premises. Hence, don't simply take premises at face value; ask whether you believe them.)

If you have difficulty finding a philosopher's argument, the best place to start is by identifying what you think is the (or a) *main claim* in the reading. This will probably be the conclusion of the argument. Then, look for the supporting reasons. Sometimes an author will present the entire argument in a single ¶. More often than not, he or she will present it over a

series of ¶s. Once you identify your argument, it's helpful to present it by listing the premises (and numbering them), followed by the conclusion.

When developing a key position or argument, be sure to set the *context* for your prompt. If the reading is long, give us a sense of where the argument falls. Also, identify the **relevant branch(es)** of philosophy (to be introduced early in the course) which it concerns. As you will quickly learn, philosophical exploration typically requires close attention to the meaning and relations between key ideas. Hence, as you develop your position or argument, be sure to **identify, define, and relate** your key ideas. Sometimes new ideas are introduced and defined; at other times, seemingly familiar ideas are used in a new or controversial manner (and you have to pry out the meaning by reading carefully). Philosophers often employ complex means to explore and clarify new ideas. They don't just offer straightforward *definitions*; they often draw important (but often overlooked) *distinctions*. Hence, as you explore a key idea, consider (a) explaining the chief meaning of the term as it's used in the reading, (b) explaining whether its meaning is controversial, (c) offering examples to illustrate it, and/or (d) showing its relation to (and/or difference from) other key ideas.

• **Responses** are intended to be thoughtful explorations of the position or argument (not mere reactions). Respond by:

(ii) discussing the *significance* of the position or argument.

In your explication, you've explained your position or argument; here you are helping the class understand why anyone should care about it. Significance is usually shown by considering the position/argument's relevance to some other context. In this class, those contexts will typically be (a) the philosopher's work as a whole, (b) our course questions (see page 1 of the syllabus), or (c) some real life scenario that to which the position/argument is or should be relevant. Hence, you might show significance by explaining how the position you develop responds to an early problem the philosopher raised, or how it illustrates a new and creative use of the method he introduced earlier.

– and –

(iii) discussing an important *objection, question, or problem* concerning the position or argument.

Here your goal is to enrich our understanding of the position or argument by critically assessing it. You might find one of the premises questionable, or you might object that a key idea is hopelessly vague or confused. Part iii may also arise out of part ii; for instance, in considering a pertinent real life scenario, you may find yourself unsatisfied with the position or argument. (This will be especially likely when we consider ethical questions.) Or in considering an argument's place in the philosopher's work as a whole, you may find that it generates a tension or inconsistency with one of his earlier positions. Objections and questions usually come naturally, but don't fabricate them. If you trouble generating them, come chat with me.

Finally, and very importantly, sketch at least two *possible responses* to the objection, question, or problem. If the response is presented in the text, then you haven't dug deeply enough to find an important objection, question, or problem.

(2b) Follow-up Assessment of your Prompt: (*Note:* Each student should write his or her own assessment of the prompt.) Hopefully you will learn much when presenting and discussing your prompt that will deepen your understanding of the issue and perhaps also of your interests and philosophical strengths. Hence, after prompting, write an assessment of your prompt in which you:

(i) Present the key points made in class discussion of your prompt, explaining the main comments and questions made in response to your prompt. Explain clearly how you did (or now would) respond to these.

(ii) Explore how your view has changed (or deepened) as a result of discussion and further study. (By "further study" I mean to include the following readings we do on the philosopher on whom

you prompted. This gives you the opportunity to consider your prompt in a larger context.) For instance, have you changed your mind about the argument's significance? Do you think that your objection exposes a serious flaw in the philosopher's position, or are you now convinced that he can adequately respond to it? You might also indicate whether this is a topic you would want to pursue more fully, e.g., in a paper (your assessment does not commit you to writing a paper related to the prompt).

• **Suggestions:**

-Approaching the prompt: It's best not to simply read the assignment, hoping something will reach out and grab you. Since the first part of the prompt is explication of a key argument, it's probably best to begin by *outlining* the day's reading. That will help you identify the main argument(s) or idea(s).

-After writing the prompt, be sure to proofread your prompt. It should be a *well-written* piece. Draw relevant *distinctions* that help clarify your issue or idea. Also, provide *examples* (from the readings, your experience, or your imagination) where appropriate to develop or illuminate your points.

-Problems to avoid: At their worst, prompts are times when students simply express how they feel rather than explore a relevant course issue with insight and sophistication. This is always a danger of prompts, but it rarely happens. Prompts should grow out of your reading and preparation for class, and they should be thought of as integral parts of our work. They are not tangential or accidental, so please do not approach them in this way (either when you are giving your own prompt, or when you are listening to someone else's).

• **Submission deadlines and Grading:**

Prompts need to be carefully written, typed and no more than 2 pages (single spaced, no more than 1000 words) long. Email me your prompt **no later than 10 p.m. the day before your prompt**; I'll make copies for the class. Our goal as a class will be to respond to your prompt; it will thus provide the focus for our discussion.

Your **follow-up assessment** is due no later than the 1st class meeting after we finish studying the philosopher on whom you prompted.

Your prompt and assessment will be graded on (i) **clarity and accuracy**, (ii) **significance** and level of **insight/sophistication**, and (iii) representation of **effort and intellectual growth**. Both partners will receive the same evaluation for the prompt itself; I will give a unique evaluation for the follow-up assessment.

If it appears that you and your partner will *miss* your scheduled contribution, you may make it up so long as (1) there is an opening on the schedule, **and** (2) you discuss the matter with me at least *24 hours before* class (unless this is legitimately impossible).

[3] Periodic Homework, Quizzes, In-class Writing, or Group Work: To gauge your **preparation** and understanding of material, I will occasionally give *homework* and *quizzes*, most of which will be designed to (i) test your understanding of the reading, or (ii) help you crystallize your thinking on a relevant class issue. In addition, there may be some *in-class writing* or *group work*. The chief criteria used in evaluating this work will be **clarity and accuracy**. I will comment on this work but typically *not* assign a numerical grade; instead I will assign a + (excellent work), √ (good work), - (problematic work), or 0 (no work) to indicate the quality of your work. These exercises are an important part of your ongoing work. Use them to test your understanding and recognize them as a valuable source of feedback from me. At the end of the semester, I will consider the profile of your work in this area. If your final course grade is borderline, and if you did good work on these exercises, your efforts here can push your grade up (e.g., from an 89% to a 90%).

Missed work in this category can be made up *only* when you have discussed the matter with me *prior* to the beginning of the class you miss. Each student is allowed *one* make-up, but make-up material must be completed *by the beginning of the next class meeting*.

If you are concerned about your performance in any of these areas, please don't hesitate to talk with me.

B. Exams: There will be 2 exams (a midterm and a final) consisting of short-answer and essay questions. The final will have a cumulative essay question.

C. Papers: There will be 2 papers (approximately 5 pages each). The first is tentatively due **February 14** (with likely topics including: the theory/practice split, arguments for the existence of God, reason's success in finding certainty, our true human nature). The second is tentatively due **April 20** on a topic of your own construction. More details will be provided later.

• **Grading Criteria:** See "Grading Criteria for Written Work" and "Writing Hints" in our folder on the Academic Server.

V. MISCELLANEOUS:

• **Successful Classroom:** Respect towards all members of the class and to course content is the key. I work hard to generate a setting in which we can be honest and critical, but my efforts are futile without your individual contributions. Impediments to a successful classroom include tardiness, disruptive talking, lethargy, excessive absences, and leaving the classroom before the end of the hour. We are biological creatures, but since we also have a certain mastery over our bodies, please take care of your biological needs before class.

• **Grading Scale:** See "Grading Criteria for Written Work" handout for specifics.

A	94 and up	B+	87-89	C+	77-79
A-	90-93	B	84-86	C	74-76
		B-	80-83	C-	70-73 etc.

• **Computer Component:** You are responsible for any notes, assignments, etc. that I send out via e-mail.

• **Film Component:** I may show a film or TV episode relevant to course material. Further details will be provided at the appropriate time.

• **Academic Volume Resources:** Our class has a folder on the Academic Server (Philosophy → Shade → Public → PHIL 203). Included are: (1) readings that are handed out, (2) study questions (for some of the readings), (3) as well as biographies and timelines, (4) a list of additional books and websites for the course. Please consult this folder, and let me know if you have problems accessing it or finding materials. I will announce new documents that need to be read; if you are absent, you are responsible for reading these.

• **Honor Code:** The Honor Code stipulates that the all work you submit is to your own. In this class, there are two exceptions: 1. prompts will be generated by groups of 2 students, and 2. you may incorporate materials that are *not* your own in prompts or papers (no other uses of additional materials are allowed) so long as these are properly cited. If you have questions, ask.

You are encouraged to discuss topics and assignments with your colleagues, but the work you hand in must be your own, i.e., it must be formulated and written in your own words and style reflecting your own thoughtful treatment.

• I'll be glad to help in any way I can, so don't hesitate to darken my doorway.

This syllabus is subject to revision (but don't worry; I'll discuss any changes with the class before I make them).

CALENDAR

S= Supplemental Reading

Tuesday	Thursday
	1/11 Reason, Will ... and Schopenhauer
1/16 RENE DESCARTES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skim General Introduction & Chronology (pp. vii-xii) • Descartes Bio (S) • Synopsis of the <i>Meditations</i> (pp. 73-75) • Meditation I (pp. 76-79) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) also pp. 112-114 (¶ 12-14) of Meditation VI in regard to the dubious nature of the senses (ii) also <i>Discourse on Method</i> Part III- beginning of IV (pp. 31-36). The rest of Part IV is also recommended. 	1/18 Meditation II (pp. 80-86); Objections and Replies to the Second Meditation (pp. 126-131)
1/23 Meditation III (pp. 86-98)	1/25 Meditation III (continued)
1/30 Meditation IV (pp. 98-105); Objections and Replies to the Fourth Meditation (pp. 133-135)	2/1 Meditation IV, V (pp. 105-110); Objections and Replies to the Fifth Meditation (pp. 139-143)
2/6 Meditation VI (pp. 110-122); Objections and Replies to the Sixth Meditation (pp. 143-147)	2/8 Meditation VI (cont.)
2/13 Passions of the Soul (pp. 218-238) *** PAPER 1 Due by 5 PM 2/14***	2/15 DAVID HUME <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hume Biography (S) • <i>Enquiry</i>, Sections i-iii (pp. 5-24) Of the different species of philosophy; Of the Origin of Ideas; Of the Association of Ideas
2/20 <i>Enquiry</i> , Sections iv-v (pp. 25-55); Sceptical Doubts concerning the operations of the Understanding; Sceptical Solutions	2/22 <i>Enquiry</i> , Sections vi-vii (pp. 56-79) Of Probability; Of the Idea of Necessary Connection
2/28 <i>Enquiry</i> , Sections viii (pp. 80-103) Of Liberty and Necessity [Also <i>recommended</i> : Sections xii (pp. 149-165) Of the academical or sceptical Philosophy]	3/1 MIDTERM
3/6 <i>Enquiry</i> , Sections i-ii (pp. 169-182) and Appendix i (285-294) Of the General Principles of Morals; Of Benevolence; Concerning Moral Sentiment	3/8 <i>Enquiry</i> , Sections iii (183-204) and Appendix iii (303-311) Of Justice; Some farther Considerations
3/13 SPRING BREAK	3/15 SPRING BREAK
3/20 <i>Enquiry</i> , Sections v (212-232) and Appendix ii (295-302) Why Utility Pleases; Of self-love	3/22 <i>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals</i> , Sections ix (268-284) Conclusion
3/27 IMMANUEL KANT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kant Biography (S) • The Canon of Pure Reason, pp. 204-209 • Duty & Morality: Preface and Section I of the <i>Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i> 	3/30 Freedom & Morality: Section II of <i>Foundations</i> . Also subsections “The Conception of Freedom is the Key ...” and “Freedom Must be Presupposed ...” in Section III
4/3 • Wrapping up Kant’s Morals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Critical Philosophy: The Copernican Revolution 	4/5 EASTER BREAK
4/10 The Possibility of Experience: Space and Time	4/12 The Possibility of Experience: The Categories
4/17 Responses to Skepticism on Causation and the External World	4/19 Reason Gone Awry: The Dialectic ***PAPER 2 Due by 5 PM 4/20***
4/24 Faith and Reason: Selections from the Second Critique (S)	4/26 Faith and Reason: Selections from the Second Critique (S) Review

