History of Philosophy: Early Modern (PHIL 210-3)

Professor Baron Reed
office: 3-421 Kresge Hall
email: b-reed@northwestern.edu

Office hours: T 2:00-3:00, and by appointment

Course Description:
The transition from the Medieval to the Modern era in philosophy began, roughly, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries and ended, again roughly, in the late 18th century. New methods of acquiring knowledge, along with a radically different conception of the world, permanently transformed the philosophical enterprise and the broader culture. In this course we will examine the views of some of the most important modern philosophers—especially Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Bayle, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume—on the nature of God, causation, substance, mind, knowledge, and the material world. Additional readings will be drawn from Elizabeth, Galileo, Masham, Boyle, Shepheard, and Du Châtelet.

Course Objectives:
The course has two primary objectives:

(A) To reach a deeper understanding of the philosophical developments that followed in the wake of the Reformation and that accompanied, and made possible, the rise of modern science and the broader Enlightenment; and

(B) To develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills, particularly in light of the new attention to philosophical method in the Early Modern period. Emphasis will be placed on both philosophical and historical methods of reading primary sources, as we attempt to understand both the views of these philosophers in their own terms and as they relate to the work of other philosophers and to broader cultural developments.

Required Texts:
Readings on Canvas.

Recommended Texts:

Required Work:
Work for the course will include two papers, reading reports, and a final exam:

+ 1st paper: 4 pages, worth 20% of the final grade
+ 2nd paper: 4 pages, worth 30% of the final grade
+ Reading reports, together worth 25% of the final grade
+ Final exam: worth 25% of the final grade

Attendance and excellent class participation may also factor into the final grade.

**Course Policies:**

1. Computers, phones, and other electronic devices must be off during class time.
2. In order to pass the course, all assignments must be completed.*
3. Extensions must be requested before the due date.
4. Attendance at both the lectures and the discussion sections is required. Four or more unexcused absences from either lecture or section will result in a deduction of 1.5 points for each additional absence from your final grade.
5. **Very Important:** plagiarism will not be tolerated. All cases of alleged violation of academic integrity will be referred to the Assistant Dean for Advising and Academic Integrity. Possible penalties range from failing the course to permanent exclusion from the university. For more on plagiarism, see: [http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/index.html) and [http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/how-to-avoid-plagiarism.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/how-to-avoid-plagiarism.html).

**Students with Disabilities:**

Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

**Resources for Well-Being:**

Students can find useful resources for safety and security, academic support, and mental and physical health and well-being at the NUhelp website and app.

**Canvas:**

Much of the business of this course will be conducted through Canvas. You are encouraged to check it frequently, as I may post announcements there. To access Canvas, you will need to use your NetID and password: [http://www.it.northwestern.edu/education/learning-management/login.html](http://www.it.northwestern.edu/education/learning-management/login.html).

**Reading Reports:**

The reading assignments must be read before class on the day they are listed. You will answer the assigned question (see Q below) and submit it on Canvas before class. Each answer should be no more than one page (double-spaced, normal font, etc.), do not put your name on the report. The questions are meant to get you thinking about at least one of the most important issues to be discussed in that day’s lecture. Your report should accomplish three things: (i) identify one of the major themes of the reading, (ii) present what you take to be the most important argumentation related to that theme, and (iii) offer a critical response (e.g., an objection, question, or extension of the argument). Of these tasks, most of the detail should go to satisfying (ii). The reports will be graded on a 5-point scale. Unlike the papers and final exam, the reading reports will be graded primarily for the quality of the effort one makes in writing them—but keep in mind that merely writing a lot of words does not by itself mean one has made a good effort.
You may drop your two lowest reading report scores, including instances in which you did not turn one in.

**Schedule of Readings:**

April 2  Introduction to Early Modern Philosophy

April 4  René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*: First Meditation, Second Meditation (1, 27–34); Recommended (but after you've read the first two Meditations): Letter of Dedication, Preface to the Reader, Synopsis (1, 22–7)

*Extra: Shakespeare, "Hamlet"; Jorge Luis Borges, “The Circular Ruins” on Canvas]*

Q: How and why does Descartes call everything into doubt?

April 9  Descartes, Third Meditation, Fourth Meditation (1, 34–45)

Q: Why does Descartes want to find an explanation for the errors we make?

April 11 Descartes, Fifth Meditation, Sixth Meditation (1, 45–55);

Correspondence with Elizabeth (Canvas);

Galileo, *The Assayer*, "Corpuscularianism" (1, 8–11)

Q: How does Descartes prove that the mind and the body are distinct?


Q: How is God related to the rest of what exists?


Q: Does God freely choose to create the world?


Q: How are your mind and your body related, according to Spinoza?

April 25  Nicolas Malebranche, *Search after Truth*: III,ii.6 (1, 220–2); VI,ii.3 (1, 225–33)

Q: What are occasional causes?

April 30  Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*: 1–17 (1, 234–45)

Q: What is the notion of an individual substance?

May 2  Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*: 18–37 (1, 245–57);

Damaris (Cudworth) Masham, Letter VI to Leibniz (Canvas)

First paper due

May 7  Leibniz, *The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology* (1, 285–93); Third & Fourth Letters to Clarke (1, 307–13)

[Extra: Voltaire, *Candide* on Canvas]
Q: What is a monad, and why does it not have any "windows"?

May 9  John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: 1.1–2; 11.1.1–5; 11.8.7–26 (II, 11-8, 27–31);
Robert Boyle, *Of the Excellency and Grounds of the Corpuscular or Mechanical Philosophy* (II, 4–10)
Q: What is the difference between primary and secondary qualities?

May 14  Locke, *Essay*: II.27 (II, 61–70);
Q: What is the source of personal identity?

May 16  Locke, *Essay*: III.3,6 (II, 70–9);
      Justin E.H. Smith, "The Enlightenment’s ‘Race’ Problem, and Ours" (Canvas)
      [Extra: Jorge Luis Borges, “Funes the Memorious” on Canvas]
Q: What is an abstract idea, and how does it function in our thinking?

May 21  Berkeley, *Principles*: 1–84 (II, 138–57);
      Mary Shepherd, selection from *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe* (Canvas)
      [Extra: Jorge Luis Borges, “Tlön, Úqbar, Orbis Tertius” on Canvas]
Q: Does Berkeley think that material objects (e.g., tables) exist?

Q: What does Hume think causation amounts to?

      Pierre Bayle, *Dictionary*: “Manicheans” (Canvas)
      [Extra: Lawrence Shapiro, “A Drop in the Sea” on Canvas]
Q: Why does Hume think you shouldn’t believe miracles have happened?

May 30  Hume, *Treatise*: I.iv.1 (II, 289–92); *Inquiry* XII (II, 387–94);
      Second paper due

June 4  Reading period begins
      [Extra: Émilie Du Châtelet, "Discourse on Happiness" on Canvas]

June 10  Final Exam, 3:00 to 5:00 PM