

History of Modern Philosophy

Philosophy 385

Fall 2009

home page: www.georgetown.edu/faculty/blattnew/modern/index.htm

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Course Syllabus

Course Description:

This course is a survey of modern philosophy from the 17th through the early 19th centuries. We will focus on the development of modern theory of knowledge and moral/political philosophy. In the course of this survey we will read texts from some of the most influential philosophers of the period, including some or all of the following authors, and maybe more: Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, and Hegel.



Immanuel 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)

It is characteristic of modern philosophy to understand the subject, agent, or deliberator as the ultimate source of authority for knowledge claims, moral principles, and political institutions. Much of the variety of modern philosophy then derives from disagreements about two fundamental questions: *Who* is the subject? – an intuitive reasoner (e.g., Descartes), a receptive depicter (e.g., Hume), a self-legislating deliberator (e.g., Kant), or a super-personal communal source of authority (e.g., Hegel). *How far* can subjective scrutiny reach? – not very far (e.g., Hume), all the way out (e.g., Descartes), within definable limitations (e.g., Kant), as far as the rational subject can reconstruct his or her historical situation (e.g., Hegel).

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 four short (5 pp.), analytical and exegetical papers, and will make one short (5 mins. or so) prepared expository presentation in class. In the assignments emphasis will be placed on the practice of historical reconstruction, in which students use both textual and argumentative analysis to understand a philosopher's views.

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Due Dates of Papers:

1. On pre-Kantian M&E: Monday, Oct. 19th, in class
2. On Kantian/Hegelian M&E: Monday, Nov. 9th, in class
3. On Social Contractarianism: Monday, Nov. 23rd, in class
4. On Kantian/Hegelian moral/pol. phil: Monday, Dec. 21st, *via* Blackboard

Late papers: 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!

Attendance policy: 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.