

Modern Philosophy

Laura Wildemann Kane

Sample Syllabus

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Modern Philosophy focuses mostly on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy, including the works of René Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant. We will explore some of the most well-known texts from these thinkers, as well as the lesser-known but equally fundamental works of Elisabeth of Bohemia, Ann Viscountess Conway, and Catherine Trotter Cockburn to provide a comprehensive accounting of Modern philosophical thinkers. The common themes that dominate this period – questions that concern the existence of God, the Mind/Body problem, the idea of the self, the source of knowledge, the extent of knowledge, and the existence of objects in the world – have influenced many contemporary beliefs and attitudes. We will discuss these themes and touch upon several related themes throughout the semester.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Recognize and explain the key problems and ideas that shaped the Modern philosophy period
2. Know how to read a historical text thoroughly and critically
3. Bolster critical thinking skills as they are applied to reading and comparing philosophical arguments
4. Refine writing skills through course papers and written exams

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1	Introduction René Descartes , Discourse on Method, Part II
Week 2	René Descartes , Meditations on First Philosophy, Letter of Dedication René Descartes , Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation One
Week 3	René Descartes , Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation Two René Descartes , Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation Three
Week 4	René Descartes , Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation Four

- René Descartes**, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation Five
- Week 5 **René Descartes**, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation Six
Elisabeth of Bohemia, Correspondence with Descartes
- Week 6 **Ann Viscountess Conway**, The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy (selections)
- Week 7 **Gottfried Leibniz**, Monadology, §1-47
Gottfried Leibniz, Monadology, §48-90
- Week 8 **John Locke**, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Chap. I, "Of Ideas in General, and their Original"
John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Chap. VIII, "Some Farther Considerations Concerning Our Simple Ideas"
- Week 9 **John Locke**, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Chap. XXVII, "Of Identity and Diversity"
Catherine Trotter Cockburn, A Defense of Mr. Locke's Essay of Human Understand (selections)
- Week 10 **George Berkeley**, Principles of Human Knowledge, Part I, §1-15
George Berkeley, Principles of Human Knowledge, Part I, §16-33
- Week 11 **David Hume**, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Section II, "Of the Origin of Ideas" (Parts I & II)
David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Section IV, "Skeptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding" (Parts I & II)
- Week 12 **David Hume**, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Section VII, "Of the Idea of Necessary Connection" (Part II only)
David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Section VIII, "Of Liberty and Necessity" (Parts I & II)
- Week 13 **Immanuel Kant**, Critique of Pure Reason, Introduction, §IV "On the Distinction between Analytic and Synthetic Judgments"
Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, Introduction, §V "All Theoretical Sciences of Reason Contain Synthetic a priori Judgments as Principles"

Week 14 **Immanuel Kant**, Critique of Pure Reason, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part I “Transcendental Aesthetic” (incl. Space & Time)