

Modern Philosophy

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Sample Syllabus

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Our Modern Philosophy course will explore canonical works from philosophers of the Modern period, including René Descartes, Elisabeth of Bohemia, Ann Viscountess Conway, Gottfried Leibniz, John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, Mary Shepherd, and Immanuel Kant. In exploring these works, students will gain a comprehensive understanding of the central debates that guided philosophical thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. 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. In discussing these themes, we will examine the nature of our own experiences and beliefs as they relate to course materials.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

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

1. Recognize and explain the key problems and ideas that shaped the Modern philosophy period.
2. Understand the key strategies for reading a historical text thoroughly and critically.
3. Bolster their 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,” and Book II, Chap. IX, “Of Perception”
- Week 9 **John Locke**, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chap. XXVII, “Of Identity and Diversity”
George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part I, §1–33
- Week 10 **Mary Shepherd**, “Consideration of the Erroneous Reasoning Contained in Bishop Berkeley’s *Principles of Human Knowledge*”(selection)
- 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)