Early Modern Philosophy
Prof. Martin

Class Hours: Tu-Th, 11:12-12:20
Classroom: 213 Wood Hall
Office Hours: Tu & Th 1:00-3:00 and by appt.

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Quick Overview:
Our aim this semester is to immerse ourselves in some of the most pressing philosophical questions of the early modern era. Our pursuit of these questions will introduce us to some of the era's leading thinkers and ideas. It will also furnish us with a deeper appreciation of the intellectual climate of the day and, perhaps most importantly, its impact on ours. We will begin our adventure by asking what is real – what, exactly, exists? The answers are certain to surprise and astound you – especially since the arguments given in support of some extremely implausible views are deceptively strong. Then we'll turn our attention to God where we will investigate the kind of entity God might be. No course in early modern philosophy would be complete without a thorough review of the mind-body problem, so we'll tackle that next. Then we'll consider different account of the identity of individuals like you and before problematizing all of this with the question of what if anything we can actually hope to secure any kind of legitimate knowledge about. We'll close by looking at a few of the different accounts of gender and the role of women in a cosmopolitan society.

The early modern era functions much like a dialogue between its various participants. We will acquaint ourselves with some of its more provocative elements not as mere spectators but, rather, as well-intentioned participants. Our aim is to recreate this conversation amongst ourselves in hopes of giving something back to it.

I hope that as a result of this course you will …

(1) Better understand and appreciate some of the central philosophical debates in the early-modern era (roughly 1650-1770)
(2) Recognize that many of these disputes linger and even inform important contemporary issues
(3) Deepen your capacity to read and critically analyze difficult material
(4) Sharpen your ability to think long and deep about such material – ultimately in service to your own thinking about the matters discussed therein
(5) Build confidence expressing ideas and expressing your own opinions in conversations

Grades:
Your grade will consist of random reading quizzes, reading exercises, two 500 word papers, two short presentations, and a final exam.

For reading quizzes and exercises you will be given a check-minus, check, or check-plus. These will correspond to a 5, 8, and 10 respectively. Reading quizzes will be random. Any notes you make on the reading before class can be used in these quizzes. The exercises, which you'll turn in at the beginning of class, are meant to help you to better read, understand, and think critically about the material. They are also meant at times to better familiarize you with supportive and destructive writing habits. I have posted some examples on our D2L page.

Quizzes and exercises cannot be made up. Instead, in order to account for family emergencies, days when you're not feeling well, or simply cannot make it to campus (curse you old-man Winter!), I will
drop your lowest two scores. The average of your remaining scores will account for 20 % of your final grade. This is a hefty percentage, and with the right effort it should be an easy A. My hope is that these exercises will help you to read the material better and to subsequently do better on the papers, presentations, and exam.

You will also submit two 500 word papers, each worth 20 % of your grade. In each paper you will be asked to review and critique a specific claim from one of our thinkers. We will use the Vaughn text to help us identify and work through the steps toward writing a good paper. These will be challenging, but rewarding. You should plan on allocating much more time to these papers than you might think. Also, papers submitted late will incur a half-grade per day overdue penalty.

Because these papers can be difficult, I’m going to give you an opportunity to present your idea(s) to the class before fully articulating them in your paper. Before each paper, you’ll give your classmates a quick overview of your argument in hopes of soliciting constructive feedback. Each such presentation will be worth 5 % of your grade.

Lastly, we'll have a take-home final exam.

Your grade breaks down as follows:

- Reading Quizzes and Exercises --------------------- 20 %
- First Short Paper --------------------------------- 20 %
- Second Short Paper ------------------------------- 20 %
- Presentations ------------------------------------- 10 %
- Final Exam ----------------------------------------- 30 %

I use the following grade scheme: A = 92 and above, AB = 87-91, B = 82-86, BC = 77-81, C = 72-76, CD = 67-71, D = 62-66 and F = 61 or below. An A paper will receive a 95, an AB a 90, a B an 85, a BC an 80, C a 75, a CD a 70, D a 65 and F a 55 or below.

Requirements:
You are expected before each class to have read the material assigned for that day. I have intentionally kept the readings short – because I expect you to read them two or even three times before each class. To encourage your doing so, we'll have random reading quizzes at the beginning of class to test how well you've prepared and understood the material. You'll struggle with this at first, as the material is quite difficult. But if you attend carefully to Vaughn's text and learn from the exercises we'll work through in class you will find that your reading comprehension skills will improve considerably.

It is all too easy to read through some difficult philosophy and conclude that you don't understand it (worse yet, to conclude that you do when you really don't), and use this as an excuse to give up. There's no progress down that road though. If you genuinely want to improve your reading and thinking abilities you need first to learn how to work and think through difficult materials. You'll want, as best you can, to identify the significant claims being made in each day’s assigned reading and then, again as best you can, pull out the author's argument for this claim. This class will be a struggle, but a struggle from which you will reap significant rewards in the future if only you put the time and energy in now.
I’d like to stress that our aim is to understand not only what is being said but, what is more important, why. We’re going to come across a lot of controversial and even fantastical claims. I recommend that you learn to ignore your initial reactions and attend instead to the arguments given in their support. My hope is that after a while, once we’ve worked on our reading comprehension skills a bit, we can spend a bulk of each class not learning about, but instead thinking through the different points of view – we’ll be doing philosophy rather than merely learning about philosophy.

If you commit to this course, read carefully, prepare for each class, participate, and work hard on your papers, you will do well and learn a considerable amount this semester. Alas, if you do not, you will struggle and very likely do poorly. You are making a choice every time you commit to or neglect your responsibilities. Your grade will largely be the sum-total of these choices. That being said, please come by my office with any issues, frustrations, or problems that might arise. It is always best to catch these things early, and my door is always open.

**Policies:**
This course has a D2L site where I will post the syllabus and other materials throughout the course. You can also review your grades and determine where you stand in the class from here. You will also be submitting your papers to the D2L site, so be sure you're familiar with doing so sooner rather than later.

Let me say again that reading quizzes and exercises cannot be made-up. I will drop your lowest two scores. Papers submitted late will be penalized ½ letter grade per day overdue. Also, cheating of any kind, including plagiarism, will not be tolerated. If I catch you cheating you will automatically fail the course.

I do not allow cellphones or laptops in class. Texting or surfing the web is very distracting to me and to your fellow students and is not permitted. If you don't want to come to class don't come, but don't come only to distract others or I may ask you to leave.

Rude or disruptive behavior is also grounds for dismissal from the class and even automatic failure. Philosophy is best practiced as a dialogue between competing points of view, and certain of the points of view under discussion this semester likely will not sit well with you. I hope that you will engage the argument, and thoughtfully so, instead of the person presenting or defending it. I will not tolerate rude behavior toward myself or other classmates.

Students with a documented disability who need accommodations must contact the Disability Services Office at 465-2841. Reasonable accommodations can be made unless they alter the essential components of the class. Contact the instructor and Disability Services Coordinator in a timely manner to formulate alternative arrangements.

**Texts:**
Schedule
Week 1
January 29: Introductions
  • Overview of Syllabus, expectations, workload, etc.

January 31: What is our real aim in this course?
  • Mills: “What is the Value of a College Education?” (D2L)
  • Vaughn: How to Read Philosophy

Week 2
February 5: Cartesian minds and bodies
  • Descartes: Meditations, Meditation Two (30-31, left column only) & Meditation 6 (50, right column-51, left column)

February 7: Only one substance can and must exist
  • Spinoza: Ethics Book I (read up to and including proposition 7, then read prop. 11 & 14; 158-160, 162&163)  
    Exercise # 1: Outline the defense for proposition 14

Week 3
February 12: An infinite number of monads exist
  • Review Spinoza’s one substance argument
  • Leibniz: Monadology §1-6 (285)  
    ○ Extra Credit: Why are Spinoza and Leibniz the only live options about substance?

February 14: Only ideas exist
  • Berkeley: Principles of Human Knowledge, §1-7, 16-17 (138-140, 141-142)  
    Exercise # 2: Identify four rules from Vaughn (chapter 3) in the reading

Week 4
February 19: God as an Absolutely Perfect Being
  • Descartes: Meditations, Meditation Three excerpts: 34–35 (first paragraph); 36 (start at “All these points demonstrate”) –38 (whole page)

February 21: God as the prerequisite for Truth
  • Leibniz: Monadology §31-48 (288–289)

Week 5
February 26: Divine law is not prescriptive, only descriptive
  • Spinoza: Theological-Political Treatise, chapter 4 (D2L)

February 28: Scripture as a myth for the masses
• Spinoza: *Theological-Political Treatise*, chapter 13 (D2L)

**Week 6**
March 5: Short Papers
  • Discuss Vaughn, Chapters 2-4
  • Discuss assignment, share ideas

March 7: You’re the Philosopher
  • Presentations

**Week 7**
March 12: You’re the Philosopher
  • Presentations

March 14: Against miracles
  • Hume: *Enquiry*, section X, Part I (371-374)
    Exercise # 3: Use three ideas from the reading to illustrate three different fallacies

**First 500 word paper due to D2L by 5:00 pm on Friday, March 15**

**Spring Break: March 19-21**

**Week 8**
March 26: Mind-body interaction
  • Descartes: Reread *Meditations* Meditation Two (30-31, left column only) & Meditation Six (50, right column-51, left column)
  • *Meditations*, Meditation Six excerpts, 51 (middle 2 paragraphs in right column), 53 (right column to end of meditation)
    Exercise # 4: Identify four instances in which Descartes utilizes rules from Vaughn, chapter 3

March 28: Pre-established Harmony
  • Leibniz: *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §14-15 (242-243); *Monadology*, §78-90 (292-293)

**Week 9**
April 2: Your mind is (literally) your body
  • Spinoza: *Ethics* Book II, read up to and including proposition 7 and scholium (178-180)

April 4: Identity as the collection of one’s past
  • Locke: *Essay* Book II, Chapter 27, sections 1-10 (61-64)

**Week 10**
April 9: Identity as a collection of ideas
• Hume: *Treatise on Human Nature* I,IV.6 (320-322, stopping at “In order to [see] this ... “). Read also the last paragraph on 323 and its conclusion on 324.

**April 11:** Identity as Complete Concept

- Leibniz: *Monadology* §7-9 (285-286); *Discourse* §8-9 (238-239)
  - See also *Monadology*, §56-58 (290)

  **Exercise #5:** Identify three competing ideas from Spinoza, Locke, and Hume on identity

**Week 11**

**April 16:** You don’t know anything.

- Descartes: *Meditations*, Meditation One (27-30)

  **Exercise #6:** Draw a map of Descartes’ argument(s)

**April 18:** Knowledge as Experience

- Locke *Essay*, Book I, Chapter 1 (11-13); Book II, Chapters 1, sections 1-10 (17-19)

**Week 12**

**April 23:** No innate ideas

- Locke: *Essay*, Book 1, Chapter 2

**April 25:** Knowledge as a relation between ideas

- Hume: *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, section II (333-335)

**Week 13**

**April 30:** Your turn

- Presentations

**May 2:** Your turn

- Presentations

**Second 500 word paper due to D2L by 5:00 pm on Friday, May 3**

**Week 14**

**May 7:** One take on women

- Rousseau: Duties of Women (D2L)

**May 9:** A far different take

- Wollstonecraft: Vindication of the Rights of Women (D2L)

**Final Exam Due to Dropbox Tuesday, May 14, 5:00 pm**