

PHIL206: Early Modern Philosophy

Zhejiang University/University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institute

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3 Credit Hours: Lectures (3)

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Office Hours: Thursdays By Appointment Office: UIUC

Hours & Location: Fridays 13:00-15:50 (lectures), Lecture Theatre North A301
Spring & Summer Semester, 2024

Course Description

This course is aimed at introducing the student to early modern philosophy and how it is pertinent to the modern world as we know it today. The student is expected to (1) become familiar with major topics and thinkers in the early modern period and (2) to reflect critically on issues in the modern world. The course begins with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century continental-European and British thinkers like Francis Bacon and René Descartes, covering area including epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics. We will engage critically with what has come to be called the “enlightenment” and reflect on the insights as well as biases that the contemporary world inherited from this period. After journeying through the eighteenth century, the course concludes by introducing Immanuel Kant as a stage-setting figure for what may be called modernity, as well as post-Kantian founders of modernity, most notably G. W. F. Hegel. By the end of the course, the student is expected to be able to apply philosophical thinking to various aspects of life and society, including their own academic discipline.

Pre-Requisites: None

Learning Objectives

1. Become familiar with the major thinkers of the early modern period in the history of Western philosophy
2. Become familiar with the major branches of modern philosophy: (logic), metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics
3. Understand the roots of modern notions and values such as historical consciousness, modern science, fine arts, human dignity (including rights and freedom), the rule of law, modern economies, etc.
4. Apply historical-analytical methods to reflections on contemporary issues of various sorts
5. Reflect on the capabilities and limits of human reason
6. Develop critical appreciation of modern science and technology and understand their limitations
7. Discern and critique philosophical assumptions underlying various positions on academic, social, political, and everyday issues
8. Apply philosophical thinking and knowledge to issues in engineering
9. Appreciate intellectual, religious, and cultural diversity both charitably and critically

Required and Recommended Reading

1. Required: A Course Reader in PDF format will be distributed electronically at the beginning of the semester.
2. Recommended: Most of the philosophical classics presented in the lectures are available online. Students are encouraged to read these texts.

Required reading assigned for each week is indicated in the “Course Outline” section below. Students are cautioned that all reading materials are, to various extents, written from specific points of view and must be read *critically*. Reading must be completed prior to the lectures of each respective week.

Grading

Midterm Examinations:	40%
Final Examination:	60%

Midterm Examinations

There will be 4 midterm exams throughout the semester. The dates will be announced one week in advance. These exams will be completed in the BlackBoard system. The initial attempt will be completed in class under strict time limits. Thereafter, you will be allowed to make unlimited attempts at the exams, and the final course grade will be based on the highest grade in your attempts at the exams.

Final Examination

There will be a 3-hour **final exam** during examination week. The exam will be entirely comprised of objective questions based on the midterm exams.

Course Outline

Week 1: Introduction—the Major Branches of Philosophy

Assigned Reading: none

Week 2: René Descartes and the Enlightenment Self

Assigned Reading: “Early-Modern Rationalism,” in Shao Kai Tseng, *Immanuel Kant* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2020), 20-23.

Week 3: Early-Modern Rationalist Metaphysics—Spinoza, Leibniz, and Wolff

Assigned Reading: “Baruch de Spinoza *Ethics*”, in Nigel Warburton, *Philosophy: The Classics* (London: Routledge, 2014), 74-79.

Week 4: Francis Bacon and John Locke—the Beginnings of Empiricism

Assigned Reading: “Early-Modern Empiricism” in Tseng, 25-30.

Week 5: Seeing is believing? Empiricism, Idealism, and Skepticism

Assigned Reading: “David Hume *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*”, in Warburton, 99-108

Week 6: The Early-Modern Roots of Capitalism—Max Weber’s Thesis Reconsidered

Assigned Reading: Benjamin Franklin, *The Way to Wealth* (excerpts)

Week 7: John Locke and the Beginnings of Libertarianism

Assigned Reading: Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (excerpts)

Week 8: Machiavelli and Hobbes on Human Nature

Assigned Reading: “Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan*”, in Warburton, 64-73.

Week 9: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Social Contract

Assigned Reading: none

Week 10: British Calvinism and the Rule of Law

Recommended Reading: Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, Rex* (available online)

Weeks 11-13: Kant and the Beginnings of Modern Consciousness

Assigned Reading: none

Week 14: Exam Review

Assigned Reading: none