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## **Phil 3121: Modern Philosophy**

Fall 2012  
Thursdays 6:05 - 9:25 pm  
Boylan Hall 3305



### **Course Description**

Modern philosophy arose out of conflict and concluded in “Enlightenment,” but the path was by no means direct, and the development was not unequivocally progressive. In this course, we will trace some of the twists and turns of seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophy by way of close readings of some of the most important texts of this period. We will focus on the works of five philosophers: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, and Hume. Some of the main questions that we will ask in this course are: What are the sources and limits of human knowledge? How are our beliefs justified? Are there good reasons for believing in God? What is the relationship between our minds and our bodies? What is the basis of moral agency and personal identity? Is freedom compatible with determinism?

### **Course Objectives**

The aims of this course are manifold. You will be reading a number of the most important texts in the history of philosophy, texts that have influenced Western thought in powerful ways. Contained within these works are some of the most ingenious (and occasionally bizarre) philosophical arguments of all time. You should come away from this course with a solid grasp of these important texts and the pivotal arguments contained therein. You should be able to speak intelligently about each of the main philosophers whom we will be studying and to identify how these philosophers differ from one another.

Moreover, wrestling with these arguments should enable you to improve your skills as a critical readers and thinkers. You will be asked to dissect complicated arguments, raise questions, identify unrecognized conceptual possibilities, follow discussions with patience and charity, and explore the implications of arguments. These skills will aid you in thinking more clearly and rewardingly.

You will be refining these critical skills by working through issues that are of enduring significance. By engaging with many of the central texts in modern philosophy we will be grappling with many of the hardest problems in philosophy, problems that are central to

understanding ourselves and the universe and which are not settled by any other discipline. So you will not only learn to think more clearly and rewardingly, you will learn to think more clearly and rewardingly about some of the most challenging and important problems in philosophy, problems that lie at the heart of epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics.

Finally, you will also improve your ability to express yourself effectively both in writing and orally. The writing assignments in this course will demand that you present the ideas of others clearly and accurately, structure your ideas effectively, formulate strong thesis statements, and present convincing arguments in support of your thesis. Learning to communicate more clearly will in turn enable you to think more clearly.

### **Text:**

There is one required text for this course:

*Modern Philosophy: an Anthology of Primary Sources*, Second Edition, edited by Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins.

This text is available at *Shakespeare and Co.*, 150 Campus Road.

### **Assignments and Methods of Assessment:**

Two One-Page Papers	20 %
One Medium-Length Paper (including Outline)	20 %
Midterm	20 %
Final Exam (Cumulative)	30 %
Participation, Attendance, and In-Class Assignments	10 %

You must take the midterm on the scheduled date. Deadlines for papers are absolute. If there is a *very* compelling reason why you cannot complete an assignment on the scheduled date, you must let me know at least three days in advance so that we can work out other arrangements. All late papers will be reduced by at least a full letter grade (subject to my discretion).

As you might infer from the participation and attendance grade, a failure to attend class on a regular basis will severely hurt your grade. Attendance will be taken at every class. If you have to miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what was covered and what the reading assignment will be for the subsequent class. We might be amending the reading schedule from time to time and you must be aware of the changes that are made.

Each of you will construct and present a well-defined discussion question for two separate classes this semester. Your question should arise from an attempt to grapple with a central problem in the text, and it should elicit discussion rather than a simple factual retort.

## **Expectations and Policies in the Classroom:**

A classroom is a form of community. As members of this community we all have a number of formal and informal responsibilities.

Here are some **expectations that we can all have for one another:**

- We will treat one another honestly and fairly and will generally carry ourselves in a professional way (without taking ourselves *too* seriously).
- We will show up for class! I have an attendance policy not to satisfy my punitive urges, but because in order for us to have a successful learning community we must, minimally, be present. We owe it to one another.
- We will assume a charitable, respectful posture when reading/listening to the views of others. In other words, we will try to interpret the views of others in the best possible light.

Some other things that **I expect from you:**

- You will come to class having read and thought about the material, and you will participate constructively in classroom discussion.
- You will seek to be stimulated intellectually. How much one learns depends to a significant degree on how much one *cares* to learn. So you will do your best to stay engaged and interested.
- You will ask me to clarify points if you are confused. It is often hard for an instructor to know what is clear and what is not without feedback from students. I will be relying on your feedback throughout the semester.
- You will turn your cell phones off before class and will not carry on side conversations, send text messages, or participate in any other non-class-related form of communication.

Some other things that **you can expect from me:**

- I will do my best to challenge and stimulate you, to make sure that your efforts in the classroom are rewarded.
- I will do my best to ensure that anyone who puts in the effort can understand the material, no matter how difficult.
- I will make myself available to you outside of class by holding office hours, answering email as promptly as possible, and scheduling additional meetings if necessary.
- I will treat you with respect both inside and outside of the classroom and will do my best to create an environment in which you can feel comfortable and confident.
- I will try to articulate my expectations for assignments as clearly as possible, and I will assess these assignments as fairly and impartially as I can.

## **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:**

The faculty and administration of Brooklyn College support an environment free from cheating and plagiarism. Each student is responsible for being aware of what constitutes

cheating and plagiarism and for avoiding both. The complete text of the CUNY Academic Integrity Policy and the Brooklyn College procedure for implementing that policy can be found at this site: <http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bc/policies>. If a faculty member suspects a violation of academic integrity and, upon investigation, confirms that violation, or if the student admits the violation, the faculty member MUST report the violation.

### **Disability Services:**

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations students must first be registered with the Center for Student Disability Services. Students who have a documented disability or suspect they may have a disability are invited to set up an appointment with the Director of the Center for Student Disability Services, Ms. Valerie Stewart-Lovell at 718-951-5538. If you have already registered with the Center for Student Disability Services please provide your professor with the course accommodation form and discuss your specific accommodation with him/her.

### **Provisional Reading Schedule:**

Thurs., Aug. 30	<b>Introduction to Course</b> <b>Montaigne</b> , <i>Apology</i> , pp. 4 - 15 <b>Bacon</b> , <i>New Organon</i> , pp. 16 - 20 <b>Galileo</b> , <i>The Assayer</i> , pp. 21 - 24
Thurs., Sept. 6	<b>Descartes</b> , <i>Meditations</i> I - III, pp. 40 - 54
Thurs., Sept. 13	<b>Descartes</b> , <i>Meditations</i> IV-VI, pp. 54 - 68 <b>** Short Paper #1**</b>
Thurs., Sept. 20	<b>Spinoza</b> , Letter to Oldenburg, pp. 142 - 143 <b>Spinoza</b> , <i>Ethics</i> , pp. 144 - 151 and pp. 156 - 164 (Propositions 1 - 15, Propositions 28 - 36 and appendix)
Thurs., Sept. 27	<b>Spinoza</b> , <i>Ethics</i> , pp. 184 - 188 <b>Spinoza</b> , <i>Ethics</i> III - V (Handout)
Thurs., Oct. 4	<b>Leibniz</b> , <i>Primary Truths</i> , pp. 265 - 268 <b>Leibniz</b> , <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> (§§1 - 13, 30 - 33), pp. 224 - 232, 242-245 <b>Parkinson</b> , "Philosophy and Logic" (Handout)
Thurs., Oct. 11	<b>Leibniz</b> , <i>Monadology</i> , pp. 275 - 283
Thurs., Oct. 18	<i>Review</i> <b>Midterm Exam</b>
Thurs., Oct. 25	<b>Locke</b> , <i>Essay</i> , pp. 316 - 328, 332 - 340, 359 - 367
Thurs., Nov. 1	<b>Locke</b> , <i>Essay</i> , pp. 367 - 386

**\*\*Short Paper #2\*\***

Thurs., Nov. 8	<b>Hume, <i>Enquiry</i>, pp. 538 - 555</b>
Thurs., Nov. 15	<b>Hume, <i>Enquiry</i>, pp. 555-576</b>
Thurs., Nov. 22	<b>No Class</b>
Thurs., Nov. 29	<b>Hume, <i>Enquiry</i>, pp. 577-593 Outline for Medium-Length Paper Due</b>
Thurs., Dec. 6	<b><i>Lecture on Kant</i> <i>Final Review</i> ** Medium-Length Paper Due **</b>

**Final Exam:** *Thursday, December 20, 6pm - 8pm*