



COURSE SYLLABUS

Early Modern Philosophy

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Phil 31012-001-16092
TR 2:15-3:30
315 Bowman
Spring, 2025

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Course Design: Virtually since its inception 2600 years ago, Western philosophy has been divided between factions of rationalism and empiricism. Rationalism insists reality is mind-like and known by the light of reason. Empiricism maintains it is physical and known via our senses. In antiquity Plato jousted with Protagoras and in Medieval times realists disputed nominalists. But the economic and technological Renaissance of the fifteenth century sparked the most intense philosophical confrontation in the Western canon, with rationalists Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz pitted against empiricists Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. Both sides claimed to champion the advent of modern science, and both were emboldened to push philosophical speculation to unprecedented heights. Though no longer dominant in their original forms, the legacy of the rationalist-empiricist dispute led to the subsequent development of German critical philosophy, pragmatism, existentialism, and contemporary Continental and analytic philosophy. Philosophy in the twenty first century cannot be adequately appreciated without firm grasp of this classic confrontation between rationalism and empiricism.

Required Texts:

1. *The Rationalists: Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz*. ISBN: 9780385095406.
2. *The Empiricists: Locke, Berkeley, and Hume* ISBN: 9780385096225.

Grading:

Grading: Grades are calculated according to the standard scale:

≥93 = A; 90-92 = A-; 88-89 = B+; 83-87 = B; 80-82 = B-; 78-79 = C+;
73-77 = C; 70-72 = C-; 68-69 = D+; 60-67 = D; ≤59 = F

20% is determined by a Midterm Exam, mostly multiple choice and short answer.

25% is determined by a *cumulative* Final Exam, mostly multiple choice and short answer.

20% is determined by verbal answers to two sets of Unit Study Q questions (10 pts. ea.).

You are strongly encouraged to participate in the discussion. If you are unable to do so, however, you may earn credit for this assignment by providing written answers to all questions before the class exercise.

5% is determined by a two page paper abstract.

25% is determined by a 5-7 page term paper in either an argument-criticism or topic-thesis format. You may revise and resubmit your first draft once for a higher grade.

5% is an attendance grade scaled to the number of unexcused absences:

0-1 A; 2 B; 3-4 C; 5-6 D; 7+ F.

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Classroom Etiquette: Please restrict electronic devices to class-related uses only. Avoid tardiness, as this tends to disrupt the continuity of lectures and discussions.

Attendance Policy: I am generally happy to excuse an absence **when informed in advance or on the same day**. An email post is ideal. After the fact, written documentation in conformance with university policy is required for an excused absence.

Academic Honesty: Cheating and plagiarism are serious academic offenses afforded *zero* tolerance. Any passage or idea taken from the work of another must be fully cited as such. Violations of academic honesty in this class are handled in conformance to University Policy 3342-3-01.8. Penalties include, but not limited to (1) assigning a zero grade for the work in which the cheating or plagiarism took place or (2) assigning a grade of “F” in the course. Please consult University Policy 3342-3-01.8 for additional information.

Special Note: The application or assistance of AI (artificial intelligence) in generating work is strictly prohibited. Submissions found to be in violation of this policy will receive no credit, and violators are subject to additional sanctions, including an “F” course grade and referral to academic discipline.

Enrollment/Registration: University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they attend. Students who are not registered should not attend. Please confirm your enrollment by checking your class schedule Flashfast prior to the deadline. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the deadline.

Withdrawal Deadline: Please consult the university calendar for drop and withdrawal deadlines.

Grievance Policy: The Philosophy Department Grievance Procedure for handling grievances is in conformity with the Student Academic Complaint Policy and Procedures set down as University Policy 3342-4-16 in the *University Policy Register*. For information concerning the details of the grievance procedure, please see the Departmental Chairperson.

Students with Disabilities: University policy 3342-3-01.3 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements. Please note that you must verify your eligibility through the Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at 330-672-3391 or www.kent.edu/sas.

Date	Topic	Reading	Paper Deadlines
		1-3 <i>The Rationalists</i>	
		4-6 <i>The Empiricists</i>	
		C: On Canvas	

Note: Review the Power Point for each topic before class.

1/14 Introduction and Overview

I. Rationalism

1. Descartes

1/16	Bio, On Doubt	<i>Meditation 1:</i> 99-103; 112-117	Paper Instructions
1/21	The <i>Cogito</i>	<i>Meditation 2:</i> 118-127	

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1/23	Proof of God's Existence	<i>Meditation 3: 128-142</i>
1/28	Truth and Knowledge	<i>Meditation 4: 144-152</i>
1/30	Mind & Matter	<i>Meditation 5: 153-175</i>

2. Spinoza

2/4	Bio, Concerning God	I. Prop. I-XV, 179-193
2/6	Modes & Attributes	I. Prop. XVI-XXIX, 193-202
2/11	Origin of Mind	II. Prop. I-XIII, 216-227
2/13	Limits of Perception	II. Prop. XIV-XXXI, 231-242
2/18	Emotion, Will, & Ethics	IV. Preface, 321-324 V. Preface, 379-382

Paper Abstract Due

3. Leibniz

2/20	Bio, God's Perfection	<i>Discourse §I-X, 409-419</i>
2/25	Ideas & Spirits	<i>Discourse §XXIV-XXXVII. 437-453</i>
2/27	Monads	<i>Monadology §1-89 455-471</i>
3/4	Unit I Study Questions	
3/6	MIDTERM EXAM	

3/10-3/16 *Spring Break*

II. Empiricism

4. Locke

3/18	Bio, Simple Ideas I	7-24
3/20	Simple Ideas II	24-37
3/25	Complex Ideas	37-52
3/27	Knowledge of Existence	98-113

5. Berkeley

4/1	Bio, Abstract Knowledge	136-151
4/3	Critique of Matter	151-168
4/8	Causation, Spirit, and God	176-183 193-195 208-212
4/10	Perceptual Relativity I	219-234
4/15	Perceptual Relativity II	234-249

Paper First Draft Due

6. Hume

4/17	Bio, Simple, Complex, & Abstract Ideas	C: 1-18
4/22	Causation and Probability	C: 18-28
4/24	Skepticism About Reason	C: 20-30
4/29	Skepticism about Sense	C: 30-34
5/1	Unit 2 Study Questions	

Paper Final Draft Due

FINAL EXAM: Wednesday May 7, 12:45-3:00