

SAMPLE SYLLABUS: MODERN PHILOSOPHY

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COURSE: PHIL XXXX
CREDIT HOURS: 3
PREREQUISITIES: NONE
SEMESTER: SPRING 2016
MEETING TIME: XXXX
CLASSROOM: XXXX

COURSE DESCRIPTION: The 16th and 17th centuries were incredibly exciting times intellectually. The scientific revolution forced people to rethink their fundamental conceptions of the world and our relation to it. This period was an especially fruitful and innovative period in the history of philosophy. In this course we will focus on a range of epistemological and metaphysical views developed by modern philosophers including Descartes, Cavendish, Spinoza, Leibniz, Cudworth, Locke, Cockburn, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. This period is often characterized as a debate between two schools of thought, rationalism and empiricism, culminating in a synthesis of the opposing views in Kant. Crudely, rationalists emphasized the role of *reason* and innate principles in gaining knowledge of the world, whereas empiricists traditionally rejected the notion of innate principles and held that all knowledge is acquired via experience. As we'll see, however, the views of these philosophers are more nuanced and subtle than might be suggested by this crude characterization.

TEXTS: There are two *required* texts:

1. Ariew and Watkins' *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Hackett, 2009). ISBN: 0872209784.
2. Atherton's *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period* (Hackett, 1994). ISBN: 0872202593.'

Students interested in looking at additional reading are advised to start by look at either the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (www.iep.utm.edu) or the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (www.plato.stanford.edu) – the former is the less technical. *DO NOT* consult sources such as Wikipedia, blogs, online forums (e.g. reddit), or the dictionary for philosophical insight. These sources have not been vetted; their quality varies *widely* and they are *overall* unreliable.

INSTRUCTOR E-MAIL: On normal weekdays I will dedicate 2:00pm – 3:00pm to responding to student e-mail. On weekends and holidays I won't have a dedicated time for responding to e-mail but I will strive to respond within 24 hours. Plan accordingly.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AND STUDENT EXPECTATIONS:

- *E-mail and class website:* Check your e-mail and the class website at least once a day. Also, there will be discussion forums on the class website. These are meant to provide a venue for students to continue discussion beyond class, or to help you study with your fellow students. Be respectful of one another on these forums. You are *NOT* required to post anything to these online forums.
- *Come prepared:* Come to class prepared to discuss the topic for the day. This involves bringing your textbooks, bringing materials for taking notes, and doing the assigned readings *before* class. Philosophy is a dialogical activity; you should always be ready to engage in discussion about the topics with your teachers, classmates, and the authors of the readings.
- *Careful reading:* Philosophical writing can be dense and difficult to understand. Read *carefully*. Do not just skim the reading. Actively engage with the text while you read it. Underline or highlight important passages, write summaries and questions in the margins, copy down crucial definitions and distinctions, think of examples illustrating the ideas you're reading about, and attempt to

reconstruct any arguments you find. You might also have to do read the selections multiple times.

- *Technology in class:* Using technology in ways *unrelated to the course* is prohibited. In fact, unless you have a special need of this technology, I *recommend* that you do not use a laptop even for taking notes. Research suggests that taking notes with paper and pencil helps students to better process, retain, and understand the information they receive in their classes.
- *Etiquette:* We will be discussing some controversial topics to which many of you might have a strong emotional connection over which reasonable people will disagree. Take care to articulate your views and arguments in ways that are respectful to your fellow students. Be especially careful when posting on the online discussion forum.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: By studying these topics students will gain a wide range of knowledge and skills whose value extends well beyond the classroom. Given that you put in the required time and effort, by the end of this course you will be able to:

1. Evaluate simple ordinary language arguments for validity, soundness, strength, and cogency.
2. Interpret, paraphrase, and explain difficult passages of philosophical prose and argumentation.
3. Reconstruct arguments found in the text into premise/conclusion format.
4. Construct cases for use with the counterexample method, and utilize different strategies for responding to supposed counterexamples.
5. Articulate the fundamentals of the philosophical views developed in the Modern Period.
6. Understand the connections between each Modern Philosopher’s views, and appreciate the way in which these were all systematic philosophies.
7. Appreciate and appraise the strength and weaknesses of competing philosophical theories.
8. Construct your own arguments challenging or defending philosophical positions.
9. Appreciate weaknesses and anticipate objections to your own arguments.

GRADING SCALE:

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
100-93	92-90	89-87	86-83	82-80	79-77	76-73	72-70	69-67	66-63	62-60	59-0

GRADING BREAKDOWN:

ASSIGNMENT	PERCENT OF FINAL GRADE	TOTAL
Exam 1:	13%	13%
Exam 2:	13%	26%
Exam 3:	13%	39%
Paper 1:	13%	52%
Paper 2:	13%	65%
Paper 3:	13%	78%
Class Presentation:	10%	88%
In-Class Activities	12%	100%

EXAMS 1-3: These exams will be take-home tests that will consist of short answer and essay questions of the material covered in the readings and in class. *Exams are NOT cumulative.*

PAPERS 1-3: The first two papers will be short 4-5 pages (double-spaced) papers developing your own argument defending or criticizing one of the epistemological views discussed in class.

CLASS PRESENTATION: Each student will choose a day to give a 15-minute presentation on the assigned reading for that to the rest of the class. In this presentation I want you to summarize *one* view or argument given in the text, raise questions about this part of the text, and offer at least one worry for the view or argument given.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES: The in-class activities will consist of various forms of both individual and group work. These might consist of worksheets, free writing sessions, directed writing sessions, group work, writing test questions, peer-review projects, etc. These assignments are my way of grading attendance and participation, and are my way to make sure you are keeping up with the readings.

- Each in class assignment will be graded on a 0-2 point scale
 - 0 = Assignment wasn't attempted
 - 1 = Assignment shows only minimal effort or a failure to do the readings.
 - 2 = Assignment shows good effort and good-faith attempt to do the readings.
- The lowest three in-class assignments will be dropped at the end of the semester.

LATE WORK AND MAKE-UP POLICY: *Unexcused* late papers will receive a 3% grade reduction for each day that they are late. *Unexcused* missed tests/exams will receive a 3% grade reduction for each day that passes prior to taking a make-up exam. Since in-class activities are my way of tracking attendance and participation, these can *only* be made up when you have an excused absence. If you have an *excused* absence during an exam or in-class assignment, you should contact me within a week to initiate arrangements to make up the work.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION POLICY: Attendance and participation in class will be factored into your grade via the in-class activities as explained above. See the student handbook for more information on the University's attendance policy. NOTE: leaving early for a scheduled university holiday or break is *NOT* an excused absence. Schedule your rides and flights accordingly.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: I will use turnitin.com. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. Plagiarism and cheating will result in a zero for the assignment and will be reported to the university. I expect that you understand what constitutes plagiarism, but if you are unsure then please see the university's student academic integrity webpage (see link below). *Trust me... Plagiarism is not in your best interest; I will catch you!*

NOTES ABOUT THE SCHEDULE: A *tentative* schedule for the course can be found on the next page. Readings with a "*" will be provided on the course website.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1	*McGrew, Alspector-Kelly, & Fritz: The Scientific Revolution *SEP article on Rationalism vs. Empiricism	
WEEK 2	Descartes: Meditations 1-3	
WEEK 3	Descartes: Meditations 4-6	
WEEK 4	Princess Elizabeth: Correspondence with Descartes Cavendish: Selections from Philosophical Letters	<i>Friday: Paper 1 Due</i>
WEEK 5	Spinoza: The Ethics – Part I & II	
WEEK 6	<i>Spinoza continued</i>	<i>Wednesday: Test 1 Due</i>
WEEK 7	Liebniz: Discourse on Metaphysics	
WEEK 8	Liebniz: The Monadology Cudworth: Selections from Correspondence with Liebniz	
WEEK 9	Locke: Book 1 (Ch. i, ii, and iv) Locke: Book 2 (Ch. i-xiii, xvi, xxi sec. 1-5, xxiii, xxvi, xxvii)	<i>Monday: Paper 2 Due</i>
WEEK 10	Locke: Book 3 (Ch. iii and iv); Book 4 (Ch. i-iv, x-xi, xv-xvi) Cockburn: A defense of Mr. Locke’s Essay	
WEEK 11	Berkeley: Principles of Human Knowledge (Intro. & Sect. 1-33)	<i>Friday: Test 2 Due</i>
WEEK 12	Hume: An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding	
WEEK 13	<i>Hume continued</i>	<i>Friday: Thesis Due</i>
THANKSGIVING BREAK		
WEEK 14	Kant: Critique (Preface and Introduction) Kant: Critique (Transcendental Deduction)	<i>Friday: Argument Summary Due</i>
WEEK 15	Kant: Critique (Refutation of Idealism)	
FINAL EXAM & PAPER DUE		