

1-2012

PHL 262Y.01: History of Modern Philosophy

Soazig Le Bihan

University of Montana - Missoula, soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu

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Recommended Citation

Le Bihan, Soazig, "PHL 262Y.01: History of Modern Philosophy" (2012). *Syllabi*. 1056.
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PHL 262Y
History of Modern Philosophy
– University of Montana –

Soazig Le Bihan

Part I

Presentation and Introduction

Chapter 1

Syllabus

1.0.1 Course Information

- Course Number: PHL 262Y
- Credits: 3
- Class meets: TR 2:10 - 3:30 pm, SS 356
- Instructor: Soazig Le Bihan
 - Office Number: LA 153
 - Office Hours: Thursdays, 3:40-5pm.
 - Mailbox: LA 101
 - Email: soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu
- Websites:
 - All current course information (including class handouts, assignments, announcements, any revision of the schedule, exam questions, links etc.) can be found on the course web site
<http://www.soaziglebihan.org/PHIL262.php>
 - Information about your grades is on Moodle

1.0.2 Course Description

This course will introduce you to seven of the major figures of the 17th and 18th centuries in philosophy: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant.

The 17th and 18th centuries are centuries of radical change in the domains of philosophy, science and politics. Most of our modern western culture originates in these times. That said, while studying modern philosophy, you should expect to encounter and to learn to understand worldviews that are alien to your own. Confronting radically different ways of thinking should shed new light on your own views, methods and prejudices. In analyzing competing views on a subject, you will not only learn some philosophy, but also learn to *do* philosophy.

We will focus on metaphysics (roughly concerned with the question of the nature and structure of reality) and epistemology (roughly concerned with the question of the nature and scope of knowledge), leaving aside moral and political matters. Very little emphasis will be put on the historical and social contexts.

The learning goals are:

1. to learn about the major views of the modern philosophers in metaphysics and epistemology;
2. to develop critical thinking skills (including analyzing philosophical texts, evaluating philosophical arguments, and exploring the relationships between different views);
3. to be able to construct, convey, and argue for your own coherent views in metaphysics and epistemology.

1.0.3 Required Textbook

Ariew R. and Watkins, E., *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, Hackett

1.0.4 Tentative Schedule

Week 1	Presentation of the course, Introduction and Arguments
Week 2	Descartes, Meditation I, II
Week 3	Descartes, Meditation III and IV
Week 4	Descartes, Meditations V and VI
Week 5	EXAM WEEK
	2/21 – In class-Exam
	2/23 – Essay due
Week 6	Spinoza
Week 7	Leibniz
Week 8	Locke
Week 9	Berkeley
Week 10	EXAM WEEK
	3/27 – In-class Exam
	3/29 – Essay due
Week 11	SPRING BREAK
Week 12	Hume
Week 13	Hume
Week 14	Kant
Week 15	Kant and Conclusion
Week 16	5/7 – FINAL EXAM 1:10-3:10 – SS 356

1.0.5 Course Requirements

Your grade will be based on the following:

Attendance and participation	5 %
Homework	10%
Exam 1	25%
Exam 2	25%
<i>Comprehensive</i> final exam	35 %

Attendance Attendance is required, and necessary to succeed in the course. There will be a lot of material covered, and the material covered will be difficult.

You are allowed to miss three classes without penalty. Following that, you will lose 1% up to a maximum of 5% (that is, half a letter grade).

You are expected to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class. *Three late arrivals count as one absence.* If you have to leave early, please tell me at the beginning of class and sit close to the exit to minimize the disturbance to the class.

You are expected to give your full attention to the class. Cell phones or other means of

communication should be silenced for the duration of class. You will be asked to leave if you are doing anything not relevant for class, e.g. reading the newspaper, sleeping, doing work for other classes, etc. *Three offenses of this type will count as one absence.*

That said, absences may be excused in cases of illness or other extreme circumstances. Relevant documentation is required in such cases. You also will be expected to work through the material covered during the classes you may have missed.

Homework Each week, you will be given study questions on the readings. Each Monday, you will have to turn in your answers to the study questions for the week. The answers should be short: one sentence is probably not enough, but more than ten is probably too much. A short paragraph should be right on target. *Your homework should be type written, and turned in by hand during class.*

Every week, I will pick up your homework. I will grade your homework twice over the course of the semester. You will not be told which homework I will grade. I will give you some feedback on your first homework so that you have a clear sense of what I am expecting from you.

Because you will turn in the homework before we cover the material in class, I will be generous when grading your homework (see the grading policies section). You will be allowed to miss one homework without penalty. Following that, you will lose 2% for each assignment missed up to a maximum of 10%.

In-class Exams All in-class exams (including the final) will consist in (1) answering short questions, which will be taken from a list which will be distributed in advance, and, (2), a take home essay. You will have to turn in the essay by hand during the class period following the exam – except for the final exam for which your essay is due the last day of class, Friday 5/6. Your essay should be typewritten and turned in by hand during class. The essay should be about 500 words, give or take 50 words.

Note that most of the questions asked in the exams correspond to the study questions. This means that if you do your homework regularly, and if you correct your answers after we have covered the material every week, studying for the exams should be easy.

The exams during the semester deal with the material covered since the preceding exam (or the beginning of the class for the first exam). **The final in-class exam is comprehensive.**

No notes nor books will be allowed during the in-class exams.

The exams are mandatory. Absences may be excused only in cases of severe illness or other extreme circumstances. Proof of extreme circumstances or severe illness is required. Make up exams will not be given unless there is proof of extreme circumstances.

Late Assignment Rules *Late assignments (homework, essays) will NOT be accepted for this class.* Again, you will be allowed to miss one homework without penalty. Following that, you will lose 2% for each assignment missed up to a maximum of 10%. You will receive a zero if you don't turn in an essay on time.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you encounter difficulties concerning an assignment, **it is almost always possible to make arrangements before the assignment is due.** No accommodation is possible once the deadline has passed. **Come and talk to me before it is too late.**

Writing Center Students from all levels can take advantage of the writing center (LA 144 : drop in or by appointment)

“The Writing Center exists to help all UM students improve their writing skills as they pursue their academic and professional goals. We provide free writing instruction through one-on-one tutoring, in-class workshops, and the Writing Assistant program.” (quoted from the writing center website)

The tutors will not write your paper for you, but they will teach you how to write better. For more information, go the website: http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/welcom_about.htm

Academic Misconduct You are strictly held to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code (<http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/documents/StudentConductCode1.pdf>).

Unless collaborative work is specifically called for, work on assignments and exams is expected to be your own. If you plagiarise, your assignment will receive a zero. You may fail the class altogether depending on the scircumstances. Also, I will report the case to the Dean.

I will be glad to answer questions you may have about how to document sources properly. Anytime you take a phrase or sentence from someone, you have to quote it. Anytime you take an idea from someone, you have to cite your sources.

All exams are closed-note and closed-books: you may not consult anything but your own mind in order to answer questions on the exam. You may not use cell-phones, or any electronic devices to aid you, nor fellow students, nor fellow students' answers on exams, etc. You will receive a zero if you cheat on an exam. Your conduct will also be reported to the Dean.

Students with Disabilities If you are a student with a disability and wish to discuss reasonable accommodations for this course, contact me privately to discuss the specific modifications you wish to request. Please be advised I may request that you provide a letter from Disability Services for Students verifying your right to reasonable modifications. If you have not yet contacted Disability Services, located in Lommasson Center 154, please do so in order to verify your disability and to coordinate your reasonable modifications. For more information, visit the Disability Services website at www.umt.edu/dss/.

1.1 Grading Policies

The following are generic grading policies that I make available to my students.

1.1.1 Participation evaluation

- A range: The student is fully engaged and highly motivated. This student is well prepared, having read the assigned texts, and has thought carefully about the texts' relation to issues raised in lecture and section. This student's ideas and questions are substantive (either constructive or critical); they stimulate class discussions. This student listens and responds to the contributions of other students.
- B range: The student participates consistently in discussion. This student comes to section well prepared and contributes quite regularly by sharing thoughts and questions that show insight and a familiarity with the material. This student refers to the materials discussed in lecture and shows interest in other students' contributions.
- C range: The student meets the basic requirements of section participation. This student is usually prepared and participates once in a while but not regularly. This student's contributions relate to the texts and the lectures and offer a few insightful ideas, but do not facilitate a discussion.
- Failure to fulfill satisfactorily any of these criteria will result in a grade of "D" or below.

1.1.2 Homework evaluation

I am in general very generous in grading homework. The point of the homework assignments is to help you to focus on the important points during your reading.

- A range: Readings are very well understood. Only minor problems (up to four for a five questions assignment) remain. The assignment is written in whole sentences, good English and clear style.
- B range: There is either too many minor problems, or a few minor problems plus one major problem on one of the questions, or more than two major problems in the understanding of the readings. The assignment is not fulfilling one or more of these requirement of the A-range: whole sentences, good English and clear style.
- C range: There is a major problem for all questions. The assigned material was read, but not understood.
- Failure to fulfill satisfactorily any of these criteria will result in a grade of "D" or below.

1.1.3 Text analysis and presentation evaluation

- A range: You present an accurate reconstruction of the problem that the author is dealing with, an accurate and charitable reconstruction of the arguments pertaining to that problem, and a careful criticism of the author's arguments via your discussion questions. You take an active role leading discussion of the paper by responding to student's comments. In particular, you will have anticipated responses to your

discussion questions, especially how you think the author(s) might respond, and use those to draw out more elaborate comments about student's responses or to generate further discussion.

- B range: You present a reasonable reconstruction of the problem that the author is dealing with, a charitable reconstruction of the arguments pertaining to that problem, and some criticism of the author's arguments via your discussion questions. You will lead discussion of the paper and respond to student's comments.
- C range: You state the topic of the paper without articulating the problem that the author intends to address. You provide a summary of the paper (mere chronology without isolating the main arguments). You provide discussion questions that are related to the text, but aren't primarily geared to addressing possible weaknesses in the author's argument. You ask questions, but don't develop discussion.
- Failure to fulfill satisfactorily any of these criteria will result in a grade of "D" or below.

1.1.4 Paper / Essay evaluation

Six criteria for evaluating a paper:

- Substance,
- Thesis and argument structure, including introduction and conclusion,
- Use of supporting material and evidence,
- Quality of analysis, including the crucial distinction between unsupported assumptions, value judgments vs. analysis and argumentation,
- Use of quality sources,
- Quality of writing including grammatical correction, clarity, concision and persuasiveness.

Objectives for a good paper: rigorous inquiry, critical thinking, effective written argumentation.

- A range: This paper is outstanding in form and content.
 - The materials covered in class is understood in depth: the student shows that he or she has a command on the materials, including a critical understanding.
 - The thesis is clear and insightful; it is original, or it expands in a new way on ideas presented in the course.
 - The argument is unified and coherent.
 - The evidence presented in support of the argument is carefully chosen and deftly handled.
 - The analysis is complex and nuanced.

- The sources are original texts or quality scholars' literature.
- No grammatical mistakes, clear, precise and concise style.
- B range: The argument, while coherent, does not have the complexity, the insight, or the integrated structure of an A range paper.
 - The material covered in class is well understood: the student does not make any mistake on the materials but does not show great depth in critical understanding.
 - The paper's thesis is clear.
 - The argument is coherent.
 - The paper presents evidence in support of its points.
 - The paper is reasonably well written and proofread.
- C range: This paper has some but not all of the basic components of an argumentative essay (i.e., thesis, evidence, coherent structure).

For example:

- a clear misunderstanding of some of the material covered in class, or
- no clear or incoherent thesis, or
- incoherent structure of argument, for example simply repeats points made in class without an overall argument, or
- presents no evidence in support the thesis
- no use of original texts, but only secondary or popular literature (encyclopedia...)
- poorly written and proofread.
- A paper will fall below a "C" if it lacks more than one of the basic components of an argumentative essay.

Sources

- Tips for grading in the humanities, Stanford Center for Teaching and Learning website
- Introduction to the Humanities Program, STANFORD UNIVERSITY, Information for Faculty, 2005-06

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/undergrad/ihum/instructors/>

1.2 Suggested additional readings

If you need more sources of information, in addition to the material covered in class, I would suggest that you start with two great websites:

- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://plato.stanford.edu>
- The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>

No need to say, there is a lot of *inaccurate if not plainly false* information on the web. You need to learn how to recognize good sources of information.

Here are two useful introductory texts:

- John Cottingham, *The Rationalists*, History of Western Philosophy Series, Oxford University Press (Paperback - Sep 22, 1988)
- Jonathan Bennett *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, Oxford University Press (Paperback - May 15, 1971)

You can also trust the series “Cambridge Companion to ... ” and “Blackwell guide to ...”.