

PHIL 252  
History of Modern Philosophy  
– University of Montana –  
Spring 2009

Soazig Le Bihan



# Part I

## Presentation and Introduction



# Chapter 1

## Syllabus

### 1.1 Course Information

- Course Number: PHIL 252
- Credits: 3
- Class meets: MW 3:10 - 4:30, JOUR 304
- Instructor: Soazig Le Bihan
  - Office Number: LA 153
  - Office Hours: Fridays 8-11 am
  - Mailbox: LA 101
  - Email: [soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu](mailto:soazig.lebihan@umontana.edu)
- Websites:
  - Note that 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/0901-PHIL252.php>
  - Information about your grades: blackboard: [hhttps://courseware.umt.edu](https://courseware.umt.edu)

## 1.2 Course Description

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

The 17th and 18th centuries are centuries of radical changes in the domains of philosophy, science and politics. Most of our modern western culture originates in these times. That said, in studying modern philosophy, you should expect to encounter and to learn to understand worldviews that are also 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 only 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 three main goals of the course are for students:

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

To attain goal (1) and (2), we will carefully read and discuss original texts by the most important philosophers of the period. To attain goal (3), memorizing and repeating is not going to be enough: students are expected to engage the material themselves instead.

## 1.3 Required Textbook

Ariew R. and Watkins, E., *Modern Philosophy: an anthology of primary sources*, Hackett

Suggestions for further reading are available at the end of this syllabus.

## 1.4 Tentative Schedule

Week 1	01/26 01/28	Presentation of the course and Introduction Philosophy and Arguments
Week 2	02/02 02/04	Philosophy and Arguments – TEST 1 Descartes, Meditation I
Week 3	02/09 02/11	Descartes, Meditation II and III Descartes, Meditation IV and V
Week 4	02/16 02/18	No class: Washington-Lincoln Day Descartes, Meditation VI
Week 5	02/23 02/25 02/27	Descartes, Conclusion – TEST 2 Spinoza, Ethics, Part I PAPER DUE before 2pm in my mailbox
Week 6	03/02 03/04	Spinoza, Ethics, Part II Spinoza, Ethics, Part V
Week 7	03/09 03/11	Leibniz, Monadology – WITHDRAW DAY Leibniz, Monadology
Week 8	03/16 03/18	Leibniz, Discourse on Metaphysics, excerpts Spinoza and Leibniz: Conclusion – TEST 3
Week 9	03/23 03/25 03/27	Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book I Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II REWRITE DUE before 2pm in my mailbox
Week 10		SPRING BREAK
Week 11	04/06 04/08	Berkeley, Three Dialogues, 1-2 Berkeley, Three Dialogues, 3
Week 12	04/13 04/15	Conclusion Locke and Berkeley – TEST 4 Hume, Inquiry, 1-4 – PROSPECTUS DUE for optional paper
Week 13	04/20 04/15	Hume, Inquiry, 5-8 Hume, Inquiry, 10-12
Week 14	04/27 04/29	Hume, Conclusion – TEST 5 Kant, Prolegomena to any future metaphysics, Preface and Preamble – OPTIONAL PAPERS DUE
Week 15	05/04 05/06	Kant, Prolegomena to any future metaphysics, Part I Kant, Conclusion
Week 16	05/11	FINAL EXAM 3:20 to 5:20

## 1.5 Course Requirements

Your grade will be based on the following:

1. Attendance and participation 5 %;
2. 1 text analysis 5%;
3. 5 Tests, 5% each – 25% total;
4. 1 take-home paper and 1 rewrite, 20 % each – 40% total;
5. 1 in-class *comprehensive* final exam, 25 %.

**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 hard.

You are allowed to miss 3 classes without penalty. Following that, you will lose 1% up to a maximum of 5 per cent (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.

To attend a class does not mean merely sitting in class. You are expected to give your full attention to the class. Cell phones or other modes of communications 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 have worked by yourself on the material covered during the classes you may have missed.

**Participation** I encourage you to participate in class. Trying to answer my questions or asking questions yourselves both qualify as participation. You will not be penalized for answering incorrectly.

This means that, when reading at home, you have to be an *active reader*. This will be one of the most important parts of the work your



are expected to do for the course. I will provide you with study questions. In order to get prepared for class, you should:

- write down short answers to the study questions
- prepare at least 3 questions of your own on the readings
- give comments to the text analysis on Blackboard when applicable

While you will not be given a grade for your participation, I will take it into consideration when deciding upon your final grade. Active and consistent participation to the class can raise your final grade by a step within a letter grade (from B- to B for example).

**Text analysis** Each week, we will spend some time on a close reading of a passage of the readings. The aim is to get you learn how to read a philosophical text. I will ask two to three students to prepare an analysis of the passage, which should consist in extracting:

- the main claim(s) of the passage
- the argument structure
- three questions for the further evaluation of the argument

The analyses should be posted on blackboard + send to me via email the day before class before 4pm. Every student will then be responsible to read the analysis and to write down some comments.

For very useful guidelines on how to read philosophy, see J. Pryor web site:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

**In-class Exams** All the in-class exams (including the final) will consist in answering short questions, which will be taken out of a list which will be distributed in advance. Most of the questions correspond to the study questions that I give you for the readings.

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 extreme circumstances.

**Papers** You will have to write a short paper and a rewrite, on the basis of my comments, each between 800 and 1000 words. Both the original paper and the rewrite will have the same weight in your final grade. An important part of the grade of the rewrite depends on how you responded to my comments.

You will also be given the option of writing a second paper, between spring break and the end of the semester. There will be no possible rewrite for this optional paper, but I will ask you to give me a prospectus for the paper in advance. A prospectus should contain your thesis statement as well as an outline of your argument, and a bibliography. The optional paper will have the same weight as the other two. This means that the three papers will together count for 40% of your final grade. The optional paper will be counted no matter what the result is, that is even if your grade does not raise your overall grade of your papers.

**Late Assignment Rules** Late Assignments: without prior arrangements being made with the instructor, the grade of any late assignment will be lowered by one step of a letter grade a day (B+ to B for example).

**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 won't 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](http://www.umt.edu/writingcenter/welcom_about.htm)

**Academic Misconduct** You are strictly held to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code (<http://www.umt.edu.SA>).

Unless collaborative work is specifically called for, work on assignments and exams is expected to be your own. In case of plagiarism, your assignment will receive a zero. You may fail the class altogether depending on circumstances. 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.

The final exam is closed-note: 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 the final 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/](http://www.umt.edu/dss/).

## 1.6 Grading Policies

### 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.

### **Paper 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/>

## 1.7 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 ...”.