
HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY II: FROM RENAISSANCE TO MODERN in Spring 2021 (PL1200)

Course Code	PL1200	Professor(s)	Oliver Feltham
Prerequisites	None	Office Number	G-L19
Class Schedule	M: 16:55-18:15 in G-L22 R: 12:10-13:30 in G-L22	Office Hours	Tuesday and Friday 15h30-16h30
Credits	4	Email	ofeltham@aup.edu
Semester	Spring 2021	Office Tel. Ext.	618

Course Description

History of Philosophy II is the second core course in the Philosophy Major. It provides an intense introduction to the work of four major philosophers whose work defined philosophical modernity: Descartes, Spinoza, Locke and Hume. Through an examination of modern skepticism about the claims of reason and our knowledge of the world, students will be introduced to the philosophical discipline of epistemology as well as the transformations of metaphysics. Descartes develops an introspective method, examining the contents of his own mind in an attempt to find and secure a foundation for scientific knowledge. This approach inaugurated what came to be known as the philosophy of the subject, an entire branch of modern and contemporary philosophy that led to the school of phenomenology and is also found in contemporary philosophies of psychoanalysis.

One of our guides through this complex material will be the classic question 'how do we know about the existence of other minds'. It is often claimed that in the modern period epistemology replaces ontology as first philosophy, yet we will pay equal attention to the transformations of ontology in the modern period, moving from an Aristotelian understanding of reality consisting of concrete individual substances to the redefinition of substance and its physical and mental modes in Descartes and Spinoza, and a skepticism about either our knowledge of or the very existence of substance in Locke and Hume. The Cartesian redefinition of substance leads to the problems of mind/body dualism, which still haunts the philosophy of mind today, and which received one of its early and enduring solutions in Spinoza. These transformations in ontology also reflect the impact on philosophy of the new physics. We will also be concerned with these philosophers' contributions to the project of the enlightenment in its various forms, and how they position the philosopher with regard to society.

Descartes' redefinition of substance as extension, his mind-body dualism, his provisional morality, his geometrical method and his championing of free will and the use of reason by any man to engage in the gradual accumulation of scientific knowledge will serve as the starting

point in our exploration of the great intellectual adventure that is modern philosophy.

Course Learning Outcomes

(Written expression) Write a philosophy essay, focusing on the clear presentation of a critical analysis of a primary text so as to produce an argument that answers a philosophical question

(Philosophical analysis) Engage in the close reading of key philosophical texts, identifying the different parts of arguments, major theses, concepts and problems.

(Philosophical argumentation) Reconstruct the stakes of the major philosophical questions – concerning being, truth, God and action – as they are posed by different philosophers.

Analytically recompose important arguments, such as that leading to (and from) Descartes' cogito.

(Historical understanding) Identify elements of the legacy of the empiricist and rationalist philosophers in contemporary philosophy and ideology

General Education

Course Outline

PART I DESCARTES

Week I Method, scientific knowledge and rationalism

Monday 18th January - Session 1 Method and Provisional Morality

Reading

- Descartes, "Parts 1, 2 & 3" of *Discourse on Method* in *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*, pp.20-39.
- Cottingham, "Chapter 2: Method", in *The Rationalists*, pp.31-50.

Topics

- What is Descartes' method? The distinct nature of scientific knowledge: product of a gradual accumulative process rather than illumination or inspiration;); the discovery of sound principles; the extension of the model of deductive reasoning to all knowledge;

the four rules of clear and distinct ideas (accessible and simple), analysis, order of ideas, completion; its source is not tradition but the world and the self (how does the method acquire its object? the doctrine of innate ideas and introspection versus the mathematization of the universe); the ideal of systematicity guaranteed by single authorship, the exercise of radical doubt as purification of the author, the project of epistemological foundation and the limit of its reform to the subject's own knowledge, the starting point within mathematics and the result of analytic geometry and optics, the ethic of the method (stoicism, democratic accessibility), the challenge of applying the method to philosophy, the obstacle of lack of experience.

- How to act when refounding one's knowledge: the provisional moral code (Part III). The four maxims: first, obedience to civil law and religion's precepts, conformity to social norms, disengagement from contracts; second, resolute action based on probable judgement in practical situations; third, attempt to change my desire and my thoughts rather than the order of the world (Stoicism); fourth, the errant voyager's review of all occupations and opinions in the world as a way of disengaging himself from false opinions and received ideas.

Thursday 21st January - Session 2 Hyperbolic doubt, physics

Readings

- Descartes, "Parts 4, 5 & 6", *Discourse on Method* in *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings* [SPW], pp.30-56.

Topics

- Application of the method to metaphysics: summary of the *Meditations* (Part IV). Radical doubt and its limit in the cogito; the cogito as first principle; the identity of the subject of the cogito as a thinking substance separate from the body (Cartesian dualism); criteria for true knowledge are clarity and distinction of ideas; ontological argument for the existence of God based on the innate idea of the most perfect being, for my dependency on God (concurrence), for my knowledge of God; critique of perception and imagination as essential to the understanding; distinction between metaphysical and practical certitude, metaphysical certitude of the existence of God and the soul, God as guarantee of truth; reason as the only admissible evidence for knowledge.
- Application of the method to physics: our innate ideas of the laws of nature (Part V). Summary of the non-published treatise *The World* (matter, light, astrophysics, geology, etc.). Strategy for avoiding ecclesiastical censure. Mechanist critique of the Aristotelian conception of the soul as a substantial form animating the body: matter and its qualities as sole explanation of physical movement. Theory of the circulation of blood (the phenomena to be explained, the causes Descartes identifies, his use of Harvey's work, the concept of animal spirits); summary of theory of perception; mechanist collapse of the distinction between natural and artificial bodies; reinforcing the distinction between humans and machines (plasticity, question of artificial intelligence) and the distinction between humans and animals (language); account of the soul, its location in and its union with the body, the afterlife as essential to morality.

-
- The place of the philosopher. Galileo's trial: reasons for and against the publication of *The World*. Contributing to the collective progress of scientific knowledge and to its practical application in technology, rendering humans the 'masters and possessors of nature', specifically in medicine;

January 27th – last day to drop/add courses

Week II *The Meditations*

Monday 25th January - Session 3 Hyperbolic doubt and the cogito

Reading

- Descartes, Meditations 1 and 2, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, SPW, pp.76-86.
- "Objections and Replies" (On Meditations 1 & 2), SPW, pp.123-31.

Assessment

- Set questions for the first take home essay (1000-1500 words), due Thurs 4th Feb.

Topics

- The search for first principles: the exercise of methodological doubt and the proof of the existence of the soul. The four successive waves of doubt. First, doubting sense-perception of external bodies (the argument from relativism and error). Second, the argument from dreams (on the basis of perception alone, how do we distinguish being awake from dreaming?). Fourth, hyperbolic doubt and the hypothesis of the evil demon. The difference between doubt and skepticism. Discovering the limit point to doubt: the *cogito*. From object to subject of the verb.
- Analysis of the *cogito*: what is the subject? A thinking thing. Critical analysis of our knowledge of bodies, of physical substance: the lump of wax. Empirical knowledge is not sufficient to establish the notion of substance. Thesis: our knowledge of mental substance is more certain than our knowledge of physical substance.

Thursday 28th January - Session 4 Epistemology: the origin of our ideas

Reading

- Descartes, Meditation 3, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, SPW, pp.86-98.
- "Objections and Replies" (On Meditation 3), SPW, pp.131-33.

Topics

- The investigation of Epistemology. Stocktaking: what kinds of ideas are present in my mind? Enquiry: what are the origins of these ideas? What guarantees the veracity, the objective validity, the resemblance of an idea? Doctrine of ideation as a form of causality

(the cause must possess at least the same degree of reality as the effect).

Selective enquiry: which of my ideas possesses the greatest objective reality? The idea of God is of infinity and absolute perfection.

- Three hypotheses as to the origin of my existence: myself, less perfect beings, my parents. The innate idea of God as God's signature in his work, the work of my soul.

Week III *The Meditations*: proofs of essence and existence

Monday 1st February - Session 5 Truth, essences, and the argument for the existence of God

Readings

- Descartes, Meditations 4 & 5, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, SPW, pp.98-110.
- "Objections and Replies" (On Meditations 4 & 5), SPW, pp.133-43.

Topics

- Theory of truth and falsity (Medit'n 4). First theory of error as the overextension of the will beyond the understanding (*hubris*). Error is privation and lack and as such does not involve God's concurrence. Criterion of truth: all clear and distinct ideas come from God and are true. Difficulties with this criterion: are we not persuaded of the truth of our prejudices and errors?
- Proving the essence of material things (Medit'n 5). The presence, in my mind, of many clear and distinct ideas of things.
- The ontological argument for the existence of God. Existence is one of God's perfections hence to be absolutely perfect is to exist. Kant's counter-argument in *The Critique of Pure Reason*.

Thursday 4th February - Session 6 Proof of the existence of external things, mind-body dualism

Assessment

- First take home essay on Descartes due today (1000-1500 words).

Readings

- Descartes, Meditation 6, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, SPW, pp.110-22.
- "Objections and Replies" (On Meditations 1 & 2), SPW, pp.143-59.

Topics

- Proof of the existence of material things. Argument for their probable existence from the operation of the imagination. Argument from unwilled changes in sense-perceptions: there must be an external agent of such change if it is not myself. Argument from God

not being a deceiver.

- Proof of the real distinction of mind and body: Cartesian dualism. From the experience of the cogito I know that my essence is to be a thinking thing, independent of my body. I have two clear and distinct ideas of my mind and of my body.
- Proof of the substantial union of mind and body. The experience of pain.

Week IV Ontology and the Passions

Mini-break 8th-10th February

Thursday 11th February- Session 7 Outline of a mechanist ontology

Reading

- Descartes, Part II, Propositions 1-23 of *Principles of Philosophy*, SPW, pp.189-99.
- Part I, Propositions 51-65 of *Principles of Philosophy*, SPW, pp.177-83.

Topics:

- What is mechanism? The redefinition of body as extension; the equivalence of space, place and corporeal substance (§10-15); the non-existence of a void (§16-18); the impossibility of atomism; the indefinite extension of the universe; ontological monism: no sublunar universe of contingency, determinism and the mathematization of the universe; global qualities as aggregate results of local interactions.
- Definition of substance, modes and attributes. Real and modal distinctions.

Week V Free will and the passions, Intro to Spinoza

Monday 15th February - Session 8 Free will and the passions

Readings

- Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul* [selections], SPW, pp.218-38.

Topics

- The definition of the passions (§1-3)
- Mechanist conception of the body and critique of the animist notion of the soul (§4-6); explanation of corporeal movement via an account of circulation of the blood and the nervous system (§7-16);
- The functions of the soul: distinction between passions and actions, perceptions and volitions; sense-perceptions caused by external objects or our body versus passions of the soul (§17-26); definition of passions of the soul, holistic unity of mind and body and their functional interaction in the pineal gland, mechanical explanation of the passions (§27-37). Leibniz's critique of the soul's movement of the pineal gland as against mechanism. Free will and the power of the soul with regard to the passions (§41-50); the

role of habit, the influence of the passions on the soul, incontinence and self-discipline, the possibility of moral education through mastery of the passions.

Part II SPINOZA

Thursday 18th February - Session 9 Argument for the existence of one sole all-encompassing substance

Reading

- Spinoza, Book I, Definitions and Propositions 1-15, *Ethics*.

Passages for close reading

- Appendix to Book I.

Topics

- The critique of the imperial model of action and the anthropomorphic illusion of the creator-God as separate from the created universe.
- Redefinition of substance, attribute and mode in relation to Descartes' definition in *Principles of Philosophy*.
- Analysis of the forms of differentiation; between modes, between attributes. Numerical versus real difference.

Week VI Causality and Mind-body parallelism

Monday 22nd February - Session 10 Immanent causality and determinism

Reading

- Spinoza, Book I, Definitions and Propositions 16-36, *Ethics*.

Topics

- The depersonalization of God: God is action or an infinite production process; determinism and compatibilism: redefining freedom as independence and self-causation (P17), the *natura naturans* / *natura naturata* distinction (P29Sch).
- The univocity of being: transfer of God's properties (infinity and necessity) to everything that arises on the basis of God (attributes and modes) (P21-23). The ontological situation of individual things (P24-29)
- The function of the intellect and the critique of free-will (P30-36)
- The argument for the unity of substance revisited: numerical versus real distinction, the finite and the infinite.

February 24th-28th Mini-break, no classes!

Week VII Philosophy of mind and epistemology

Monday 1st March - Session 11 The nature of mind: divine and human

Reading

- Spinoza, Book II, Definitions and Propositions 1-13, *Ethics*.
- Breakdown of the structure of Book II on the BB site.

Topics

- Epistemological and ontological parallelism: definition of the mind of God and its relation to extended things (P1-7)
- Conditions of ideas (of God, of humans) (P8-P13); the nature of human beings (P10, P13Cor); the nature of the human mind and its relation to the body (P11-13); the distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas configured as two different relationships between the mind of God and the human mind (P11Cor).
- Physics: doctrine of particular bodies (Post's & Ax's to P13); simple bodies, composite bodies and the human body.

Thursday 4th March Session 12 Spinoza's theory of knowledge

Reading

- Spinoza, Book II, Definitions and Propositions 14-49, *Ethics*.

Topics

- Spinoza's theory of error: why do human beings have inadequate knowledge? (P14-P36) Knowledge is knowledge of affections of the body (P12-22); Various forms of inadequate mutilated knowledge (P23-31). Criterion of truth and falsity in ideas (P32-36)
- True knowledge is knowledge of God: the very possibility of adequate human knowledge (P37-49). The possibility of universals (P37-40). Definition of three kinds of knowledge (P40Sch2-P42); truth as an index of itself (P43); the possibility of adequate human knowledge of God (the point of view of reason is eternity) (P44-47); the existence of volitions but not free will as a separate faculty in human minds (P48-9).

Week VIII The Affect Network

Monday 8th March - Session 13 Spinoza's theory of the passions and of socialization

Reading

- Spinoza, Book III, Definitions and Propositions 1-55, *Ethics*

Topics

-
- The critique of traditional moral philosophy in the name of a scientific apology of the emotions (Preface)
 - The plasticity of the human mind: definitions of action, passion and their relation to adequate and inadequate ideas, and of conatus (P1-11)
 - Construction of the basic emotions of pleasure, pain and desire, love and hatred (P11-18)
 - Basis for affect networks (P18Sch2-P26): sympathy, egocentrism
 - Socialization via other people's emotions: mechanisms of identification, reciprocity, possessiveness, envy (P27-43).
 - Group phenomena in emotions (P44-55) Prejudice, sympathy and pity, superstitions, diversity of reactions to the same event, inconstancy of judgement

Thursday 11th March - Session 14 Midterm

Assessment

- Oral presentations of the significance of one proposition from Bks I-III to Spinoza's argument

Part III: LOCKE

Week IX Intro to Locke, Locke's epistemology

Monday 15th March - Session 15 Locke's epistemological turn and his critique of innate ideas

Reading

- Locke, "Preface" and Book I Chapters 1 & 2, Chapter 3 of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pp.3-8, 13-42. BB pdfs.

Assessment

- Questions for research essay set (essay is due Thursday 8th April)

Topics

- The epistemological turn: dismissal of ontology, investigation of origin of ideas, of degrees of assent and of limits of knowledge. The promise: definitive resolution of moral and political problems – the problems of political and religious conflict (BkI, Ch.1, pp.13-16).
- Argument against innate ideas (BkI, Ch.2, pp.17-30). Countering the argument from universal assent. Locke's critique of the supposedly innate speculative ideas of non-contradiction.
- No innate practical ideas (BkI, Ch.3, pp.30-42): argument from practice for the diversity of human morality (§3). Argument from justification: asking for reasons for moral rules and

the diversity of those reasons (§4-6).

Thursday 18th March - Session 16 Genealogy of ideas and the theory of perception

Reading

- Locke, Book II Chapters 1-8, & 12 of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pp.54-82 & 96-99. BB pdfs.

Topics

- Empiricist epistemology: the human mind defined as *tabula rasa* (II,2,§2). Definition of ideas, distinction between simple and complex ideas. Origin of ideas in sense-perception and reflection (II,1,§3-4). The genealogy of ideas (a 'history of my spirit'): first particular ideas, then general ideas constructed through abstraction (another variety of epistemological foundationalism?) (I,1,§15). Definition and genealogy of complex ideas (II,12).
- Argument against the soul always thinking: thinking is always conscious (II,1, §§9-19) target = Descartes?)
- Locke's theory of perception (II,8): Distinction between primary and secondary properties (II,8,§8-18). Ideas represent but do not resemble things.

Week X True ideas of substance versus true ideas of action

Monday 22nd March - Session 17 Locke on the genesis of general ideas, our ideas of substance and his conception of truth

Reading

- Locke, Book II Chapter 21 of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pp.140-74. BB pdf.

Topics

- The peasant versus the watchmaker's idea of the clock: complex ideas of substance and a progressive conception of scientific and technical knowledge

Thursday 25th March - Session 18 Locke's theory of action

Reading

- Locke, Book II Chapter 22, 23 & 32 of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pp.174-96, 242-44.
- Locke, Book III Chapters 6 & 9 of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pp.279-302, 322-28

Topics

- Mixed modes as complex ideas versus the complex ideas of substance
- Epistemology as the basis of moral philosophy: the investigation of our ideas of power and action.
- The problem of transmission, the problem of equivocal actions, the solution of authority

Friday 5th April - last day to withdraw or choose credit/no credit option

Week XI Locke's conception of personal identity

Monday 29th March – Session 19 Locke's desubstantialization of personal identity

Reading

- Locke, Book II Chapter 27 of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pp.203-219.

Topics

- What is a person? A forensic term: a person is a reflective consciousness of self-identity qua ownership of actions.
- The critique of substantial identity.

Thursday 1st April - Session 20 Personal identity as a forensic category

Reading

- Locke, Book II Chapter 27 of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, pp.203-219.

Topics

- Definition of our ideas of action as 'mixed modes'; the automatic adequacy of a mixed mode as an archetype versus our ideas of substances as copies of reality.
- The problems of transmission and application

Week XII Locke and religious toleration, Intro to Hume.

Mon 5th– Tuesday 6th no classes (Easter Monday then Faculty Retreat)

Thursday 8th April - Session 21 Locke on religious toleration

Assessment

-
- Research essay due (1500-2000 words)

Reading

- Blackboard pdf of Locke's *Letter on Toleration*

Topics

- Appeal to authority (II,33,§12)
- Diagnosis of religious conflict in complex ideas (II,34,§18)
- Locke's separation of church and state
- Locke's reinvention of the institution of the church as a free association of investors

PART IV HUME

Week XII Hume on the origin of knowledge

Monday 12th April - Session 22 Impressions and Ideas

Reading

- Hume, Chapters 2, 3 & 4 of *An Enquiry concerning human understanding*, pp.14-40.

Topics

- The origin of knowledge. The distinction between impressions and ideas as degrees of intensity. The empiricist doctrine that all ideas have their source in impressions. Argument from introspection and resolution of complex ideas into simple ideas. Argument from the blind man's ignorance of colour. Generation of a criterion for the critique of philosophical knowledge: verification of the idea's correspondence with an impression: verificationism.
- The construction of knowledge I. The first law of Hume's 'science of human nature': association of ideas through resemblance, contiguity and cause and effect. The role of these three kinds of association in aesthetic perception (poetry and history).
- The threat of skepticism. Distinction of all objects of knowledge into relations of ideas (necessary) and matters of fact (contingent). All reasoning about matters of fact depends on the relation of causality. Enquiry into our knowledge of causality: always based on experience. Doctrine of the real distinction of cause and effect as separate events. How do we make conclusions on the basis of experience? Not by reason (no chain of deduction, rehearsal of Locke's argument on the limits of our knowledge of nature's secret powers, the course of nature could change).

Thursday 15th April - Session 23 Hume's critique of metaphysical knowledge of causality

Reading

-
- Hume, Chapters 5, 6 & 7 of *An Enquiry concerning human understanding*, pp.41-72.

Topics

- The construction of knowledge II: A principle of human nature: habit.
- Probability and degrees of knowledge
- The critique of causality

Week XIII Hume on free will and religion

Monday 19th April - Session 24 Free will versus determinism: a compatibilist solution

Reading

- Hume, Chapter 8 of *An Enquiry concerning human understanding*, pp.72-91.

Topics

- Hume's compatibilist solution to the problem of free will versus determinism.

Thursday 22nd April- Session 25 Hume on religion and its metaphysical claims

Reading

- Hume, Chapters 10 & 11 of *An Enquiry concerning human understanding*, pp.96-130.

Topics

- The critique of miracles
- The critique of religion's promises for the individual: a particular providence, and the afterlife.

Week XIV Revision

Monday 26th April– Session 26 Revision

Assessment: Revision for the exam

Last classes Wednesday 28th April

Reading days April 29th– May 2nd

Exams May 3rd– 12th

Textbooks

Title	Author	Publisher	ISBN	Required
An Essay concerning Human Understanding	John Locke	oxford UP	9780199296620	Yes
Selected Philosophical Writings	Descartes	Cambridge University Press	9780521358125	Yes
An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding	David Hume	Cambridge UP	9780521604031	Yes
Ethics	Spinoza	Cambridge UP	9781107655638	Yes

Attendance Policy

Students studying at The American University of Paris are expected to attend ALL scheduled classes, and in case of absence, should contact their professors to explain the situation. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of any specific attendance policy that a faculty member might have set in the course syllabus. The French Department, for example, has its own attendance policy, and students are responsible for compliance. Academic Affairs will excuse an absence for students' participation in study trips related to their courses.

Attendance at all exams is mandatory.

IN ALL CASES OF MISSED COURSE MEETINGS, THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMMUNICATION WITH THE PROFESSOR, AND FOR ARRANGING TO MAKE UP MISSED WORK, RESTS SOLELY WITH THE STUDENT.

Whether an absence is excused or not is ALWAYS up to the discretion of the professor or the department. Unexcused absences can result in a low or failing participation grade. In the case of excessive absences, it is up to the professor or the department to decide if the student will receive an "F" for the course. An instructor may recommend that a student withdraw, if absences have made it impossible to continue in the course at a satisfactory level.

Students must be mindful of this policy when making their travel arrangements, and especially during the Drop/Add and Exam Periods.

Grading Policy

- Short take home essay on Descartes (1000-1500 words) due Thursday 4th Feb.
10%
- Midterm oral presentations on Spinoza on Thursday 11th March
20%
- Research paper (1500-2000 words) due Thursday 8th April
30%
- Final Exam
20%
- Attendance, participation
20%

Other
