

History of Modern Philosophy

Wednesday, January 22 **OVERVIEW**

We will discuss some of the leading European philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Philosophy in this era was dominated by questions raised by the scientific revolution. To get a taste of this, we will discuss a short passage from Galileo in which he sets out his belief that the world can be fundamentally described in mathematical terms. This means, as he says, that things like colors are not objective features of the world but rather are due to our subjective experience of the world. Read Galileo, *The Assayer*, pp. 21-24.¹

Monday, January 27 **DESCARTES'S FIRST MEDITATION**

Descartes's *Discourse on Method* gives an intellectual autobiography. We get his project of building a foundation for his beliefs as well as a statement of his dualism. The latter is an attempt to find a place for minds in the material world. The first meditation begins this project in earnest by identifying all of the beliefs that can be called into doubt. Descartes intends to set these aside in order to find beliefs he is certain of to provide the foundations he seeks. By the end of the *Meditations*, he will try to show that the foundations he identifies give him confidence in the beliefs that he had set aside at this stage. Read Descartes, *Discourse on Method* and Meditation One, in *Modern Philosophy*, 25-43²

Wednesday, January 29 **DESCARTES'S SECOND MEDITATION**

In the second meditation, Descartes finds the first brick for his foundation: he cannot doubt that he exists. This leads him to ask what he is. Since his answer is that he is a mind and not a body, he discusses the

¹ Galileo Galilei, *The Assayer*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, trans. Arthur Danto, 3rd ed. (1623; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019), 21-24.

² René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, trans. Donald Cress, 3rd ed. (1623; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019); René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, trans. Donald Cress, 3rd ed. (1623; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019).

differences between mind and body. Pay special attention to what he says about himself on page 44 and what he says about the wax on pages 45-46. This is a topic he will return to in the sixth meditation. Read Descartes, "Meditation Two," in *Modern Philosophy*, 43-47

Monday, February 3

DESCARTES ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The most important foundation for knowledge is God. Descartes will try to prove both that God exists and that he is not a deceiver. He thinks that will be enough to show that we can genuinely know things based on the senses. It is at least enough to dismiss the doubts that came up in the first meditation, namely, that I could be dreaming or that my senses could be manipulated by a demon or other supernatural being. Read Descartes, Meditations 3-5, in *Modern Philosophy*, 47-61.

Wednesday, February 5

DESCARTES ON BODY AND MIND

The topic of the sixth meditation is the relationship between the mind and the body. We will be especially concerned with Descartes's contention that the mind and body have separate essences: thought and extension, respectively. In addition to looking at his argument for this conclusion, we will discuss a criticism posed by Princess Elisabeth: Descartes has no way of explaining how mind and body could interact, either when the mind receives information from the senses or when it controls a body's actions by, say, making a decision. Read Descartes, Meditation Six, in *Modern Philosophy*, 61-68 and Elisabeth and Descartes, "Correspondence" in *Modern Philosophy*, 93-95.

Monday, February 10

HOBBS'S MATERIALISM

Thomas Hobbes was a materialist. Unlike Descartes, he did not believe that mind and body were distinct but rather that the only things that exist are material bodies. We will read some objections that Hobbes raised against Descartes, along with Descartes's replies, and then Hobbes's own materialist theory of psychology as presented in his book *Leviathan*. Hobbes believes that mental states, such as sensations or memories, are motions in a body, presumably a brain. Is that an adequate account of what it is like to see something? He is also a nominalist, meaning that he thinks that only particular things exist and that all generalizations are a matter of our linguistic conventions.

Does that mean that science is just a matter of definitions? Read Hobbes and Descartes, "Objections and Replies," in *Modern Philosophy*, 76-79 and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chaps. 1-5, in *Modern Philosophy*, 122-135.³

Wednesday, February 12 HOBBS'S MATERIALIST ACCOUNT OF GOD

In the Objections and Replies, Hobbes expresses doubts that we have an idea of God in the way Descartes claims. In chapters 34 and 38 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes gives a materialist reading of the Bible, trying to show that Biblical references to spirits, angels, and the afterlife can all be understood in materialist terms. In chapter 46 of *Leviathan*, Hobbes elaborates on his materialist philosophy and rails against the incorporation of ideas from Greek philosophy into Christian doctrine. Read Hobbes and Descartes, "Objections and Replies," in *Modern Philosophy*, 79-82; Hobbes, *Leviathan* chaps. 34 and 46, in *Modern Philosophy*, 135-42; and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chap. 38 (on Canvas).

Monday, February 17 BRAMHALL AND HOBBS ON FREE WILL

This is the beginning of a seventeenth-century debate about free will that the Marquis of Newcastle commissioned between John Bramhall, Bishop of Derry, and Thomas Hobbes. Bramhall's position was that a variety of social and religious practices make sense only if what he calls the will is not caused by anything outside of it. Hobbes said that our actions are free if we are not prevented from doing what we want to. That kind of freedom is compatible with the causal determination of our desires and, in turn, the actions those desires produce. Read John Bramhall *Discourse on Liberty and Necessity* and Thomas Hobbes, *Of Liberty and Necessity* (On Canvas as "Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity").⁴

³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, 3rd ed. (1651; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019).

⁴ John Bramhall, *Discourse of Liberty and Necessity*, in *Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance*, ed. Mark C. Rooks, British Philosophy: 1600-1900 (1655; Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 2000). Thomas Hobbes, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, ed. Mark C. Rooks, British Philosophy: 1600-1900 (1654; Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 2000).

Wednesday, February 19 **SPINOZA ON SUBSTANCE**

We will discuss Spinoza's monism, that is, his view that there is only one substance. Spinoza tries to show that substances cannot interact with one another and that there must be an infinite substance that has every attribute. From these points, he believes, it follows that there is only one substance. Read Spinoza, *The Ethics*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 172-77.⁵

Monday, February 24 **SPINOZA ON GOD**

Today's class is devoted to Spinoza's pantheism, that is, his view that everything in nature is part of God. Read Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 177-92.

Wednesday, February 26 **MALEBRANCHE'S OCCASIONALISM**

We have encountered one question about causation already: how could mental and material substances interact, such that the one could cause effects in the other? One thing that was taken for granted is that material bodies could cause other material bodies to move: by displacing one another from their positions in space. Malebranche questions that story about material causation. His idea is that causes necessarily bring about their effects, but only God has the power to make anything truly necessary. What look like causes to you and me are only occasions for God to act, hence the name "occasionalism." Read Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 240-51.⁶

Monday, March 3 **LEIBNIZ ON GOD**

Leibniz argues that this is the best of all possible worlds and that it was chosen by God because it is the best. Furthermore, everything that happens is determined; that is why God chose this world. In addition to explaining his reasoning for those claims, Leibniz has to show that they are

⁵ Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, trans. Samuel Shirley, 3rd ed. (1677; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019).

⁶ Nicholas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, trans. Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene, 3rd ed. (1675; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019).

compatible with God's freely having chosen to make the world as he did. Read Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 252-63 and 270-75.⁷

Wednesday, March 5

LEIBNIZ'S IDEALISM

Leibniz took seriously the idea that substances cannot interact with one another. He also maintained that substances must be indivisible unities. Material bodies cannot be substances because they are divisible. That leaves souls as the only possible substances. Read Leibniz, *Primary Truths*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 293-302.⁸

Monday, March 10

LEIBNIZ ON INNATE IDEAS

Questions about the origins of our ideas have come up from time to time. For example, Descartes maintained that the idea of God is innate (p. 60L) while Hobbes said that all of our ideas come from the senses (p. 122L). Leibniz makes an extended case for innate ideas in response to John Locke, the author who is next on our syllabus. Read Leibniz, "Preface to the *New Essays*," in *Modern Philosophy*, 463-74.⁹

Wednesday, March 12

LOCKE ON INNATE IDEAS

John Locke argues that there are no innate ideas. He thinks our minds are blank slates at birth and all of our ideas come from experience. He is, accordingly, known as an empiricist. Read John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 346-62.¹⁰

⁷ G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, 3rd ed. (1686; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019).

⁸ G. W. Leibniz, *Primary Truths*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, 3rd ed. (1689; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019).

⁹ G. W. Leibniz, *A New System of the Nature and Communication of Substances, and of the Union of the Soul and the Body*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, 3rd ed. (1695; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019).

¹⁰ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, 3rd ed. (1690; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019).

Monday, March 24

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY QUALITIES

We have seen philosophers assert that qualities like shape and size are parts of the objective world while others like color and smell are not but are rather the products of our minds. Locke makes a systematic case for this kind of distinction. Read Locke, *Essay*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 362-72, 389-97.

Wednesday, March 26

LOCKE ON REAL AND NOMINAL ESSENCES

A thing's real essence is whatever makes it the kind of thing it is. In the case of material things, real essences are the underlying cause of a thing's observable qualities. Nominal essences are abstract ideas that we use to group things into kinds. The important question, of course, is how nominal essences, that is, our ideas, are related to real essences, that is, the way things are. Read Locke, *Essay*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 407-16.

Monday, March 31

LOCKE ON PERSONAL IDENTITY

When we talked about Hobbes's materialist account of the afterlife, we had a question: what makes the resurrected person the same as me? Hobbes did not think about that question, but Locke did. He introduces memory, or "consciousness extended backwards" to explain what makes a person the same over time. Read Locke, *Essay*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 397-407.

Wednesday, April 2

BERKELEY'S FIRST DIALOGUE

Berkeley's "Three Dialogues" contends that we do not understand matter. Instead, all of our thoughts that seem to be about external objects are really about ideas. The dialogue is between two characters, Philonous, whose name means lover of wisdom, and Hylas, whose name is derived from the word for matter. In the first dialogue, Berkeley frames the question to be addressed in the larger work. In the dialogue, Hylas concedes that sensible qualities exist only in the mind. Since Hylas also maintains that there is a distinction between external objects and our ideas of those objects, Philonous claims that this means Hylas must deny that we can know anything about the external objects. Philonous,

by contrast, maintains that everything is an idea. Read Berkeley, *First Dialogue*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 494-514.¹¹

Monday, April 7

BERKELEY'S SECOND DIALOGUE

The topic of the Second Dialogue is how our sensations are caused. Hylas begins with a hypothesis that they are caused by physical objects that are outside the mind. After that is rejected, Philonous argues that are ideas are caused by a different external source: God. Read Berkeley, *Second Dialogue*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 515-24.

Wednesday, April 9

BERKELEY'S THIRD DIALOGUE

In the Third Dialogue, Hylas embraces skepticism about our knowledge of objects outside the mind. He tries to turn the tables on Philonous by arguing that he is in no better position to know about the supposed objects of the senses. Read Berkeley, *Third Dialogue*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 524-43.

Monday, April 14

HUME ON THE IMMATERIALITY OF THE SOUL

Hume challenges both dualist and materialist accounts of the mind. For example, one argument in favor of dualism is that thoughts are indivisible and so cannot interact with extended matter. Hume contends both that some thoughts are divisible and that divisible thoughts can interact with indivisible ones. More generally, he draws on his theory of causation, which we will discuss later, to argue that there is no reason why matter cannot cause thought and *vice versa*. Read Hume, "Of the Immateriality of the Soul," in *Modern Philosophy*, 563-71.¹²

Wednesday, April 16

HUME ON PERSONAL IDENTITY

If both materialist and immaterialist accounts of the mind are unintelligible, what does the mind's identity over time consist in? Assuming that questions about the identity of minds are the same as questions about

¹¹ George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous in Opposition to Sceptics and Atheists*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, 3rd ed. (1713; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019).

¹² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, 3rd ed. (1739; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019).

the identity of persons, Hume seeks to answer a slightly different question: what explains our *idea* of personal identity. We do not have any access to an underlying substance, whether material or immaterial. So what do we believe has remained the same when we think we have lived from year to year? Hume's answer is that we do not have an idea of the self and he tries to explain why we nonetheless believe that we exist and remain the same over time. Read Hume, "Of Personal Identity," in *Modern Philosophy*, 571-78.¹³

Monday, April 21

HUME ON INDUCTION

I think I know things using inductive reasoning, that is, by moving from observations of the past to conclusions about what the future will be like. For instance, I think the fact that the sun has always risen in the past enables me to know that it will rise tomorrow. Hume argues that those inferences are groundless and that we have as much reason for believing that the sun will rise tomorrow as we do for believing that it will not. We will pay special attention to Hume's argument that attempts to justify these inferences based on past experience involve reasoning in a circle (pp. 592-93). What does that mean? Where is the circle? Read Hume, "Skeptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding," *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, section 4, in *Modern Philosophy*, 588-94¹⁴

Wednesday, April 23

HUME ON CAUSATION

In these sections, Hume gives his positive account of causal reasoning. In section 5, he contends that inductive inferences are based on custom. The repeated association of different ideas makes us feel that the effect is going to happen when we have the idea of the cause; that feeling is what belief consists in. But what distinguishes cause from correlation? Causes make their effects happen or, in Hume's terminology, there is a necessary connection between cause and effect. But Hume has insisted that our ideas of causes can always be separated from our ideas of the effects. In section 7, he tries to explain

¹³ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, in *Modern Philosophy*.

¹⁴ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, 3rd ed. (1748; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019).

what our idea of the necessary connection between cause and effect amounts to. Read Hume, *Enquiry*, sections 5-7 in *Modern Philosophy*, 594-610.

Monday, April 28

HUME'S SKEPTICISM

Hume is, obviously, skeptical about both common sense and philosophical theories. This section is devoted to explaining the nature of his skepticism. He maintains that what he calls academic or mitigated skepticism is a useful attitude while what he calls Pyrronism or excessive skepticism is not. Read Hume, "Of the Academic or Skeptical Philosophy," *Enquiry*, section 12, in *Modern Philosophy*, 639-46.

Wednesday, April 30

KANT'S PROJECT

Kant takes Hume's skepticism as a challenge: is it possible to say anything about the fundamental nature of reality and our knowledge of it? His answer was to develop a distinctive approach to these questions that he called "transcendental." Very roughly, the basic idea is that some concepts, such as the concepts of cause and effect or of substance, are necessary for us to have the experiences that we do. This, in turn, is supposed to provide a kind of vindication for those concepts. In today's reading, Kant sets out his project. Read Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 719-37.¹⁵

Monday, May 5

KANT'S ANSWER TO HUME

In today's reading, we will see how Kant applied his system to answer Hume's doubts about causal necessity. Read Kant, *Prolegomena*, in *Modern Philosophy*, 737-50.

Wednesday, May 7

REVIEW

We will talk about the final exam. The exam will have two parts. In the first part, you will be asked to explain selected passages from the readings throughout the term. In the second part, you will write an essay on the part of the course not covered by the paper topics. After that, we will take a class picture on the steps of Pearsons Hall and complete the course evaluations.

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, trans. Paul Carus and Eric Watkins, 3rd ed. (1783; Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2019).

MATERIALS

Most of the readings are from the book *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, edited by Ariew and Watkins and published by Hackett Publishing Company. We are using the third edition. This is available in the bookstore and the library. Additional materials will be available in the files section of the Canvas site for this class. You will also find notes on each class session there.

INSTRUCTOR

My name is Michael Green. My office is 207 Pearsons. My office hours are Mondays and Wednesdays 4-5; any changes will be posted on the Canvas site. My office phone number is 607-0906 and my email address is available through the Canvas site.

GOALS

This course covers the major philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries. In spring 2025, the theme will be materialism and its critics. Materialists hold that everything that exists is material, meaning that it is extended or has measurable dimensions. Their critics argued that materialism cannot explain some of the following phenomena: the existence of minds, as thoughts and conscious experiences are not extended, free will, personal identity despite physical changes, and causal relations. We will read Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant.

The materials make heavy demands on their readers' analytical and interpretive skills. Our discussions and writing assignments will focus on the arguments in these works. That is where your analytical skills will come into play. Since we are reading works from a different period in history, we will also have to work hard at interpreting material that is written in ways that are unfamiliar and that reflects concerns and beliefs that are sometimes different from our own.

ASSIGNMENTS

Grades will be based on four equally weighted assignments: three papers and a final exam.

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Draft</i>	<i>Due</i>
First paper	Wednesday, February 12	Saturday, February 22	Saturday, March 1
Second paper	Wednesday, March 5	Saturday, March 15	Saturday, March 29
Third paper	Wednesday, April 9	Saturday, April 19	Saturday, April 26
Exam	Wednesday, May 7	none	Friday, May 16 2:00 - 5:00 p.m., in class

Table 1 Assignment Schedule

GRADING POLICIES

I am committed to seeing that my students are able to do very high quality work and that high quality work will be recognized. I do not employ a curve and there is nothing competitive about grading in my courses.

Grades apply to papers, not to people. They have no bearing on whether I like or respect you. Nor do they measure improvement or hard work: one may put a lot of effort into trying to make a bad idea work or produce a very good paper with ease. Grades communicate where written work stands on as objective a scale as we can devise. That is all that they involve, so do not make too much of them.

GRADE CALCULATIONS

Table 2 gives Pomona College's four point scale. Table 3 shows how numerical averages will be converted to final letter grades. In a nutshell, the average has to be greater than halfway between two grades in order to get the higher grade.

<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Number Grade</i>	<i>Lowest Number</i>	<i>Letter Grade</i>	<i>Highest Number</i>
A	4.00	3.835	A	4.000
A-	3.67	3.500	A-	3.835
B+	3.33	3.165	B+	3.500
B	3.00	2.835	B	3.165
B-	2.67	2.500	B-	2.835
C+	2.33	2.165	C+	2.500
C	2.00	1.835	C	2.165
C-	1.67	1.500	C-	1.835
D+	1.33	1.165	D+	1.500
D	1.00	0.835	D	1.165
D-	0.67	0.335	D-	0.835
F	0.00	0.000	F	0.335

Table 2 Point Scale

Table 3 Numerical Thresholds

WHAT THE GRADES MEAN

The grade of A is given to work that is accurate, elegantly written, and innovative. It adds something original, creative, or imaginative to the problem under discussion. A papers are exceptional.

The grade of B is given to work that is accurate, well written, and has no significant problems. B papers are very good and there is less of a difference between A and B work than you might think. Generally speaking, B papers are less innovative

than A papers. This may be because the paper is less ambitious or because it is not fully successful.

The grade of C is given to work that has problems with accuracy, reasoning, or quality of writing. The grade of C means that the paper has significant problems but is otherwise acceptable.

The grade of D is given to work that has severe problems with accuracy, reasoning, relevance, or the quality of writing. Papers with these problems are not acceptable college-level work. Note that a paper that is fine on its own may nonetheless be irrelevant. A paper is not relevant to my evaluation of work for this particular course if it does not address the question asked or if it does not display knowledge of our discussions. This sometimes trips up those taking a course pass/no credit.

The grade of F is given to work that has not been completed, cannot be understood, or is irrelevant.

WRITING HELP

I should be your primary resource for help with your papers. That is my job! That said, talking about academics with your peers is an extremely valuable part of the college experience. So I highly recommend discussing your papers with other members of the class.

In addition, there are some very good options outside the class. To begin with, the Philosophy Department has arranged for experienced philosophy student to work as what it calls writing mentors. There will be an announcement about this program early in the term. In addition, the College's Center for Speaking, Writing, and the Image (CSWIM) offers free one-on-one consultations at any stage of the writing process. You can make appointments through my.pomona.edu (look for "CSWIM") or by email (cswim@pomona.edu).

LATE PAPERS AND ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Late papers will be accepted without question. They will be penalized at the rate of 0.083 points per day, including weekends and holidays. Exceptions will be made

Syllabus

History of Modern Philosophy

in extremely unusual circumstances. Please be mindful of the fact that maturity involves taking steps to ensure that the extremely unusual is genuinely extremely unusual.

To request academic accommodations of a disability, please speak with me and the associate dean in charge of disability in the Dean of Students office. This is never a problem, but it is best taken care of in advance.