History of Western Philosophy: Descartes to Kant, Spring 2011

Instructor: Marina Folescu
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Class time: Tuesday & Thursday, 12:30-1:50 pm
Office Hours: Tuesday & Fridays 2-3pm
Office: B5A, Mudd Hall of Philosophy (MHP)

Course Description:

The advent of the scientific and political revolutions of the 17th and 18th century have deeply influenced the way we think about our place, as human beings, in a clockwork universe, which functions according to deterministic natural laws. What is a human being: just another automaton, with each organ part of a system of pulleys and levers? Or is there something more to the notion: e.g. feelings, and morality? Is a human being just a body, or is it also a mind? Are we inherently social creatures or, on the contrary, our actions are always determined by self-interest? These are just a handful of questions that philosophers aimed to answer, by evaluating the changes taking place around them, and, in some cases, by being the engine behind those very changes, both on the scientific and on the political front.

We will begin by discussing the works of the so-called “Rationalists”, including René Descartes (1596-1650) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), for which the notion of innate ideas and the essential use of reason are the key features that help us have knowledge about ourselves and the external world. We will continue by investigating the key tenets of the so-called “British Empiricists”, including John Locke (1632-1704), George Berkeley (1685-1753), and David Hume (1711-1776), who reject innate ideas and think instead that sensations are at the origin of our knowledge, imperfect as it is, of both ourselves and the external world. We will end the class with an examination of the synthesis of these traditions in the works of Thomas Reid (1710-1796) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

This course will focus not only on metaphysical and epistemological questions and their bearing on scientific inquiry, but also on the gradual movement from a theological framework (which dominated Western philosophy for centuries before Descartes) to the progressive ideals of the Enlightenment period.

Course Objectives

We will be studying primary texts written by major figures of Western Philosophy, who helped shape not only the development of philosophy, but also of some other academic disciplines, such as mathematics, physics and psychology. By completing this course, students are expected to gain an understanding of some major issues regarding the nature of the relationship between philosophical and scientific inquiry, and, especially, what can constitute knowledge of the external world and what are its limits. They will also have gained an appreciation of the place of philosophy within the complex intellectual and social issues of the time. By completing the written assignments,
students will have enhanced their critical thinking skills, which include an ability to closely read a difficult text, and to analyze and reconstruct the arguments advanced in such a text.

Course Requirements and Grading Policy

Students are expected to attend all lectures and sections. The following constitute the grade components:

- Regular attendance and participation in lectures and discussions. This will represent 10% of your final grade.
- Two papers (5-7 pages), analyzing an argument from one of the reading assignments. Each counts 20% towards the final grade. These essays are due at the beginning of class, on the following dates:
  - February 8th (first essay)
  - April 7th (second essay)
- One in-class mid-term examination, which will count 20% of the final grade, on March 3rd.
- Final in-class examination, which will count 30% of the final grade, on May 12th.

Required Books

The following texts are required and may be purchased at the USC Bookstore. Please bring the relevant books with you to lecture. Please quote only from the assigned editions.


Course Topics

The following schedule of topics may be changed if necessary. You will be notified of any changes, and the new syllabus will be posted online – on Blackboard and on my webpage.

Week 1 1/11  **Introduction: Scientific background of 17th and 18th century philosophy, including Kepler and Galileo**

Week 1 1/13  **The limits of knowledge: the method of doubt**
Galileo, *The Assayer*, in *MP*, pp. 8-11
Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*: Letter, Preface, Synopsis, Meditation I, in *MP*, pp. 22-30
Descartes, *Objections and Replies*, “On Meditation One”, in *CR*

Week 2 1/18  **The Nature of Mind and the Cogito**
Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation II, in *MP*, pp. 30-34
Descartes, *Objections and Replies*, “On Meditation Two”, in *CR*

Week 2 1/20  **Arguments for the existence of God; the Source of Errors**
Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations III and IV, in *MP*, pp. 30-45; Descartes, *Objections and Replies*, “On Meditation Three” and “On Meditation Four”, in *CR*

Week 3 1/25  **The Nature of Body and the Argument for the Existence of Bodies**
Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations V and VI, in *MP*, pp. 45-55; *Objections and Replies*: “On Meditation Five” and “On Meditation Six”, in *CR*; from the *Letter to Elizabeth*, 28 June 1643, in *CR*

Week 3 1/27  **Leibniz: First Principles and the Pre-established Harmony**
*Discourse on Metaphysics*, in *MP*, pp. 184-207
*A New System of Nature*, in *MP*, pp. 229-34

Week 4 2/1  **Leibniz: Idealism**
from *The Letters to Arnauld*, in *MP*, pp. 208-24; *Monadology*, in *MP*, pp. 235-43

Week 4 2/3  **Locke: Against Innate Ideas and Principles**
Locke, from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, Chapters 1 and 2, in *MP*, pp. 270-76; and Book II, Chapter 10, in *EHU*, pp. 149-155

Week 5 2/8  **FIRST PAPER DUE**

Week 5 2/10  **Locke: The Distinction Between Primary and Secondary Qualities**
Locke, from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 8, in *EHU*, pp. 132-42; Book II, Chapter 30-31, in *EHU*, pp. 372-84
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<th>Week</th>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/17</td>
<td>Locke: On General and Personal Identity</td>
<td>EHU II, Ch. 27: pp. 328-48</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>Hume: On Impressions and Ideas</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>MIDTERM EXAMINATION</td>
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**SPRING RECESS: 3/14–3/19**

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<th>Week</th>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3/22</td>
<td>Hume: On Personal Identity and Immaterial Substance</td>
<td>MP, pp. 558-572</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>3/24</td>
<td>Hume: On Skepticism</td>
<td>E, pp. 102-11</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>3/29</td>
<td>Reid: On the Distinction Between Sensation and Perception</td>
<td>IHM, 2.2-2.3, pp. 26-28; and 6.20-6.21, pp. 167-177</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>3/31</td>
<td>Reid’s Nativism: The Experimentum Crucis</td>
<td>IHM, 5, pp. 54-76; and The Hume-Reid exchange, in IHM, pp. 255-65</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>Reid’s Reply to the Skeptic</td>
<td>IHM, 5.7-8, pp. 67-76 and 6.20, pp. 167-72</td>
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Week 12 4/7  **SECOND PAPER DUE**  
Reid: *On Memory and Personal Identity*  

Week 13 4/12  **Kant: Overview and Terminology I**  
Kant, Prefaces to A and B editions; Introductions to both editions, in CPR, B1-30; A1-16

Week 13 4/14  **Kant: Overview and Terminology II**  
Kant, Prefaces to A and B editions; Introductions to both editions, in CPR, B1-30; A1-16

Week 14 4/19  **Transcendental Idealism – Space**  
Kant, CPR B33-45; B59-73

Week 14 4/21  **Refutation of Idealism – Kant against the Skeptic**  
Kant, CPR B274-294

Week 15 4/26  **Closing remarks I: Lessons from the Rationalists and the Empiricists**

Week 15 4/28  **Closing remarks II: Lessons from Reid and Kant**

**FINAL EXAMINATION: THURSDAY, MAY 12, FROM 2:00 p.m. TO 4:00 p.m.** Note: the date and time of the final examination are set by the Registrar’s office according to the days and times of the class meeting; I have no say in exam scheduling. Please do not ask to take the exam early; if you know now that you will have commitments that require you to leave campus prior to the time of the exam, do not enroll in this class.

**Other Policies**

**Plagiarism:** Each student is expected to know the University policy on plagiarism as it is stated in SCampus: [http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/universityconductcode/](http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/universityconductcode/) especially the sections under “11.00 Behavior Violating University Standards and Appropriate Sanctions”. Students caught plagiarizing on a paper, exam, or any assignment, will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and will be failed for the course. Proper citations are an easy way of avoiding this problem. If you are unsure about how to cite in your paper, please see me.

**Academic Accommodations:** Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DPS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DPS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DPS is located in STU 301 and is open from 8:30 am.to 5:00 pm., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DPS is (213)-740-0776.