

INSTRUCTOR: Colin McLear  
COURSE: PHIL 871  
TIME: M 3:30-6:05 pm  
LOCATION: Oldfather Hall 1007  
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# KANT & EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

The essence of a thing consists in its form (*forma dat esse rei*, as it is said by the Scholastics), insofar as it may be known through reason... Upon these forms rests the possibility of all synthetic cognition a priori, whose possession we are indeed unable to deny.

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On a Recently Prominent Tone of Superiority in Philosophy, Ak 8:404  
IMMANUEL KANT

## Course Overview

This course surveys views of some key figures in early modern (17th—18th century) European philosophy, up to and including Kant. Our discussion begins with the enormously influential theories of René Descartes, specifically his theories of mind and nature, and examines subsequent reactions, criticisms, and (partial) defenses of his views in the writings of other prominent philosophers. The course culminates with an analysis of central themes in Immanuel Kant's "critical" philosophical work. In particular, this course focuses on issues surrounding the transformation of notions of scientific explanation in the early modern period. We will start with scholastic Aristotelian conceptions of scientific explanation, see how these are critiqued and transformed by Descartes, Locke, and Leibniz, savagely criticized by Hume, and ultimately given new form by Kant.

## Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course students should have a good grasp of both the broad outline of central philosophical arguments in the early modern period, as well as the historical context in which these doctrines were articulated. This includes being able to (i) articulate some of the central metaphysical, epistemological, and scientific disputes in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth-century; (ii) clearly explain the different positions of the figures discussed in the course, as well as their dialectical context; (iii) articulate Kant's proposed resolutions of these disputes.

## Course Materials

The following books are required for this course:

- Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, volume II
- Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*
- Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

- Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*
- Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*

Other readings will be posted on the [course website](#) under “[Assignments](#).”

## Course Requirements

- **Preparation:** You are expected to attend every class meeting fully prepared to discuss each assigned reading, to submit written work punctually, and to offer thoughtful and constructive responses to the remarks of your instructor and your classmates. Make sure that you bring the relevant readings with you to every lecture class. I further expect you to treat both the texts at hand and your classmates’ ideas with openness and respect.
- **Attendance:** Attendance is required. You are also expected to attend every section meeting. 1/2 a letter grade will be deducted from your final course grade for every absence from section after your fifth.
- **Website:** We will use a course website for all materials. The site address is: [phil871.colinmclear.net](http://phil871.colinmclear.net). Upcoming assignments and readings will be posted there. Please let me know if you have any problems. Technical glitches, computer malfunctions and crashing hard drives are not excuses for failing to complete work in this class.
- **Format for Papers:** Please submit work as a .docx or .rtf file. All work must be typed. I will not accept any handwritten work aside from that we do in class. Your papers should be in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced with margins set to one inch on all sides. Your name, my name, the date and assignment should appear in the top left hand corner of the first page. Your last name and page number must appear in the top right hand corner on each subsequent page. Please staple or paperclip hard copies of papers and drafts. You are responsible for the presentation of your papers.
- **Late Work:** Late papers and assignments will standardly be marked down by 1/3 of a letter grade for each day the work is late (for example, from A- to B+, from B+ to B, and so on).

## Evaluation

### Two Essays: 60%

- Explain and critically assess a philosophical argument. Topics will be suggested. Approximately 4-6 pages (1200-2000 words). Graduate students taking the course will instead write a research paper (6-8000 words) in two drafts.

### Weekly reading responses: 10%

- (500 words; posted on our public course blog by 8 pm the evening before class meets + 250-word responses to a classmate’s post posted by class time): Your reading responses should detail your observations about a primary text (though one can also relate this to secondary readings). They are not summaries. Move to delimit 1-2 major points or ideas from the reading and discuss them. What do you find interesting or compelling? What do you find logically problematic?

In addition to posting your reading response, you are also required to respond to one of your classmate's posts by the start of class the following day. Your response should engage one or more of the points raised by your classmate. It is not enough to simply say that you agree or disagree with the author of the post. You must explain how your views intersect with the ones presented. Did the post make you think about a reading in a different way? Why? How? What did you find particularly interesting or compelling about the response?

#### **Weekly reading précis: 20%**

- Write a précis addressing a particular secondary text assigned for the week (this does not include my notes). A précis is a rhetorical exercise that asks you to summarize a text, including the claim/argument, supporting evidence, purpose, and audience in 4 sentences. For a helpful example of the form, see: [http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/modules/rhetorical-precis/sample/peirce\\_sample\\_precis\\_click.html](http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/modules/rhetorical-precis/sample/peirce_sample_precis_click.html)

#### **Participation: 10%**

- The participation grade takes into account your attendance in class and section as well as the quantity and quality of your participation.

### **Policies**

- **Academic Integrity:** All the work you turn in (including papers, drafts, and discussion board posts) must be written by you specifically for this course. It must originate with you in form and content with all contributory sources fully and specifically acknowledged. Make yourself familiar with UNL's Student Code of Conduct and Academic Integrity Code, available online. **In this course, the normal penalty for any violation of the code is an "F" for the semester.** Violations may have additional consequences including expulsion from the university. Don't plagiarize – It just isn't worth it.
- **University Policies:** This instructor respects and upholds University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to physically handicapped, visually and/or hearing impaired students; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective University regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to the attention of the instructor.
- **ADA:** In compliance with University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for students with disabilities. Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.
- **Miscellaneous:** Please turn off cell phones, beeping watches, and other gadgets that make noise before entering our classroom. Absolutely no texting is permitted during class. I will subtract up to five points from your participation grade each and every time your phone rings or I see you texting during class.

## Further Resources

- **Jargon:** It's important to be on top of the technical terms used by philosophers. Please ask for clarification of terms in class. You can also consult Jim Pryor's online "Philosophical Terms and Methods."
- **Help with writing:** Papers should adhere to some consistent practice of footnoting and citation (Chicago, MLA, etc.). I don't really mind which one you use as long as you are consistent. On writing a philosophy paper, there is no better on-line guide than Jim Pryor's. Please consult it. Hacker's A Writer's Reference is also extremely helpful. Useful online writing help may be found at the Purdue Online Writing Lab at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Writing Center can provide you with meaningful support as you write for this class as well as for every course in which you enroll. Trained peer consultants are available to talk with you as you plan, draft, and revise your writing. Please check the Writing Center website for locations, hours, and information about scheduling appointments.

- **Reference:** The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu> is an excellent online resource.

# Kant & Early Modern Philosophy

## PHIL 4/871 Reading List

Fall 2016

### 1 - Scholasticism & Descartes's Project

Today we look at the medieval scholastic background against which much of the philosophical work we'll be examining is written. I'll also introduce the basic aims of Descartes's work the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and we'll discuss in some detail the argument of the *First Meditation*. If you are unfamiliar with the historical context of seventeenth and eighteenth century European philosophy, you might get started by familiarizing yourself with [important dates and people](#).

#### Readings

- Descartes, *First Meditation*
- McLear, Notes on the Medieval Background
- McLear, Notes on Descartes's Method & the *First Meditation*.
- Pasnau, Epistemology Idealized
- Nadler, Doctrines of Explanation

### 2 - The Second & Third Meditations

Today we'll discuss the *Second* and *Third Meditations*. We'll look, in particular, at the *cogito* argument, the wax argument, the role of God in Descartes's argument, and Descartes's conception of mental representation (ideas).

#### Readings

- Descartes, *Second* and *Third Meditations*
- McLear, Notes on the *Second* and *Third Meditations*
- Hatfield, Descartes and the Meditations, chs. 4-5
- Frankfurt, Descartes's Discussion of his Existence in the Second Meditation
- Morris, The Second Meditation

### 3 – The Fifth and Sixth Meditations

Today we'll finish our discussion of the previous *Meditations* and look at the *Fifth* and *Sixth Meditations*. The key issues we'll focus on are the conception of essence and the ontological argument in the *Fifth Meditation* and the real distinction argument, proof of the external world, and overall view of nature in the *Sixth Meditation*. Finally, we'll discuss the issue of the Cartesian Circle and potential responses to it.

#### Readings

- Descartes, *Fifth and Sixth Meditations*
- Descartes's Correspondence with Elisabeth
- McLear, Notes on the *Fifth and Sixth Meditations*
- Van Cleve, Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle
- Nolan & Whipple, The Dustbin Theory of Mind
- Garber, Descartes, Mechanics, and the Mechanical Philosophy

### 4 - Locke (and others) on Mechanism

Today we will discuss the conceptions of mechanism and materialism as they appear in various figures, and in particular in Locke and Boyle. We'll also try and understand the extent to which Descartes's conception of corporeal nature differs from that of Boyle and Locke.

#### Readings

- Galileo, excerpt from *The Assayer*
- Descartes, excerpts from parts I-II of the *Principles of Philosophy*
- Boyle, *On the Origins of Forms and Qualities* (pp. 50-53)
- Locke, Bk. II, Chs. 1-8 (focus especially on ch. 8)
- McLear, Notes
  - The primary/secondary quality distinction
  - Locke's epistemology
- Downing, *The status of mechanism in Locke*
- Rozemond, *Peach trees, gravity, and god*
- Kochiras, *Locke's philosophy of science*

## 5 - Locke on Essence

Today we'll continue our look at Locke on our knowledge of nature. We'll finish up our discussion of the primary/secondary quality distinction and move on to examine his distinction between real and nominal essence. We'll look at his arguments for this distinction, for skepticism concerning our ability to know anything about real essences, and what all this means for his corpuscularian conception of nature.

### Readings

- Locke, EHU
  - III.iii.11-20 (especially 15-17)
  - III.vi.1-20
  - IV.iii
  - IV.iv.1-12
  - IV.vi
- Ayers, Locke vs. Aristotle on Natural Kinds
- Pasnau, Real Essences (especially §27.7)
- Owen, Locke on Real Essence

## 6 - Locke & Leibniz on Relations

We conclude our discussion of Locke with an examination of his views regarding the relationship between a substance and its properties. Specifically, we'll look at how Locke thinks the powers of a substance are or are not rooted in its essence or nature. We'll also look at how this view compares to that of Leibniz.

### Readings

- Locke - EHU IV.iii
- Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*
  - Primary truths
  - Discourse on metaphysics, §§1-25
  - Principles of nature and grace (optional)
  - Monadology, §§1-60
- Jauernig, Disentangling Leibniz's views on relations and extrinsic denominations
- Langton, Locke's relations and God's good pleasure

- Connolly, Lockean superaddition and lockean humility

## 7 - Hume's Mind

This week we look at Hume's theory of mental content and set up his critique of causation for next week. We'll also look at Hume's skeptical view regarding personal identity. We'll revisit this when we examine Kant's views on such matters.

### Readings

- Hume
  - Sections 1-3, 12 of Hume's *Enquiry*
  - Appendix on identity
- Garrett, Hume, chs. 2-3
- Schafer, Hume's Unified Theory of Mental Representation
- Cottrell, Minds, Composition, and Hume's Skepticism in the Appendix

## 8 - Hume on Causation

Today we will look at Hume's famous argument against the legitimacy of our concept of necessary connection, which is an integral aspect of causation as it was then understood. We'll also see how Hume draws a distinction between "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact", as well as similar ways of drawing the distinction in Locke and Leibniz.

### Readings

- Locke, EHU IV.viii
- Leibniz, Primary Truths (pp. 30-5 in *Philosophical Essays*)
- Hume, *Enquiry*, sections 4-7
- Bell, Hume on Causation
- Strawson, David Hume: Objects and Power
- Winkler, The New Hume



## 9 - Kant on Analyticity & the A priori

Today we'll look at Kant's famous distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments, and his corresponding claim that metaphysics consists of synthetic a priori judgments.

### Readings

- Kant, *Prolegomena* Preface & §§1-13
- Beck, Can Kant's Synthetic Judgments be Made Analytic?
- Beck, Analytic and Synthetic Judgments before Kant
- Stang, Did Kant Conflate the Necessary and the A Priori?

## 10 - Kant's Thinking Subject

Today we'll look at Kant's conception of the thinking subject and how his views contrast with those of Hume. We'll discuss both his positive conception of the thinking subject as put forward in the section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled the "Transcendental Deduction", and his negative arguments against prior German metaphysical arguments about the nature of the subject.

### Readings

- Kant
  - Transcendental Deduction (1787)
  - The Paralogisms (1787)
  - *Prolegomena*, §§40-47 (especially §§46-7)
- Pereboom, Kant's Metaphysical and Transcendental Deductions
- Wuerth, The Paralogisms of Pure Reason
- McLear, Apperception & the Substantial Subject

## 11 - Kant on Causation

Last week we looked at some of the very general considerations Kant provides in favor of the claim that there are a priori concepts which we can know must apply to the contents of our experience of the world. This week look at a particular concept—causation—and Kant's argument against a broadly Humean position. We'll look at the argument as it appears in both the first *Critique* and in the *Prolegomena*.

## Readings

- *Prolegomena* §§22-3, 26-30 (Discussion of Hume starts at §27)
- The Second Analogy (excerpted from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, also available as an appendix to the Cambridge edition of the *Prolegomena*)
- Watkins, *The System of Principles*
  - This is a helpful overview of the entire section (the titular *System of Principles*) in which Kant argues concerning causation (in the Second Analogy)
- Watkins, *Causal Powers, Laws, and Kant's Reply to Hume*
- Van Cleve, *Causation and the Second Analogy*

## 12 - Kant & Leibniz on the Ideality of Matter

Today we'll discuss ways in which Leibniz and Kant both argue for the ideality of matter. Specifically, we'll look at a line of argument Leibniz employs in his *New System* against the reality of extended matter. We'll then look at the argument of Kant's Second Antinomy as it appears in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Prolegomena*.

## Readings

- Leibniz, *A New System of the Nature* (especially pp. 138-142) in *Leibniz: Basic Works*
- Kant
  - *Prolegomena* §§40-45, 50-52C
  - The Second Antinomy and related texts (excerpted from the *Critique of Pure Reason*)
- Wood, *The Antinomies of Pure Reason* (this is a helpful overview of the Antinomies section)
- Van Cleve, *Reflections on Kant's Second Antimony*
- Schmiede, *What Is Kant's Second Antinomy About?*

## 13 - Kant Against Ontotheology

Today we'll discuss Kant's criticisms of traditional rational theology, including his famous argument that existence is not a predicate.

## Readings

- Kant
  - The Ideal of Pure Reason (excerpt from the first *Critique*)
  - *Prolegomena*, §55
- Ameriks, Kant's Critique of Metaphysics (optional background overview)
- Wood, Introduction & ch. 1 (excerpts) from *Kant's Rational Theology*
- Stang, Kant's Argument that Existence is not a Determination

## 14 - Kant on Mechanism & Teleology

Last week we looked at Kant's response to various putative proofs of God's existence as offered by other early modern philosophers. Today we'll look at Kant's conception of the mechanism of nature, and the degree to which he allows for purpose-driven causal explanation. We'll discuss how his views concerning mechanism and living organisms differ from those of Descartes and Locke.

## Readings

- Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (excerpts)
- Ginsborg, Kant's Biological Teleology and its Philosophical Significance
- Breitenbach, Mechanical explanation of nature and its limits in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*