

**PHIL 3020: Modern Philosophy, Spring 2010**  
**MW 9:30-10:45, Denny 215**  
**Dr. Gordon Hull**

**Course Objectives and Description:** What does it mean to be “modern?” “Modern philosophy,” as a distinctive set of problems, questions, and methods, began in early 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. This was a period of tremendous cultural change and turmoil. For most of the late 1500s and early 1600’s, European countries were at war (culminating in the treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which is often regarded as laying the groundwork for the contemporary nation-state order; Descartes spent some early time touring with one of the main armies). There was widespread economic dislocation and disease. Colonialism was in full swing, causing not only assessments of the place of Europe in the world (debated at Valladolid in 1550, for example), but also a realignment of political powers (the Spanish Armada was defeated in 1589; in his autobiography, Hobbes apocryphally claims that fear of the Armada is what prompted his mother to go into labor) and a Europe-wide economic crisis induced by the glut of Spanish gold. At the same time, the hegemony of the Catholic Church was broken by the Reformation (Luther’s theses: 1517), and counter-reformation. The same period, on the other hand, saw the emergence of modern science: Copernicus published in 1543; he was followed by Galileo in astronomy (then condemned in 1633), Harvey (who discovered the circulation of blood) in biology, and the development of the Royal Society in England. Institutionally, philosophy was dominated by an Aristotelianism that was increasingly hard to square with developments in science. Against this background, philosophers such as Descartes attempted to think through their new world; the problems and questions of modern philosophy are the result.

We will focus on four figures, who can be seen as both representative of different approaches to modern philosophy, and as among the most historically important thinkers in it. We will begin with a close reading of Descartes’ *Meditations*, which set the stage for much subsequent debate. We will follow with two works of Leibniz. We will then read Hume’s *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, which proved devastating to the metaphysical claims of thinkers like Leibniz. We will conclude by reading substantial sections from Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, which attempted to determine the legitimate role for philosophy in the face of the critiques of Hume. Kant’s work then set the agenda for the development of German Idealism (and responses to it) in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and for much of twentieth-century thought, as well.

This course is designed to increase both your familiarity and facility with a major period in the history of philosophy, one that still overdetermines a lot of current philosophical work. To that end we will remain as discussion-oriented as possible. Your informal participation in class discussion is expected. The course is also designed to help you build your skillset: you will get a change to develop your argumentative (and oral) skills in both formal and informal debate contexts; and there will be numerous occasions for you to practice your writing.

**Readings:**

Descartes, Rene. *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: CUP, 1988. 0521358124

Leibniz, G. W. *Philosophical Essays*, ed. Roger Ariew and Dan Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989. 0872200620

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Eric Steinberg. Hackett, 1993. 0-87220-229-1

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason, Abridged*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999. 0872204480

- I may also post readings on the course page as pdf files.

### **Requirements/Assignments:**

Short Assignments: 25% (total)

Short Paper: 25%

Long Paper: 35%

Debate: 15%

**Short Assignments:** This is a grab-bag category covering several types of short assignment: turning in thesis/outline material, participation in mini-debates, and reflective responses. For the reflective responses (of which there will be a few over the semester), I'll give you a writing prompt - a quote, proposition, or other prompt having to do with the upcoming class's reading. You should turn in a 1-2 page (double-spaced is fine) reflection on that material, using the reading. I'll often try to give you short paragraphs or quotes from other philosophers responding to the assigned readings. These are not exercises in formal writing, but you shouldn't just turn in a stream of consciousness – try to develop a coherent thought, and adduce appropriate evidence to support it. These assignments are due at the start of class, and must be typed/printed (no handwriting!). I may start class by asking people to discuss their response.

**Short Paper:** This is a 4-6 page paper on an assigned topic (TBA). You will be graded on the quality of your argument and your development of it. You should have a clear thesis statement: "In this paper I will argue that..." If you can't finish that sentence with a straight face, you don't have a thesis. We will dedicate a week of class-time to workshopping thesis statements, either in small groups or on the board, and you'll get a short assignment grade for turning yours in at the start of those classes.

**Long Paper:** This is a 6-8 page paper due on the last day of class. Topics will be assigned (there will be several to pick from); you will need to specifically reference/cite and discuss at least *two* of the readings from the semester. By "specifically reference/cite," I mean quote and discuss in a way that indicates you have assimilated the material. For the sake of your grade, you should have a clear thesis and an "In this paper I will argue that x" sentence, somewhere in the first paragraph. I'll have more details for you closer to the due date, and we'll dedicate class time to workshopping thesis statements and outlines.

**Mini-Debates:** These are designed to get you some hands-on practice formulating and defending arguments. The class will divide into small groups. Each group will be assigned one side of the

topic/proposition in question (ex: “It is possible to doubt the existence of the world of the senses.”). Every group is to come up with an argument for its side (either 3 independent reasons, or a syllogism). We then collate/present/discuss the debate on the board. Each group will turn in its results for a short assignment grade.

**Debates:** We will have several in-class, semi-formal debates over the semester; everybody will get to debate once. In each of these, two teams of two students each will debate a proposition of philosophy central to the moderns (for example, of theodicy: “the existence of evil in the world is compatible with the existence of God”). One team’s job will be to affirm the proposition; the other’s is to negate it. There will be constructive arguments, rebuttals, and cross-examination on both sides. Members of the class will then judge which side “won” (in the sense that their presentation was more compelling – don’t vote for which side you personally think is right!). I will have a separate handout doing into much more detail on this. I will assign people more or less randomly to debate topics and partners; you do not need to advocate the side you personally agree with (in fact, it’s sometimes better if you don’t – if it’s good to read your enemies, it’s even better to try to advocate their position). Your grade derives from how well you debate, not whether you win.

**Attendance/Participation:** You can’t learn very much in philosophy by just sitting there. You learn even less if you’re not there at all. However, I am not going to be monitoring your attendance. Historically, in my classes there has been a strong correlation between attendance and class grade. This probably means that if you’re the sort of student who cares enough to come to class, you’re also likely to be the sort of student who will work enough to do well in the course. So I view the question of attendance as self-correcting. I am under no obligation to repeat course materials that you missed. **Note**, also, that if you’re not there when we do in-class short assignments, you can’t get credit for them.

**Contact Information/Getting Assistance:** It is important that you not fall behind. I want to help you avoid doing so. To get help from me:

1. Speak to me before or after class; we can set an appointment to meet at a later time if need be.
2. Email me at [ghull@uncc.edu](mailto:ghull@uncc.edu). This is probably the best way to get in touch outside of class.
3. Call my office: 7-2182 and leave a voicemail. This is less effective than email because I’m bad about checking my messages.
4. My **office hours** are: MW 1:00-2:00, Winningham 105C, or by appointment.

**Disabilities:** I share UNCC’s commitment to provide reasonable accommodations to enable students with disabilities to access course material. Please address any special needs or special accommodations with me at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you become aware of your needs. You’ll also need to contact disability services, 704-687-4355 (230 Fretwell).

**Academic Integrity:** University academic integrity guidelines can be found at: <http://www.legal.uncc.edu/policies/ps-105.html#VI>. You are required to follow them, and I will follow university procedure in dealing with academic integrity violations.

## Tentative Schedule (not a contract!)

Week		Date	Topic	
1	M	1/11	First class; what is modern philosophy?	
	W	1/13	Descartes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letter to Sorbonne</li> <li>• Meditation 1</li> <li>• Gassendi's objection (AT 257-8) and D's reply (AT 347-50)</li> </ul>	Mini debate: "It is possible to doubt the existence of the empirical world"
2	M	1/18	<b>MLK day; no class</b>	
		1/20	Descartes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meditation 2</li> <li>• Hobbes's objections and D's replies (AT 172-9)</li> </ul>	
3	M	1/25	Descartes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meditation 3</li> <li>• Arnauld's objections (AT 206-14) and D's replies (AT 231-47)</li> </ul>	
		1/27	Descartes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meditation 4</li> <li>• Mersenne's Objection (AT 125-7: "fourthly..." and "fifthly..."); D's replies (AT 142-49)</li> </ul>	Mini debate: "Error is a function of will, not cognition"
4	M	2/1	Descartes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meditation 5</li> <li>• Arnauld's objection (AT 214-18), D's reply (AT 247-56)</li> </ul>	
		2/3	Descartes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meditation 6</li> </ul>	
5	M	2/8	Descartes Debate	Topic: "The mind is better known than the body"
		2/10	Leibniz, "Discourse on Metaphysics" (1)	
6	W	2/15	Leibniz, "Discourse on Metaphysics" (2)	
		2/17	Leibniz – On Descartes (to Molanus, pp. 240-5); "On Body and Force," pp. 250-6)	Mini debate: TBA
7	M	2/22	Leibniz, "Monadology"	
		2/24	Thesis/writing workshop	
8	M	3/1	Thesis/writing workshop	
		3/3	Leibniz Debate; <b>papers due</b>	Topic: "The presence of evil in the world is compatible with the existence of God"
	MW	3/8, 3/10	<b>Spring Break</b>	
9	M	3/15	Hume II-III (origin of ideas, association)	
		3/17	Hume IV-V (skeptical doubts, solution)	
10	M	3/22	Hume VIII (Free will)	Mini debate: "Human Beings have Free Will"

		3/24	Hume X (Miracles)	
11	M	3/29	Hume Debate	Topic TBA
		3/31	Kant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preface (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) (4-14)</li> <li>• Introduction (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) (15-24)</li> </ul>	Mini debate: “Human cognition has no access to things as they are themselves”
12	M	4/5	Kant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcendental Aesthetic (25-38)</li> </ul>	
		4/7	Kant: “Deduction of the Pure Concepts of the Understanding” (51-77)	
13	M	4/12	Kant: “Deduction” (cot’d)	
		4/14	Kant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcendental Dialectic: Introduction (128-33) and Book II (134-48; 156-61)</li> <li>• Antinomy §7 (162-7), §8 (168-72); §9.III (181-95)</li> </ul>	Mini debate: TBA
14	M	4/19	Kant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finish above</li> <li>• Impossibility of Ontological Proof (196-202)</li> </ul>	
		4/21	Kant debate	Topic TBA
15	M	4/26	Thesis/writing workshop	
		4/28	Thesis/writing workshop	
16	M	5/3	Last class; debate (if necessary); <b>final paper due</b>	Topics TBA
			Final exam period – remaining debates	