Philosophy 610QB: Problems of Knowledge and Valuation, Spring 2012

**Topic:** Epistemology and metaphysics in the work of five major figures in the History of Modern Philosophy: Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Leibniz, and Kant. There will also be a brief unit on contemporary theories of knowledge at the end of the term.

**Instructor:** Prof. Ian Proops

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**Office hours for Proops:** By appointment only. (Procedure: send me an e-mail mentioning *several* times you can definitely make a meeting at iproops(at) austin.utexas.edu. I’ll respond with a time I can make. Meeting by appointment avoids congestion in the office and should save both of us time.)

**Teaching assistant:** Glenavin White

**Office hours for Glenavin White:** Tues/Thurs 5–6 and by appointment. (glenavinwhite(at)gmail.com)

**Course description**

This course examines metaphysical and epistemological issues in early modern philosophy in a selection of major figures from Descartes to Kant. Topics include the following: the nature and existence of God, the existence of the external world, *a priori* knowledge, the analytic-synthetic distinction, the nature of space, the nature of the self, mind-body interaction, immortality, primary and secondary qualities, cause, possibility, substance, essence, and free will. **Note that ethical questions will not feature in this course.** In addition to developing an understanding of these fundamental philosophical concepts and issues, students will learn how to read a historical text sympathetically yet critically. We will finish with a brief consideration of some questions in contemporary theory of knowledge.

Note. Since clear and accurate writing is essential to good philosophy, each meeting I will devote a small part of class to discussing techniques for effective writing. For those seriously interested in improving their writing, I recommend: Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace.*

**Texts**

The sole required text for this course is the anthology: *Modern Philosophy*, 2nd edition, Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, eds. This is an anthology of primary texts in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy. It is **not** available at the COOP. You should order it
from one of the various booksellers on line. (It seems to be selling new for around 35-40 dollars, but you can buy it second hand cheaper.) Please note: the first edition of the book is not suitable for our needs.

Grading Policy

The final grade will be based on four components: (1) section attendance and participation (15%) (Note: lecture participation and attendance will not be used to determine the grade); (2) one short paper (four pages, double-spaced, 12 point; 25%); (3) a longer paper (5–6 pages, double-spaced, 12 point; 35%). (4) a forty-five minute in-class test (25%) Note: plus and minus grades will be awarded.

A description of how the grade will be calculated appears on the final page of this syllabus.

Policy on Plagiarism

Students found to have plagiarized in one assignment will receive no credit for that assignment. Students found to have plagiarized more than once will fail the course and may be referred to the Dean, who may wish to impose further sanctions.

What counts as Plagiarism

Copying any material that is not your own without attribution is plagiarism. It is no excuse if that use is inadvertent. (If you take notes, it’s your responsibility to make sure you record the origin of any texts you copy.) If you go to a website and merely paraphrase what you find there without citing the source, that’s plagiarism. If you do this you are, in any case, likely to earn only D or worse for the assignment, even if you do cite the source. (Unthinking paraphrase is not college-level work). Please be aware that we know the sources students tend to draw upon when they plagiarize, and every year we catch a few plagiarists.

Policy on late papers

Papers submitted late without a reasonable excuse (e.g., serious illness), will be docked one third of a grade for each part-day they are late. So a paper submitted more than 48 hours late but less than 72 hours late will be docked a whole grade; one more than 24 hours late but less than 48 hours late will be docked 2/3 of a grade (so, e.g., from B+ to B-). Papers submitted more than 72 hours late without a reasonable excuse will receive no credit.

Extra credit

There will be no extra credit assignments in this class.
Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259. If you do need accommodations, please bring your accommodations note to me early in the term.

About the in-class writing exercise

The exercise will take 45 minutes. You will have to answer three of the six questions, which three being disclosed only at the start of the exercise. So to be safe you will need to prepare answers to all six questions. For each question you should aim to prepare an answer that will cover roughly 2.5–3 sides of a blue book double-spaced (i.e., writing on every other line). The way I count them, there are two “sides” on each leaf of a blue book. They are counted like “pages” in a printed book. You must bring your own blue book (or green book) to section. The exercise is closed-book (and closed notes). No computers are allowed; so you will have to write by hand (unless you have a note saying otherwise from the Office for Services for Students with Disabilities). From the time the exercise is distributed (roughly a week ahead) students will be under exam conditions and should not ask the TA or me for the answers!

Please be sure to notify me at the *beginning* of the course if you will need any special accommodations for the in-class test.

Syllabus

You should be sure to have read the readings for a given lecture before that lecture.

Note: The quantity of reading assigned sometimes varies from lecture to lecture and on some days, when less reading is assigned, students will be expected to read ahead. The syllabus is subject to change and supplementation. All page references are to the 2nd edition of Modern Philosophy.
I. Descartes and his Critics


Tu. Jan. 24. 2nd Meditation, pp. 43-47 and selections from the Discourse on the Method, pp. 25-34; 3rd Objection II and reply, pp. 76-79


Tu. Jan. 31. 4th Meditation, pp. 54-58, the whole of the reply to the 2nd set of objections, pp. 69-75.


Tu. Feb. 7. 6th Meditation, pp. 61-68. Preface to the Reader, pp. 37–38. FIRST PAPER ASSIGNED.

II. Leibniz


Tu. Feb. 28. The Principles of Philosophy, or the Monadology, 275-283. FIRST PAPER DUE (IN CLASS)
III. Locke


Tu. Mar. 13. NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

Th. Mar. 15. NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK


IV. Berkeley


V. Kant

Tu. April 3, Biographical sketch; Kant’s critical project, “Preface,” pp. 717-724


Tu. April 10, Analytic and synthetic judgments (re-read texts assigned for April 5)
Th. April 12, Our representations of Space (and Time) as a priori intuitions, “Transcendental Aesthetic,” pp. 729-737 (the reading ends just before the “Transcendental Doctrine of Elements”)


Th. April 19. The Transcendental Ideas. Transcendental Illusion; The First Paralogism, pp. 783-788 (begin at “Transcendental Logic” Division II”).


Th. April 26, John Pollack, “A Brain in a Vat,”; Michael Huemer, “Three Sceptical Arguments” (both articles on Blackboard). SECOND PAPER DUE. QUESTIONS FOR IN-CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENT DISTRIBUTED.

Tu. May 1st. Edmund Gettier: Is Justified True Belief Knowledge? (on blackboard)

Th. May 3, IN-CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENT HELD IN CLASS

Appendix: How the grade will be calculated

Assignments will receive letter grades. Then the grade will be calculated in three steps. Step 1. Letter grades for each assignment will be converted to numerical equivalents according to the following scheme;

A= 4.0
A- = 3.7
B+= 3.4
B = 3.0
B- = 2.7
C+= 2.4
C= 2.0
C- =1.7
etc.

Step 2. These numerical equivalents will be weighted in a way that reflects the percentage of the total grade corresponding to the assignment in question.

Step 3. The weighted numerical equivalents will be summed

Step 4. The result of step 3 will be converted into the final letter grade according to the following scheme.

3.85–4.0 = A
3.55–3.84 = A-
3.2–3.54 = B+
2.85–3.19 = B
2.55–2.84 = B-
2.2–2.54 = C+
1.85–2.19 = C
etc.

Illustration

Suppose a student earned the following grades for his or her assignment:

- Participation in section: A
- 1st paper: B
- 2nd paper: B-
- In-class writing exercise: A-

The corresponding weighted equivalents will be:

- Participation in section: 4 x 15/100 = .6
- 1st paper: 3 x 25/100 = .75
- 2nd paper: 2.7 x 35/100 = .945
- In-class writing exercise: 3.7 x 25/100 = .925

Sum of weighted numerical equivalents = (.6 + .75 + .945 + .925) = 3.22
Final grade: B+