

PHH 3400 MODERN PHILOSOPHY
Dr. Sally Ferguson

Course Overview:

During the 17th and 18th centuries, spurred on by changes and rapid developments in the natural sciences, Western philosophy underwent a period of growth that shaped the way we in the 20th century approach central philosophical issues. In this course we will trace the development of the philosophy of this so-called “modern” period through seven of its major figures: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant. In general, we will focus on issues in two main areas of philosophy that were of special interest to these figures: metaphysics, which is the study of what there is or of what exists, and epistemology, which is the study of what we can know. Tradition has grouped the first three of these figures (i.e., Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz) together under the name of “rationalists”. The second three (Locke, Berkeley, and Hume) are grouped together under the name “empiricists”. Kant is usually treated as a category unto himself, as he considered to have transcended both categories. This traditional division is useful and we will follow it, pointing out recurrent themes that appear in rationalist and empiricist thinking. We will be careful to note as we progress, however, that in some ways this traditional division is too simple, and that considerable comparisons can be made between figures from disparate groups.

Required Texts:

Robert Cummins and David Owen, Ed., *Central Readings in the History of Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant*

Grading Policy:

The grade in this course will be determined on the basis of two short-answer and essay examinations, each worth 30% of the final grade, and two (4-5 page) papers, each worth 20% of the final grade. The examinations must be written in “blue books” – examination booklets that are available in the UWF bookstore. Students are responsible for bringing their own blue books to the exams. Students should retain all their written work for the course until after they have received their final grade.

Attendance, Make-ups, etc.:

Each student is required to have done the reading in advance of class, and to be prepared to contribute to the discussion of the material. In class we will be discussing the issues raised in the reading, and expanding on them. Attendance is mandatory and will be taken. Attendance records are used for the purpose of “bumping up” final grades. Those with good attendance records, if their final grade is on the borderline between grades, will be “bumped up”.

Late assignments and make-up exams will only be allowed in cases of legitimate need, and authentication of excuse will be required (e.g., doctor's note.) Arrangements should be made in advance except in cases of emergency, and as soon as possible in the case of emergency.