

Modern Philosophy

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Focus

There are at least three good reasons to study modern philosophy: first, we get introduced to a centuries-long discussion about the possibility, the conditions, and the constraints of *knowing* something, and we get to know the main positions, concepts, arguments, and methods of reasoning that were developed in this discussion; second, since these instruments of thinking and acting are fundamental to Western culture up to now, we can learn something about our own tradition, and about ourselves; third, by studying the concepts, arguments, and methods developed in modern philosophy we can learn *how to represent* and to communicate what is important to us.

Method

Based on this last point, our class will be organized rather as a seminar than as a course. Our basic activities will be *studying, writing and presenting arguments, discussing, and re-writing*. To be prepared for our discussions, everybody has to read the texts listed in the schedule below (20 – 30 pages per week). For each meeting one (or a small group) of you is invited to present and to discuss the main arguments of such a text in a talk of 20 to 30 minutes. The presentation should focus on *the* main argument of a text, or on *a few* main arguments if there are more than one. Most important for understanding a text is, first, to *identify* arguments, second, to define the *concepts* used in an argument, third, to reconstruct its *structure* as clear as possible and, fourth, to reflect on the *context* of an argument, that is on considerations that make plausible *why* an author argues for a certain claim in a certain way. As you will see, difficulties in understanding the philosophers we are reading result mostly from problems connected with one or more of these four points. Therefore, it is important that you are *creative* in your presentation. A presentation is like a translation. You have to develop, first of all, the means that are necessary for understanding. Speaking more generally about those means will be part of the introduction. You will find the presented material on “argument mapping” also on our WebCt page (<http://webct.gatech.edu/>).

Since not all of you will get an opportunity to represent a text, there is also the possibility to present a summary in about 5 to 10 minutes. By summarizing the main points and results of the previous class meeting we can connect the different discussions. The summary’s main function is to offer a further opportunity to reflect on a text, to clarify problems you become aware of only after a seminar discussion, and to improve understanding. Roughly the first half of each class meeting will be about the previous text.

Books to buy (ordered for Engineers Bookstore)

- *The Rationalists. René Descartes: Discourse on Method & Meditations; Benedict de Spinoza: The Ethics; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Discourse on Metaphysics & The Monadology.* New York 1974: Anchor.

- *The Empiricists. John Locke: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding; George Berkeley: A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge & Three Dialogues; David Hume: An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding & Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.* New York 1974: Anchor.
- Kant, Immanuel (Prol). *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science: With Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason.* Edited by G. Hatfield. 2. ed, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy.* Cambridge; New York 2004 <1997>: Cambridge University Press.

Additional readings (download and print!)

- Kant, Immanuel (CPR). *Critique of pure reason.* Translated by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood (The Cambridge edition of the works of Immanuel Kant). Ed. by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood. Cambridge 1998: Cambridge Univ. Pr. (Two downloads on WebCt).
- Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm (1982 <1677>). Dialogue on the connection between things and words (Dialogus de connexione inter res et verba). In *Leibniz selections.* Ed. by P. P. Wiener. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 6-11 (download from our WebCt page).
- Peirce: The following links are also on WebCT!!
- Peirce, C.S. (1868). "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man": <http://members.door.net/arisbe/menu/library/bycsp/question/qu-frame.htm>
Quote according to "CP" volume and paragraphs: *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Volumes I-VI, ed. by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, 1931-1935, Volumes VII-VIII, ed. by Arthur W. Burks, 1958). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP.
- Peirce, C.S. (1877). "The Fixation of Belief": <http://members.door.net/arisbe/menu/library/bycsp/fixation/fx-frame.htm>
Quote according to "CP" volume and paragraphs.
- Peirce, C.S. (1878). "How to Make Our Ideas Clear": <http://members.door.net/arisbe/menu/library/bycsp/ideas/id-frame.htm>
Quote according to "CP" volume and paragraphs.

Helpful tools available on our WebCT page (<http://webct.gatech.edu/>)

- Argument mapping. A representational system
- Tools for philosophy (a list of dictionaries in our library and on the web to clarify terminological problems)
- Guideline and criteria for a good essay
- Further material and links

Contact

Feel free to contact me if there are any problems you would like to discuss. My **office hours** are Tuesday 2:00-3:00 pm or by appointment. The office is located in the basement of the DM Smith Building. My **phone number** is 404-385-6083. The easiest way to contact me is by **e-mail**: michael.hoffmann@pubpolicy.gatech.edu.

Schedule

<i>Date</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>presented by</i>	<i>summary by</i>
Aug. 25	Introduction Argument mapping		
Sept. 1	Descartes (1641), 99-117 (Med. I)		
Sept. 8	Descartes (1641), 118-143 (Med. II-III)		
Sept. 15	Descartes (1641), 144-175 (Med. IV-VI)		
Sept. 22	<i>No class!</i>		
Sept. 29 1. draft!	<i>No class!</i>		
Oct. 6	Leibniz (1677) and Leibniz (1685-86) §§1-21, 26-27		
Oct. 13 review!	Locke (1699)		
Oct. 20	Berkeley (1710) 135-158		
Oct. 27	Hume (1748) 322-346		
Nov. 3 2. draft!	Kant (1783) Prol, beginning to §5		
Nov. 10	Kant: a) Prol §6-10, CPR B 37-41, B 740-745; b) CPR B 74-82, Prol §21-22; c) Prol §36-38, CPR B 193-197; d) Prol §39; e) CPR B 274-279		
Nov. 17	Kant CPR B 595-630: Impossibility of proving God's existence		
Nov. 24	<i>Thanksgiving holiday!!</i>		
Dec. 1	Peirce (1868)		
Dec. 8 Essay!	Peirce (1877), CP 5.358-376 Peirce (1878)		

Grading

There will be no final exam in this seminar. Thinking through a problem is more important than writing under pressure. That means, there are other things to do. You have to work hard to get the grades you wish to have, but this work is equally divided over the whole semester. The grades you can get are based on the following assignments:

1. Write an essay on one of the twelve text selections, focusing on *arguments* as described above. This essay should be written in three steps. A first draft is due on Sept. 29th. This first draft will be peer-reviewed. That means, each of you will read and criticize the draft of a classmate. Use this criticism and suggestions to improve your first version. A second draft is due on Nov. 3th. For this one, I will write a comment with suggestions. Submit the final version of your essay on Dec. 8th latest. This final version should be about 6 to 8 pages long (12 pt font, 1.5 spaced, 1 inch on all sides). The drafts can be much shorter. The main idea of this procedure is that learning and improving is more important than being perfect. It is not easy to write a philosophical essay, but you will see how much you can learn through communication.
Send **all three** versions of your essay (Word or pdf file) by e-mail and in time to michael.hoffmann@pubpolicy.gatech.edu. Make sure that the *subject line of your e-mail* contains "PST-3103" as a marker that I need to collect your e-mails in a separate folder, and make sure that the *document name* of the files you send as attachments is formulated according to the form "PST-3103_your name_essay (or 1. draft or 2. draft)."
2. Review a classmate's paper until Oct. 13th latest, that is within two weeks. Write a comment in which you list all points that are unclear from your perspective or that could be improved. Use the "Guideline and criteria for a good essay" (cf. "Helpful tools" above) and the four points on what is "important for understanding a text" that are mentioned in the section "Method" as criteria for your comments. Send your review to your classmate and to me as well.
3. There will be 13 seminar discussions this semester. I expect that you write at least for 7 of them a short summary about one page or so. They have to be submitted *before* the next meeting, because in this way we are best prepared for our reflection on the previous week's discussion. I will not evaluate these summaries. If you send something showing that you have read the text and followed the discussion, you will get three points for each submission. Again, send your summary attached to an e-mail as described in (1). Make sure that the *document name* of the files you send follows the form "PST-3103_your name_summary of Aug25," etc.
4. Present either a draft of your essay or a summary as described above under "Method." Both can be done either individually or in small groups. There will be a common list to sign in. In case of group presentations, make clear in your final essay who is mainly responsible for which part of the paper.
5. Participate with questions, comments, and suggestions in our class discussions. I expect that you attend each seminar meeting. Please send me a short e-mail note if you are unable to attend.

You can get a maximum of 100 points according to the following list:

- max. 10 for participation over the whole semester
- 21 for summaries, each 3 points (only if sent before the next meeting)
- 9 for the review (without evaluation, only if sent until Oct. 13)
- 5 for submitting the first draft of your essay until Sept. 29 (without evaluation)
- 5 for submitting the second draft of your essay until Nov. 3 (without evaluation)
- 20 for presenting a text or a summary (without evaluation)
- max. 30 for your final essay (only if sent before Dec. 8). Learning means the development of your own thinking. There are no absolute standards what you should “know” at the end of this semester. More important is the process of learning and the improvement of your thinking.

At the end, the points will be transformed into letter grades as follows:

90-100	= A
80-89	= B
70-79	= C
60-69	= D
0-59	= F

Academic Honor Code

Based on GT’s Honor Advisory Council recommendation I would like to clarify the following points: You are allowed (and encouraged) to work together with other students on homework, as long as you write up and turn in your own solutions. Submitting any work other than your own is a violation of the Academic Honor Code. Quoting other authors, of course, is common scientific practice. However, you have to make absolutely clear what are your own formulations, and what those of others. You can quote the texts of our seminar in short form (e.g. “Peirce 1878, CP 5.400”). Other sources have to be listed under “References.” Plagiarism will be dealt with according to the GT Academic Honor Code. Note that plagiarizing is defined by Webster’s as “to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own : use (another’s production) without crediting the source.”

For any questions involving these or any other Academic Honor Code issues, please consult me or www.honor.gatech.edu.