

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: History of Western Philosophy: From Descartes to Kant
Course Code	: PHI2117
Recommended Study Year	: 2 nd year
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Lecture and Tutorial
Class Contact Hours	: 1.5 hours Lecture/week; 1.5 hours Tutorial/week
Category in Major Programme	: Foundation
Recommendation(s)	: PHI2113 History of Western Philosophy: Ancient Greek Philosophy
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

This course gives a survey of the major philosophical systems of the 17th and the 18th centuries, starting from Descartes and ending with Kant. It studies the affinities and differences between these systems and the problems they have given rise to, and which form the ongoing discussions of present-day philosophical investigations.

Aims

To acquaint students with the key concepts and themes of Western philosophy of the modern period and to enable them to see how some contemporary philosophical issues first emerged from the systems of this period.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the course, students will:

1. acquire the basic knowledge of the major philosophical systems of the modern classical period from Descartes to Kant.
2. understand the philosophical vocabulary of that period.
3. be able to articulate the philosophical concern of each of those systems.
4. understand the historical origin of some of the central issues in Western philosophy.
5. be able to read and understand the philosophical texts from that period.

Indicative Content

1. Rationalism
 - a. Descartes
 - i. The methodological doubt
 - ii. ‘*Cogito, sum*’
 - iii. Proofs of God’s existence
 - iv. The material universe
 - v. Mind-body interaction
 - b. Spinoza
 - i. Substance, attributes and modes
 - ii. ‘*Deus sive natura*’
 - iii. Emotions: Servitude and freedom
 - iv. Mind-body parallelism
 - c. Leibniz

- i. Truths of reason and truths of fact
 - ii. Monads and substances
 - iii. The principle of sufficient reason
 - iv. Pre-established harmony
- 2. Empiricism
 - a. Locke
 - i. Critique of innate ideas
 - ii. Simple and complex ideas
 - iii. Primary and secondary qualities
 - iv. The notion of substance
 - v. Knowledge and belief
 - vi. Personal identity
 - b. Berkeley
 - i. The critical method and common sense
 - ii. '*Esse est percipi*'
 - iii. Critique of language and abstract ideas
 - iv. Critique of material substance
 - v. God and mind
 - c. Hume
 - i. Impressions and ideas
 - ii. The notion of causality
 - iii. The existence of the external world
 - iv. Mind and personal identity
 - v. Reason and passions
- 3. Kant's Critical Philosophy
 - a. Kant's 'Copernican revolution'
 - b. The faculties
 - c. Thing-in-itself and appearance
 - d. Synthetic a priori judgements
 - e. Transcendental aesthetics
 - f. Transcendental analytic

Teaching Method

Lectures and tutorials.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

1. Tutorial presentation and class participation: (LO1, LO2, LO3, LO5)
 Students are required to present the thoughts of a philosopher based on an assigned reading. They are expected to explain clearly the text and the concepts therein, to bring out the issues involved and to reconstruct cogently the arguments. They are also expected to participate in class discussions and assess critically the validity of the reconstructed arguments.
2. Term paper: (LO1, LO3, LO4, LO5)
 Students will write a final paper on a selected topic in modern philosophy. They are expected to bring out the importance and relevance of a philosopher's thinking for present-day philosophical discussions.
3. Final examination: (LO1, LO2, LO3)
 The final examination will assess students' general understanding of the basic thoughts and ideas of individual modern philosophers as well as their affinities and differences. They should be able to express their ideas systematically and clearly.

Assessment

30% Tutorial presentation and participation in class discussions
30% Term paper
40% Final examination

Required Readings

Copleston, F. C., *A History of Philosophy* vol. IV-VII, New York: Image Books, 1985.
Cahn, Steven M. ed., *Classics of Western Philosophy* (5th ed.), Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999.

Supplementary Readings

Brown, Stuart ed., *British Philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment*. London: Routledge, 1996.
Cottingham, John, *Descartes*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.
Cottingham, John, *The Rationalists*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
Deleuze, Gilles, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Translated by R. Hurley; San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988.
Höffe, Otfried, *Immanuel Kant*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
Parkinson, G. H. R. ed., *The Renaissance and 17th Century Rationalism*, London: Routledge, 1993.
Savile, Anthony, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.
Stroud, Barry, *Hume*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.
Woolhouse, R. S., *The Empiricists*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>