

## Saint Meinrad School of Theology

## 05:523 – Modern Philosophy

**Course Description:**

This course examines the major philosophies of the modern period, focusing on Descartes, Hume, Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche. The premise of the course is that Descartes' dualism of matter and mind lends itself to the opposition between empiricism (Hume) and Descartes' rationalism. Kant's critical philosophy attempts to resolve this conflict through a creative compromise. Further attempts to alleviate the conflict are proposed by Hegel's idealized philosophy of history, and the Nietzschean response to it. The course attempts both an evaluation of modern philosophies on their own terms, and a critical assessment of their presuppositions.

**Course Goals:**

1. To understand and compare the basic concepts of modern philosophy's approaches to science, including the systematic approaches of rationalism, empiricism, idealism and irrationalism.
2. To be able to interpret how the modern modes of inquiry generate and influence arguments about Catholic belief and practice.
3. To begin to critically analyze the systematic modern responses to the Ancient and Medieval conceptions of metaphysics and theory of knowledge.

These goals are formulated to assist the student in attaining five of the six **MA(CPS) Student Learning Outcomes:**

1. Understand the role and contribution of the Western philosophical tradition to the development and explication of Christian doctrine.
2. Interpret philosophical and theological texts in light of the broad Western Christian tradition.
3. Express arguments logically and concisely in written and oral form.
4. Analyze and critique contemporary issues in light of the Catholic intellectual tradition.
5. Understand philosophical background of terms and theories that are found in the basic framework of Catholic theology.

**Assignments:**

- A. There will be two written assignments that serve as the primary assessment for the completion of the course, worth 70% of the grade in total, 30% for the mid-term essays and 40% for the final exam.

- B. The remaining 30% of the course will consist of regular, active participation, the evaluation of which will include weekly reading response assignments and the natural development of questions and comments in class. These assignments are subject to change at the instructor's discretion.

All written assignments must follow the most recent rules for academic writing as prescribed in: Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, current edition) and the citation guides from the Mader Center.

*Midterm Essays:* The mid-term will consist of 3 questions, and you must answer two of them (one essay for each question) to the best of your ability using the primary texts. The mid-term is take-home, open book, open note. The prompts for the mid-term will be handed out on Tuesday of week 5 of class. Each essay should be typed, double spaced, and 700-1100 words. (This is not a strict limit—if you answer the question well in 650 or if you answer the question in 1400, as long as you answer the question as completely as possible, that is the concern.) The grade for the mid-term will be 20% on grammar, 30% on formal structure of the argument (thesis? ability to see objections? use of the texts?) and 50% on the content (self-consistent interpretation, correctly framing basic facts.)

*Final Exam:* The format for the take-home final will, again, consist of 3 questions, the student answering two. For the final, the goal of the questions will be to BOTH test depth of knowledge and analysis of one particular topic and to test the ability of each student to compare and relate ideas from one modern thinker to current topics in science, technology, socio-economic realities, and theology. The grade for the final will be based on awareness of and use of course content. Each response should be approximately between 1000 and 1500 words, but again this is not a strict limit.

*Reading responses:* On ten Mondays within the course (see schedule below), students are responsible for turning in a very brief reading response (**emailed or sent through BBEM**) about the week's assigned reading. The response should not be longer than 1 side of one page; it should ordinarily only be around ½ of one side. Addressing responses to the reading will be incorporated into the Friday classes, when appropriate.

**The prompt each week is always the same:**

- 1. Say what you think are the main concepts or themes from this week's reading and why you think they are the most important ideas.**
- 2. What question do you want to know more about regarding what was said in this week's reading? And/or: what, if anything, is confusing or needs clarification for you?**

A good reading response: indicates that the student has done (at least a good chunk of) the reading, has some conception of what is important, and is working at trying to fit the whole picture together. Full credit is 10 points, partial credit of 5 indicates weakness in

any of these three areas. No points awarded for clear lack of effort or the assignment is not turned in.

**Grading scale:**

The definitions of letter grades at Saint Meinrad are available at:

<https://www.saintmeinrad.edu/student-resources/academic-regulations/>.

The following are the percentages that correspond to each letter grade in this course.

- A 95 and above
- A- 90-94
- B+ 87-89
- B 83-86
- B- 80-82
- C+ 77-79
- C 73-76
- C- 70-72
- D 60-69
- F 59 and below

**Academic Integrity/Plagiarism:**

The standards of academic integrity for this class are the same as for any course at Saint Meinrad. The statement on academic integrity, a definition of plagiarism with examples, and a statement of procedures and consequences for suspected plagiarism are all found on the school's website at: <https://www.saintmeinrad.edu/student-resources/academic-regulations/academic-integrity/>

**Assigned Texts**

Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Fourth Edition. Translated by Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998.

Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Second Edition. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993

Kant, Immanuel. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Second Edition. Translated by James W. Ellington. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1977/2001.

Hegel, G.W.F. *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*. Translated by Leo Rauch. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1988.

Nietzsche, Friedrich *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Translated by Peter Preuss. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980.

**Weekly assignments** [subject to change at the instructor's discretion]:

| Assigned Texts   | Assignments due   |
|--|---|
| Week 1 (Aug 29 and Sep 1): Introduction to course – historical background- <i>Discourse on Method</i> , parts I-II <b>for Thursday</b> .   |   |
| Week 2 (Sep 8): <i>Discourse</i> , parts III-IV; <i>Meditations</i> , med. 1-3.  | Reading questions due on <b>Wednesday</b>   |
| Week 3 (Sep 12 and 15): <i>Meditations on first Philosophy</i> , med. 4-6, <i>Discourse</i> , parts V and VI.  | Reading questions due on Monday   |
| Week 4 (Sep 19 and 22): <i>Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , § 1-6.   | Reading questions due on Monday   |
| Week 5 (Sep 26 and 29): <i>Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , § 7-12.  | Reading questions due on Monday   |
| Week 6 (Oct 3 and 6): <i>Prolegomena for any Future Metaphysics</i> , Preface and preamble   | Reading questions due on Monday   |
| Week 7 (Oct 10 and 13): <i>Prolegomena</i> , First and Second Parts  | <b>Midterm due by end of day Friday, Oct 15. No reading assignment due.</b>   |
| Week 8 (Oct 17 and 20): <i>Prolegomena</i> , Third Part and Conclusion   | Reading questions due on Monday   |
| Week 9 (Oct 24 and 27): The science of the early modern period: the development of the scientific method of investigation and the modern conception of 'Nature' versus the Aristotelian. | <i>Discussion of Humbolt biography</i><br><i>Handout on Pre-modern vs. Modern Mathematics: (Selections from Jacob Klein, Daniel Sutherland)</i> |
| Week 10 (October 31- Nov 3): <i>Introduction to the Philosophy of History</i> , Parts 1-3.   | Reading questions due on Monday   |
| Week 11 (Nov 7 and 10): <i>Introduction to the Philosophy of History</i> , Parts 4-6.  | Reading questions due on Monday   |
| Week 12 (Nov 14 and 17): <i>On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life</i> , Preface-§5.  | Reading questions due on Monday   |
| Week 13 (Nov. 28 and Dec 1): <i>On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life</i> , §6-10.   | Reading questions due on Monday   |
| Week 14 (Dec. 5): "Big-picture" Review on Monday, No classes on Dec. 8 for Feast of Immaculate Conception.   | <b>Final, take-home exam due on Friday Dec. 9.</b>  |