

PHL708: Introduction to Modern Philosophy

Fall 2008

Instructor: Dr. Glenn Parsons

Location & Time: Wednesdays 11:00-1:00 in AMC24 and Fridays 3:00-4:00 in KHE323

Office Hours: Monday and Friday 11:00-noon, or by appointment

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This course is an Upper Level Liberal Studies Elective.

Course Calendar Description

This course examines the foundations of contemporary conceptions of knowledge through a study of the two dominant philosophical traditions of the 17th and 18th centuries—Rationalism and Empiricism. The philosophers studied will include Descartes, Hume, and Kant. The themes examined may include the nature of knowledge, the origin and formation of beliefs about the external world, the threat of scepticism, theories of perception, contemporary relevance, and the relation between mind and body.

Course Synopsis and Goals

This course is an introduction to the philosophy of the ‘early modern’ period, from roughly 1600-1800. Our focus will be on the writings of three influential thinkers: Rene Descartes, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant. We will examine each thinker’s treatment of four fundamental philosophical issues: our knowledge of the physical world, the nature of the self, the existence of God and the basis of morality.

In addition to giving you an appreciation of the philosophy of this period, the course is also intended to help you develop the ability to think philosophically yourself. Philosophical thinking involves deploying a mixture of creativity, logic and careful analysis to better understand the concepts that figure in complex problems. In this course, you will develop the ability to do this through a close study of outstanding philosophical texts and through practicing the expression of your own philosophical ideas, in classroom discussions and in your written work.

Course Format/Missed Lecture Notes

This course consists of lectures in the traditional style. In these lectures, I will present the philosophical views developed in the required readings, and then explain, illustrate and provide some criticisms of these views, with an eye toward making them more or less intelligible and relating them to other readings and topics we are considering. I will also encourage the class to ask questions and engage in some critical discussion on the topics and theories that we are covering.

In developing the views presented in the required readings, I will regularly draw on ideas, facts and examples that are not mentioned in those readings, whenever I think it is appropriate and helpful. Please be aware that such material constitutes part of the course content and will be tested on course examinations and assignments. Consequently, having a good set of lecture notes is important in this course. If you miss a lecture, you are responsible for obtaining a copy of the notes for that day. I will not send you a set of lecture notes by email, nor will I post any on our Blackboard page. This is in part because I don’t even have a set of

lecture notes (what I have are speaker's notes, which are very different). You may, however, use our Blackboard page to post requests to borrow other students' lecture notes (but note that the lending of notes by other students is entirely at their own discretion).

Note also my office hours are provided so that students can drop in and ask specific questions about the course material; for obvious reasons I cannot use them to re-present for you a lecture that you have missed. If you ask me to do this, I will tell you to get a copy of the notes; if you then have specific questions about the material, I will be happy to answer them during office hours.

Texts

You need to purchase three texts for this course:

- René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3rd ed., D. Cress, transl., (Hackett, 1993)
- Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Carus/Ellington, transl (Hackett, 1977).
- A course reader for our section of PHL708

All texts are available at the Ryerson bookstore. Note that the texts in the course reader may be available, in some version or another, on the internet. However, these texts are quite long and we will be reading specific excerpts from them, in specific translations, in a specific order. Therefore you will need the course reader.

I may also dispense a few additional readings as photocopies, or employ readings available on the web; such additions will be announced in class and on the course Blackboard page.

Contacting Me/Email

I set aside a specific day of the week to answer student emails, so depending on when you email me you may not get an instantaneous response. Email is fine for quick logistical questions, but if you have a substantial question, I recommend that you use the scheduled office hours to come talk to me in person.

Note that, according to Ryerson's academic policy you are required to use a Ryerson email account for this course. You will need this for submitting your essays to Turnitin.com, and if I need to communicate to the class I will email you at your Ryerson address. I reserve the right not to respond to non-Ryerson email addresses (*e.g.* yahoo, hotmail, etc.) and my junk mail filters tend to delete such messages. For information on how to activate your Ryerson email account, go to:

<http://www.ryerson.ca/ccs/myaccounts/activate/index.html>.

Important Dates

- The Faculty Course Survey will be administered sometime between November 8th and November 22th.
- The last day to drop a course (no refund of fees) is Friday November 21th.
- Monday October 13th is Thanksgiving holiday; the University is closed.
- I will be out of the country from Nov. 5-7, so there will be no classes that week.
- Please note that on Friday, November 28th, 2008 undergrad classes regularly scheduled on Fridays will be replaced with classes regularly scheduled on Mondays. Therefore, we have no class on Friday, November 28th, 2008.
- Classes end Friday November 28th.

For a full listing of significant dates go to <http://www.ryerson.ca/calendar/2008-2009/pg12.html>

Course Blackboard Page

This course has a Blackboard page, which you should be able to access through <http://my.ryerson.ca>. Various announcements will be posted there periodically, along with certain class material and, at my discretion,

grades. Also note that the authoritative version of the class schedule will be the one on the Blackboard page, and if you are missing class you should check it periodically for updates.

Evaluation

Grades will be calculated as follows:

	<i>Due Date</i>	<i>Value</i>
Assignment #1 (one sheet of paper, maximum)	Friday Sept 19 (week 3)	10%
Short Essay #1 (4-6 pages max) (Topic: Descartes)	Friday Oct 10 (week 6)	25%
Short Essay #2 (4-6 pages max) (Topic: Hume)	Friday Nov 7 (week 10)	25%
Final Exam (Take home format; answer two essay questions)	Exam slot, TBA	40%

- Note that, unless students make alternative arrangements with me by the end of the second week of classes, the all work for this course except the first assignment must be submitted electronically to Blackboard.
- Note that, unless students make alternative arrangements with me by the end of the second week of classes, assignments for this course will be screened, upon Blackboard submission, by the Turnitin.com plagiarism detection service (see ‘Course Policies’ below for further information).
- Essays are due on Blackboard by 9:00 pm on the date indicated; essays received after this time are considered late. The penalty for late submission is one grade per day (*e.g.* an A+ paper submitted one day late receives an A, a C- paper two days late receives a D, and so on), including weekend days, up to a maximum of seven days. Papers that are more than seven days late will receive a grade of zero, unless there is documented medical or compassionate grounds for an extension (see ‘Course Policies’ below).
- There is no make-up or bonus work for this course.
- The first assignment will be returned to the class before the second assignment is due.
- Grades for work during the term may be posted, listed by student number (minus the first two digits) on the instructor’s door or on the course Blackboard page. Students who do not wish to have their grades posted in this manner must contact the instructor in writing during the first two weeks of class.
- Ryerson’s academic policy states that “students will receive their final course grades only from the Registrar. Final course grades may not be posted or disclosed anywhere by an instructor” (www.ryerson.ca/acadcouncil/current/pol145.pdf). This means that I cannot, under any circumstances, email, or report in any other way, your final grade in this course.

A Note about the Coursework

The aim of this course is to help you learn to think philosophically, and I will assess this by grading your attempts to address philosophical questions in your assignments, essays and exams. There are certain features that are characteristic of good philosophical thinking and writing, and I will discuss them, show you examples of them, and help you learn to cultivate them in your own writing. Your work will be evaluated on how well it manifests these features (see description of letter grades below). But bear in mind that there is no simple recipe for achieving these qualities in your written work that I, or anyone else, can give you. Good philosophical thinking is not primarily a matter of producing a particular set of statements that constitutes the ‘right answer’ to a question, nor is it a matter of applying a certain formula or recipe. Addressing a philosophical question well is not, in other words, a ‘paint-by-numbers’ activity; it is a skill, something more of an art than a science.

Consider an analogy. Some novels are insightful, and this is generally apparent to readers. To the extent that a novel has this quality, it is a good novel. But there is no formula for writing an insightful novel: this can be done in any number of ways depending on just what one is writing about, how one approaches it, and so on. The ability to write insightful novels, though perhaps natural to some extent, is also a skill that one develops through studying good novels, identifying the general features of insightful fiction, and refining one’s judgement through practice. This is very similar to what we will be doing in this course with regard to writing and thinking philosophically.

This means that it is particularly important that you take note of the feedback that we give you on your written work over the course of the term. If you do poorly on the assignment on philosopher X, don’t simply forget about it and resolve to devote more effort to philosopher Y for the next assignment. For the assignments do not simply test the effort that you have put into philosopher X or Y; rather they test *your philosophical skills*, and the way to improve these skills is to take note of our comments and criticisms before launching your next effort.

Description of Letter Grades

The following is a general description of the meaning of the various letter grades, as we understand them. The term in brackets following each grade is the meaning of that grade according to Ryerson’s official policy on grading ([academic council policy #46](#)).

- *A Grade (excellent) work.* Papers at this level are very well organized; they display a clear thesis and a clear aim, and carry that aim off well. They display well-rounded understanding of the issues and concepts deployed and show the ability to analyze and synthesize complex ideas. Arguments are clear and cogent and do not merely repeat arguments or ideas discussed in class notes or texts. Few or no errors are made, and possible responses are anticipated and dealt with in a highly effective way. Papers at this level reflect a deep and thorough grasp of the issues and manifest enough argumentative skill to compel a sceptical reader to accept the thesis offered.
- *B Grade (good) work.* Papers at the B level are well organized: they have a thesis and provide cogent arguments for that thesis. B level papers, however, may contain arguments that are not as original or as sharply presented as those in A papers. Minor errors in the treatment of ideas or concepts may appear, but no serious errors are present. Analysis of ideas and concepts may be sloppy or inaccurate in places. Some obvious objections may remain unaddressed, leaving the whole less than convincing to a sceptical reader. Overall, these papers are good but some work remains to take the paper to the A level.

- *C Grade (satisfactory) work.* Papers at this level present a coherent and relevant argument, but display more problems than B level papers, such as an unclear thesis, difficulties with overall organization, unclear or ambiguous argument or substantial errors in the presentation of ideas. Demonstration of the ability to analyze and synthesize complex ideas may be lacking, and the paper may need to be better informed in light of the course material. Overall, a paper at this level displays a grasp of the issues but needs work in one or more areas to reach the B level.
- *D Grade (marginal) work.* Papers at this level have one or more serious problems. For example, they may be poorly organized, lack a discernible thesis, or present basic concepts inaccurately. Papers at this level tend to drift rather than flow: the reader may have trouble following whole sections of the paper, or in seeing how the different sections together into a coherent whole.
- *F Grade (unsatisfactory) work.* Papers that receive an F are generally uninformed (displaying only rudimentary familiarity with the issues and concepts discussed in the course), incoherent, or both.

Concerns about Grades

Concerns about grades will be handled through a five-step procedure, based on and consistent with Ryerson's Academic Policy #134, Undergraduate Academic Consideration and Appeals. For further information, consult this policy, which is available at <http://www.ryerson.ca/acadcouncil/current/pol134.pdf>.

1. Student meets with the original marker. The first step is for students to meet with the original marker to discuss the grade in person. Students with questions or concerns about a grade assigned to their work cannot request a re-grade until and unless they have held such a meeting. This meeting must take place within ten working days of return of the graded assignment to the class. You ought to contact the original marker, whether me or a TA, directly by email to arrange a time for this meeting. In order for this meeting to be profitable, students are expected to have carefully reviewed the assignment and any provided comments beforehand.

2. Student requests a re-grade. We will entertain requests for re-grading only if students have specific concerns regarding our original comments (Policy #134, article IC1b). An example of a specific concern is: "The marker wrote on my essay that I failed to mention philosopher X, but on page six I talked about him for two paragraphs." "I thought I did better", "My roommate felt this was an A paper", or "The TA marked my essay" are not specific concerns about our original comments on your work. Note that requests for re-grading made via solely email, or more than ten days after work has been returned to the class, will *not* be considered.

3. Original marker decides. After hearing the student's specific concerns about the original comments and grade, the original marker will decide either to make no change to the original grade, or to re-grade the work. If the original marker decides to re-grade the work, the new mark becomes the official grade, whether it is higher or lower than the original mark. In other words, a re-grade is precisely that: a reconsideration of the work. It is not necessarily the assignment of a higher grade (Policy #134, article ICi).

4. Student requests 'out of course' re-grade. If the student is not satisfied with the original marker's re-grading, or with a decision not to re-grade a piece work, the student can ask the relevant department chair or program director to have another qualified instructor re-grade the work. Note that the student "must submit specific and detailed reasons, in writing to the Chair/Director, as to why the original grade was inappropriate, including any evidence from course notes, textbooks, etc. Asserting that the work deserves more marks or that the student disagrees with the mark is not sufficient support for the reassessment" (Policy #134 IC1fi).

5. Chair/Director decides. The Chair/Director may decide to have another qualified instructor re-grade the work, or he/she may refuse the request. This decision is final. If the work is re-graded, we will provide all relevant information on the assignment, as well as any marking key or specific grading criteria employed, to the designated instructor. The new grade assigned may be higher, lower, or the same as than the original grade, and this grade is final.

Please note that requests for re-grading are *not* academic appeals, as that phrase is defined in Ryerson's Academic Policy. "Academic Appeals are reserved for issues related to grades or academic standings that could not be resolved with an instructor or a Chair/Director... The grounds for academic appeals are "Prejudice; Medical; Compassionate; Course Management; and Procedural Error" (Policy #134 IIB). For further information on academic appeals, see Policy #134, as well as Ryerson's [Student Guide to Avoiding Academic Appeals](http://www.ryerson.ca/acadcouncil/Other.html/guideavoidappeals.pdf) (<http://www.ryerson.ca/acadcouncil/Other.html/guideavoidappeals.pdf>)

Course Policies

Classroom Policy on Technology

The use of technology in this class is permitted so long as two conditions are met: (1) it is being used for a class-related purpose (e.g., taking notes) (2) it is not bothering other students in the class. Please bear in mind that even if you are silently surfing the web, the motion on your computer screen can be distracting for those sitting behind you. If I see that your use of technology is disturbing other students, I will ask you to kindly shut it down.

Alternate Arrangements for Missed Exams and Assignments

- In general, **circumstances interfering with your ability to perform required course work must be brought to my attention as they arise, and if at all possible, in advance of missed work.** Requests made at the end of term for extensions, rewrites, etc. due to ongoing personal circumstances will not be considered (for more information, see Ryerson's [Student Guide to Avoiding Academic Appeals](http://www.ryerson.ca/acadcouncil/Other.html/guideavoidappeals.pdf)). Alternate arrangements for missed exams and assignments will normally be granted **ONLY** for reasons of illness or injury, religious observance, disability and compassionate grounds (see below).
- Alternate Arrangements/Extensions will **NOT** be granted for the following reasons:
 - Computer failure, loss of work (keep a backup copy of all your work)
 - Social engagements, including family-related events
 - Work schedules
 - Coincident deadlines in other courses
 - Travel other than home-to-school commuting (holidays, cancelled flights, *e.g.*)
- Requests for alternate arrangements will be considered in the following cases:
 1. *Illness/Injury.* Students must provide, within three working days of the missed assignment, essay, or exam, a completed Ryerson Medical Certificate or a letter from a physician (on letterhead) with the student declaration portion of the Ryerson Medical Certificate attached (this form can be obtained at www.ryerson.ca/rr/medical.pdf). The nature of the alternate arrangement for making up the missing grade is left to the discretion of the instructor. For further details, refer to Ryerson Academic Policy 134, Undergraduate Academic Consideration and Appeals, available at www.ryerson.ca/acadcouncil/current/pol134.pdf.

2. *Religious Observance.* Ryerson policy allows accommodation for religious observances. Requests for such accommodation must be made formally during the first two weeks of class. For the appropriate forms and instructions, see <http://www.ryerson.ca/rr/observemain.htm>. Ryerson's full policy on Accommodation of Student Religious Observance Obligations is available at www.ryerson.ca/acadcouncil/current/pol150.pdf.
3. *Disability.* Students with a diagnosed physical or learning disability should register with the Ryerson Access Centre at the start of the term. For more information, visit their website at <http://www.ryerson.ca/accesscentre/>
4. *Compassionate Grounds.* Students unable to complete assignments due to loss of a family member or loved one, or due to personal difficulties that are interfering with their studies, should speak to the instructors as soon as is possible. The instructors reserve the right to require documentation, depending upon the circumstances.

Academic Misconduct and Turnitin.com

- Students are reminded that they are required to adhere to all relevant University policies, such as the Student Code of Academic Conduct (available online at: <http://www.ryerson.ca/acadcouncilcurrent/pol60.pdf>). This code treats plagiarism (the misrepresentation of someone else's work as your own) as a form of academic misconduct. For detailed information concerning academic misconduct and the relevant penalties, see the Student Code. Note that **the instructors will be distributing information specifying the required citation practices for assignments in this course, and that you are responsible for being aware of and employing this information.** Note also **that it is your responsibility to be aware of what constitutes plagiarism**, and that ignorance of this is not an acceptable excuse. For further information on plagiarism and how to avoid it, go to <http://www.ryerson.ca/ai/students/studentplagiarism.html>
- Ryerson University subscribes to Turnitin.com, an on-line service that evaluates the originality of written work. Students agree that by taking this course, they are aware that all required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Detailed instructions on submitting written work to Turnitin will be provided. Note that you are required to use an official Ryerson email account when submitting to Turnitin.com: assignments from other email addresses (yahoo, *e.g.*) will not be accepted. In accordance with Ryerson's academic policy, students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must, by the end of the second week of classes, consult with the instructor to make alternate arrangements. Also, students should be aware that "when an instructor has a reason to suspect that an individual piece of work has been plagiarized, the instructor shall be permitted to submit that work to any plagiarism detection service", including Turnitin.com. For more information, see Ryerson's Course Management Policy, Section 4.3.a, available at <http://www.ryerson.ca/acadcouncil/current/pol145.pdf>.
- Students should be aware that the instructor reserves the right to conduct an oral examination on the contents of any submitted assignment.
- Note that Ryerson's Examination policy prohibits the bringing of any electronic device, such as a cell phone, PDA, or other such device, into a test or examination. This policy will be enforced in this course.

Readings for PHL708: Introduction to Modern Philosophy

Please note:

- At each lecture, students will be expected to have read the indicated readings beforehand.
- All readings are in the course reader.

René Descartes

Meditations on First Philosophy

Samuel Clarke

Excerpt from *Discourse Upon Natural Religion* (1706)*

David Hume

On Morals (*Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, §§I-III and Appendix I)*

On Ideas (*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding [EHU]*, §§2 and 3)*

On Reasoning concerning Matters of Fact (*EHU*, §4.1)*

On God (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, § IX)*

On the Self (*Treatise of Human Nature* I.IV.2, I.IV.6)*

On the External World (*EHU*, §12.1)*

On the Role of Reason in Beliefs Concerning Matters of Fact (*EHU*, §§ IV. 2 and V.1)*

Immanuel Kant

Analytic and Synthetic (*Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, §2)

The Synthetic *A Priori* (*Prolegomena*, §5)

On Mathematical Knowledge (*Prolegomena*, §§6-12)

On Causation (*Prolegomena* §§18 and 29; *Critique of Pure Reason* B233-242 [abridged]*)

Phenomena and Noumena (*Prolegomena*, §30)

Transcendental Ideas (*Prolegomena*, excerpts from §§32-60)

On Morals (*Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, §2, 414-425)*