

# PHILOSOPHY 310: HISTORY OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

Instructor:	Dr. Tanner Hammond	Course Dates:	T-TH, 9:30
Contact:	tannerh@bu.edu	Classroom:	TBD
Office Hours:	Friday 10:30am-12:30pm	Office Hours Location:	Digital Office Hours Tab



## **COURSE TOPIC:**

It has been said that we live in a “Post-Truth” era. According to the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* Science and Security Board, one of the most urgent existential threats to human civilization is internet-based misinformation, understood as the intentional or unintentional dissemination of information that is not true. From climate change denial to manufactured political strife, many believe our ability to survive as a global community is imperiled by our loosening grasp on the truth.

But what, exactly, is truth? What does it mean for a human being to possess *knowledge* of the truth? What can we know about ourselves and the external world? And what, if anything, would it mean to possess *moral knowledge* – that is, knowledge about what is “good” and “bad” or what we “ought” to do? Are there even moral truths to know?

The aim of this course is to engage in a historical dialogue on these questions with key philosophers from the Early to Late Modern period. The course will focus on representative works of four philosophers in particular - Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Nietzsche - with an eye towards charting the legacy of each thinker in contemporary philosophy. Our goal will be to balance close reading and historical sensitivity with a topical focus on issues that remain at the forefront of public debate.

## **COURSE MATERIALS AND WEBSITE:**

This class has a course website: [tannerhammond.com/310](http://tannerhammond.com/310). The class will be administered entirely through this website. Please note: There is no blackboard for this class. All materials for the course will be distributed on the course website. Sign up for an account on the course website to access the Digital Forum, where you will share your weekly assignment.

## **COURSE TEXTS:**

All Readings for this course will be distributed digitally on the course E-Reader, free of charge. You can access the E-Reader through the course website. If you would like to own a hardcopy of the major readings for the class, you make track down the following copies below:

1. **René Descartes. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*.** Fourth Edition. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 1998.
2. **David Hume. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.** Second Edition. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 1998.
3. **Immanuel Kant. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics: and the Letter to Marcus Herz, February 1772*.** Second Edition. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 2002.
4. **Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*.** New York: Vintage (Random House), 1989.

## **COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADE BREAKDOWN**

1. Participation and Annotations_____	10%
2. Weekly Blog Papers_____	10%
3. Midterm Benchmark Project (Two Short Papers)_____	2x25%
4. Stages of Philosophical Writing Assignment Series (Credit/No Credit)	
5. Final Paper_____	30%

## **GRADED AND UNGRADED ASSIGNMENTS**

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### **WEEKLY UNGRADED ASSIGNMENTS**

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#### **I. Hive Reading - aka “Annotations” (Ungraded)**

Philosophy is difficult and takes time, but we’re all in it together. This class has a social E-Reader app, “Perusall,” where everyone can engage with the material in a collective forum. This gives you all the opportunity to share comments and questions and respond directly to one another. To make sure we’re keeping up with the reading, each week you will:

1. **ANNOTATE:** Leave at least 1-2 quality annotative questions, comments, or objections on at least one of the readings that week. To keep it interesting: No duplicate questions! Early bird gets the worm. That being said, you can always take the same passage in a different direction. **Note:** You may leave 1-2 quality responses to your classmates’ annotations in fulfillment of your contribution.
2. **UPVOTE/CO-SIGN:** In addition to the above, upvote and/or co-sign any comments/questions that you find helpful or illuminating.

**DUE: Complete Hive Reading assignments before the end of the day each Tuesday, on any of the readings assigned for that week.**

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#### **2. Short Weekly “Blog Papers” (Ungraded)**

Every week each student will write and post a short “blog paper” to the *Digital Forum* on the course website, to be completed in response to one or more of the readings for that week. The blog paper should be no more than 500 words. The blog paper should either (a) Articulate and develop objection(s), worries(s), or question(s) about the ideas or arguments exhibited in the reading, and/or (b) Defend or amend the author’s view in response to anticipated criticisms.

NOTE: The blog paper should be something that you look forward to doing, and not a source of panic or stress. To emphasize this, these are ungraded (credit/no credit) assignments. That being said, they will be read and assessed for course participation, and will also serve as one basis for my feedback to you for your Midterm Feedback Dossier. They may also be workshopped in class. The idea is for you to have a piece of writing each week that will give you something to draw upon in class discussions and in office hours with me.

**DUE: Post your weekly blog paper to the Digital Forum before the end of the day each Thursday.**

## GRADED ASSIGNMENTS

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### **I. Midterm Benchmark Project (Two Short Papers; One on Module I and One on Module II):**

The aim of this course not only to teach you *about* philosophy, but to cultivate your ability to *do* philosophy. In my experience, cram-session regurgitative blue book exams do little to prepare one to do meaningful philosophical work. The purpose of the midterm benchmark paper is to give you the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge of the material while also giving you the opportunity to actually explore some of the basic conventions of philosophical discourse.

**The Paper Types:** In order to help you accomplish the foregoing, your midterm paper(s) must satisfy **at least one** of the following paper types below:

- i. Critical Engagement:** Engage critically with a philosopher's work by generating original objections or challenges to their position
  
- ii. Reconstructive Effort:** Try to defend a philosopher's view from some classic objections or problems by reconstructing a fortified or amended version of their position
  
- iii. Trans-Historical Topical Debate:** Show how an issue in contemporary debate is illuminated or problematized by a historical figure. Or show how an historical philosopher's view might be illuminated or problematized by contemporary philosophical debate.
  
- iv. Interpretive Dispute:** Engage in an existing scholarly debate between differing interpretations of a philosopher.

***Detailed instructions for the Midterm Benchmark Project will be provided in a separate handout.***

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**2. Final Paper: The Philosophical Essay:** Your final paper assignment will give you free agency to pursue any topic of interest engaging with one or more of the figures of this course. With my input, you will have full autonomy in conceiving the purpose of your paper. *Detailed instructions for the Final Paper will be provided in a separate handout.*

**Stages of Philosophical Writing Sub-Assignment Series (Credit/No Credit)** Successful Academic Writing doesn't happen in a vacuum, but involves communicative encounters with other rational inquirers at critical stages in the process. In order to prepare for your final paper, you'll need to practice the conventions of philosophical writing with opportunities for feedback To help you accomplish this, you will complete series of three mini-assignments designed to assist you along the way in composing your final paper. *Detailed instructions for the Stages of Academic Writing Series will be provided in a separate handout.*

## SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS (See Course Website for Updates)

### PART ONE: THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

<b>Module I: Cartesian Rationalism</b>		
Week 1	Introduction: Truth and Knowledge	Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, "It is Now 100 Seconds to Midnight" Rene Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> , The First & Second Meditations
Week 2	From Skepticism to Knowledge: The <i>Cogito</i> and the Cartesian Circle	<i>Meditations</i> , The Third & Fourth Meditations Barry Stroud, "The External World" Erion & Smith, "Skepticism, Morality, and the Matrix"
Week 3	Mind and Matter: Cartesian Dualism & Princess Elisabeth's Critique	The Fifth & Sixth Meditations Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, Letters David Chalmers, Philosophical Zombies
<b>Module II: Humean Empiricism</b>		
Week 4	The Empiricist Mind: Impressions & Ideas	David Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , Section I <i>Enquiry</i> II & III
Week 5	Hume's Bonfire: Knowledge and Its Limits	Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The Waterless Moat" <i>Enquiry</i> IV, V, VII
Week 6	The Scottish Heretic: Naturalism, Religion, and Morality	<i>Enquiry</i> X <i>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</i> <i>Enquiry</i> XI
Week 7	Slave of the Passions: Hume's Moral Psychology	<i>Treatise</i> Book III, Part III Annette Baier, "What is an Emotion About?" Sabine Döring, "Why Be Emotional?"

### PART TWO: THE LATE MODERN PERIOD

<b>Module III: Kant's Transcendental Idealism</b>		
Week 8	Kant's Third Way Intuitions, Concepts, and the Synthetic A Priori	<i>Prolegomena</i> Preface, Introduction, Preamble, I, II, & III
Week 9	Morality as Practical Rationality: Kant's Moral System	<i>Groundwork</i> Chapters I & II Christine Korsgaard, "Kant's Formula of Universal Law" Jennifer Uleman, "Kant's Theory of Motivation"
Week 10	What is Evil? Rationality and the Problem of Evil	Hannah Arendt, Selections "Eichmann in Jerusalem" Michelle Kosch, "Kant on Autonomy and Moral Evil" Kant, Selections from the <i>Critique of Practical Reason</i>
Week 11	The Suffering Other: The Compassion-Based Critique of Kant	Arthur Schopenhauer, "On the Sufferings of the World" Iris Murdoch, <i>The Sovereignty of Good</i> Josephine Donovan, "Attention to Suffering: A Feminist Care Ethic"
<b>Module IV: Beyond Truth and Error: Nietzsche's Challenge</b>		
Week 12	The Death of God and the Problem of Nihilism	Parable of the Madman Selected <i>Gay Science</i> <i>Genealogy</i> First Essay
Week 13	Herd Morality, <i>Ressentiment</i> , and the Will to Truth	<i>Genealogy</i> Second & Third Essay
Week 14	Creating Values: Who are Nietzsche's Free Spirits?	Nadeem Hussain, "Honest Illusion"

## IMPORTANT COURSE POLICIES AND ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

**Late Assignment Policy:** If you find that you need a short extension, you may request one in advance of the paper deadline.

**Academic Integrity:** Cases of plagiarism will be handled in accordance with the disciplinary procedures described in Boston University's Academic Conduct Code. All students are subject to the CAS code, which can be read online:

<http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>

**Attendance:** Students are expected to attend lectures regularly. Absence in the case of an illness will be excused if a note from a physician substantiates that the absence was required for health reasons. Any student who has been absent, unexcused, from more than six classes before the last date on which withdrawals are permitted will be required to withdraw from the course. Any student who has been absent, unexcused, from more than six classes before the final examination and who has not formally withdrawn from the course will receive an F for the course.

**Office of Disability Services:** I assume that all of us learn in different ways. If there are circumstances that may affect your performance in this class, please talk to me as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for accommodations that will satisfy both your learning needs and the requirements of the course. Whether or not you have a documented disability, BU provides many support services that are available to all students. Disability Services is the office responsible for assisting students with disabilities. If you have a disability that interferes with your learning (whether visible or invisible, physical or mental), you are encouraged to register with this office. If you have any questions about accommodation, or what constitutes a disability, I invite you to speak with me or to Disability Services.

**Chosen Name and Gender Pronouns:** This course aims to be an inclusive learning community that supports students of all gender identities (including non-gendered identifying persons). While class rosters are provided to instructors with students' legal names, please let me know if you would like to be addressed by a different name than that listed in the StudentLink. You are also invited to tell me early in the semester which set of pronouns best fits your identity (if any).

**Absence Due to Religious Observance** If you must miss class due to religious observance, you will not be penalized for that absence and you will receive a reasonable opportunity to make up any work or examinations that you may miss. Please notify the instructor of absences for religious observance as soon as possible, ideally before the absence. View the religious observance policy:

[www.bu.edu/academics/policies/absence-for-religious-reasons/](http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/absence-for-religious-reasons/)

**Bereavement** In the event of the death of an immediate family member, you should notify your advisor, who will help you coordinate your leave. You will be automatically granted five weekdays of leave, and if necessary, your advisor will help you to petition the Dean for additional leave time. You may also request a leave of absence due to bereavement. Please contact your advisor, who will help you with the process. View the bereavement policy: [www.bu.edu/academics/policies/student-bereavement/](http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/student-bereavement/)

**Course Recording Policy** All class sessions will be recorded for the benefit of registered students who are unable to attend live sessions (either in person or remotely) due to time zone differences, illness or other special circumstances. Recorded sessions will be made available only to students who have an obstacle to live attendance.

**Content and Trigger Warning Policy** In this class, we will be confronting challenging questions about the full spectrum of human experience. For that reason, it is of the utmost important that there are measures in place so that we may all do so safely.

1. Discussion of potentially problematic discussion in class comes with a standing open door policy so that students may leave the meeting at any time if they feel uncomfortable.
2. Videos displayed in class will include a preview still as well as a brief description of potentially upsetting content
3. There is a standing alternate reading assignment policy for any readings that a student finds to present an obstacle to learning
4. I'll be adding an anonymous feedback box to the course website, in which students can keep me apprised of any concerns they might have. Fill in the name field as "anonymous" to leave an anonymous comment.