Course Title
HM 484: Modern European Philosophy: From Descartes to Nietzsche

Course Abstract
This course is a thematic introduction to modern European philosophy from Rene Descartes to Friedrich Nietzsche. The theme for this edition of the course is God, religion and philosophy.

This course provides a synoptic account of the rise of modern philosophy in Europe from Descartes onwards till Nietzsche. The catalyzing influences on modern philosophy can be classified as broadly two types: scientific and religious, i.e. theological. Descartes and Pascal were not only among the greatest figures of modern science, but were also eminent theologians in their own respect. They made relentless attempts, however paradoxical it may seem, to reconcile mathematical sciences with Christian theology (the science of God). This religious dimension throws into sharp relief the essentially non-secular character of the origins of early modern philosophy.

In this course we will study, with some particular focus on the role played by intense theological debates in catalyzing the development of modern metaphysics and epistemology, the ideas of several philosophers who have engaged with the Cartesian legacy at substantial depth: Blaise Pascal, Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. We would study the general contours of the metaphysical systems created by each one of these philosophers and focus on their debt to medieval and early modern debates about God and Christian theology. My overall aim is to create sufficient historicist awareness among students about the intensely religious background to several of the greatest innovations of modern philosophy.

Introductory Books:

Course Specific Readings (selections from the following):
Descartes, Rene. Selected Philosophical Writings
Spinoza, Benedict. Ethics.
Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. Philosophical Writings
Kant, Immanuel. Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone
Hegel, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm. Phenomenology of Spirit
Kierkegaard, Soren. Concluding Unscientific Postscript
Nietzsche, Friedrich. Genealogy of Morality

Suggested Secondary Readings (to be updated)
Grayling, A. C. The God Argument
Mackie, J. L. The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God
Marion, Jean-Luc. *Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism*  

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

The course aims to make students proficient in some well-known debates in modern philosophy, and laterally aims to hone their argumentative and critical skills.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. **Attendance and Participation**: Success of the course much depends upon your active engagement with the readings and with each other in the class.

2. **Mode of Teaching**: The course will be organized around the ideas of the philosophers chosen for study. The lectures will help you in critically approaching the assigned readings. Discussions would be aimed at targeting the specific aspects of the readings, such as ideas, difficult passages and arguments. There may be periodic quizzes. **Independent study and initiative** will be highly encouraged and the required guidance would be provided.

3. **Writing**: You will be asked to write three short papers, varying between 1000 to 3000 words each, over the course of the semester. The word/page limit will be specified at the time of assigning the task. Alternatively, on popular demand the term papers can be substituted with scheduled exams.

**EVALUATION**

The first paper/exam will count for 30%, second paper/exam for 40% and the final paper/exam for 30%.

**PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Submitting someone else’s work as your own, or using others’ words and phrases without proper citation, is a violation of norms of academic integrity, and may result in penalties up to and including a failing grade in the course. Genuine effort and commitment will have direct bearing on the evaluation.