

Periodisk emnerapport – FIL4600/10/20

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1. 10 students took part in the course, of which 2 dropped out early in the semester. The *pensum* consisted of relevant parts of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, with Henry Allison's *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* as supporting material. The total required material was approx. 300 pages. This was spread through the semester in 14 weekly seminars (2 x 45 min), consisting mainly of lecturing and some discussion. The students were also expected (but not required) to read summaries of the lectures, approx. 140 pages. There were no other obligatory activities. The students thought the amount of required work was challenging but manageable, and it might be a good idea to lower it to approx. 250 pages.

The students were evaluated by a school exam. Four students also wrote a 10-15-page essay (FIL4610), and one student a 15-25-page large essay (FIL4620). Essays and presentations are probably a better way to evaluate MA level students than exam, so in the future exam could also be replaced by e.g. three smaller essays written in the course of the semester with perhaps one presentation.

2. The description of the course (*emnebeskrivelse*) is not very precise, and for that reason I wrote a more specific course description. The course description is ambiguous between a *general* course about 1600–1800 philosophy and a *specific* course on a precise topic within 1600–1800. Since these are very different kinds of courses, with very different aims, methods and material, it might be good to distinguish between them by having two course codes. Students thought that the teaching covered the course description very well and felt that the description explained well what was expected of them and fit the content of teaching, even with the mentioned ambiguity in it.

3. The grades were: A: 2, B: 1, C: 2, D: 1, F: 2. (FIL4600 – C: 1, D: 1. FIL4610 – A: 2, B: 1, F: 2. FIL4620 – C: 1.) Overall, the average grade is C, although the spread is great. One F was due to failure to deliver essay.

The students were very satisfied with the course. All reported that the teaching was engaging, structured, and clear either to a great or at least to some degree. They did not feel that anything was left out or discussed too much. They spent on average about 10 hours per week working on the course and felt that the course was challenging yet manageable. Everyone also felt that they could have worked more during the semester – how to encourage the students to do so is something to think about. Some students would have liked to see more student activity (e.g. presentations), but as in general the students were very passive and quiet, it was difficult to activate them. Students found the evaluation by school exam as a bad thing, and I agree with them: it does not engage them in a way that a philosophical course on a classic thinker should.

The biggest problem was the big difference between students' pre-knowledge, and the fact that some students seemed to have received very little education in history of philosophy. I do not think it is correct to say – following the *emnebeskrivelse* – that an advanced master's level course on a difficult work such as *Critique of Pure Reason* requires no pre-knowledge. General knowledge of history of philosophy is needed and would greatly increase the benefit of the course by contextualising it. Perhaps this could be addressed by dividing between general and specific courses on history. Some students also did not know

how to write an essay. I think there should be more education on this on BA level and in general the students should be encouraged to write more essays.

4. It seems that previous evaluations share my sentiments about the scope of the *pensum*: it is too large and difficult. As such I do not think that the *Critique of Pure Reason* could not be handled at least in part in such a course, but the students' lack of pre-knowledge both on history of philosophy in general and on Kant in particular makes the task too difficult. This is somewhat of a dilemma: one must focus very strongly in order to progress slowly enough, yet this focus easily hides Kant's general project and threatens to make the difficult analysis of Kant's text unmotivated and purposeless. The course might also be easier if one did not use Kant's own (difficult) text in the *pensum*, yet then it would not fit the goal of teaching students how to read classical text. However, the fair performance of the students as a whole shows that the course in its present form succeeds in its task even if there is room for improvement and even if it demands a lot from students and teachers alike.

5. I have two suggestions for development of the course.

a. The general description of the course should not include school exam as evaluation. That would leave teachers more room to choose other, more constructive means of evaluation, more fitting for an advanced MA level course in philosophy. In general the description could be more informative.

b. FIL4600/10/20 now seems to include both general course on 1600–1800 philosophy and specific course on a topic within that time period. These are in fact very different kinds of courses, with different background knowledge requirements and aims. It might be better to distinguish between the two so that a student might for example take first (e.g. fall) a general course on 1600–1800 (or a longer time period) and then later (e.g. spring) also a specific course on a thinker or topic within that time period. This would better support breadth and depth of student learning and would make it easier for students to specialise in a theme in history of philosophy. (It is possible yet difficult and rare for a student to take FIL4600 twice, and such a distinction would make it easier and would encourage the students to do so.) As such, it seems impossible for the course to serve as a general introduction to e.g. Kant and at the same fulfil the ideal of in-depth treatment of a topic in history of philosophy.