

Louisiana State University
PHIL 2035:
History of Modern Philosophy

Spring 2015

John Protevi

Texts to buy

- La Boétie, *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*
- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*
- Spinoza, *Ethics*
- Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*
- Cugoando, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*
- Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Grading

- Attendance and quizzes: 10%
- Midterm 1 (Philosophy in / of the Americas, and Descartes): 25%
- Midterm 2 (Spinoza, Hume, Kant): 25%
- Final Exam (comprehensive): 40%

Definition of Philosophy

- Every philosopher, notoriously, has his or her own definition of philosophy
- I like this one by W. Sellars: “trying to understand how things hang together”
- And this one by G. Deleuze: “creation of concepts / Ideas / multiplicities”
- We’ll try to see what each of our philosophers thought he or she was doing

Areas of Philosophy

- Metaphysics: modes or levels of reality
- Epistemology: knowledge
- Psychology: how we think, know, will, imagine
- Politics: how we should arrange society
- Morals and Ethics: how we should act
- Aesthetics: sensation and beauty / sublimity

Is philosophy historical?

- No, not really. There are past attempts at truth but truth is universal and atemporal and we can judge those past attempts by how close they got to the timeless truths logic and science have now discovered.
- Yes, so much so that there have been many systems of truth in the past. But we can engage past philosophers by trying to understand the problems they posed and the truths they constituted on the basis of those problems.

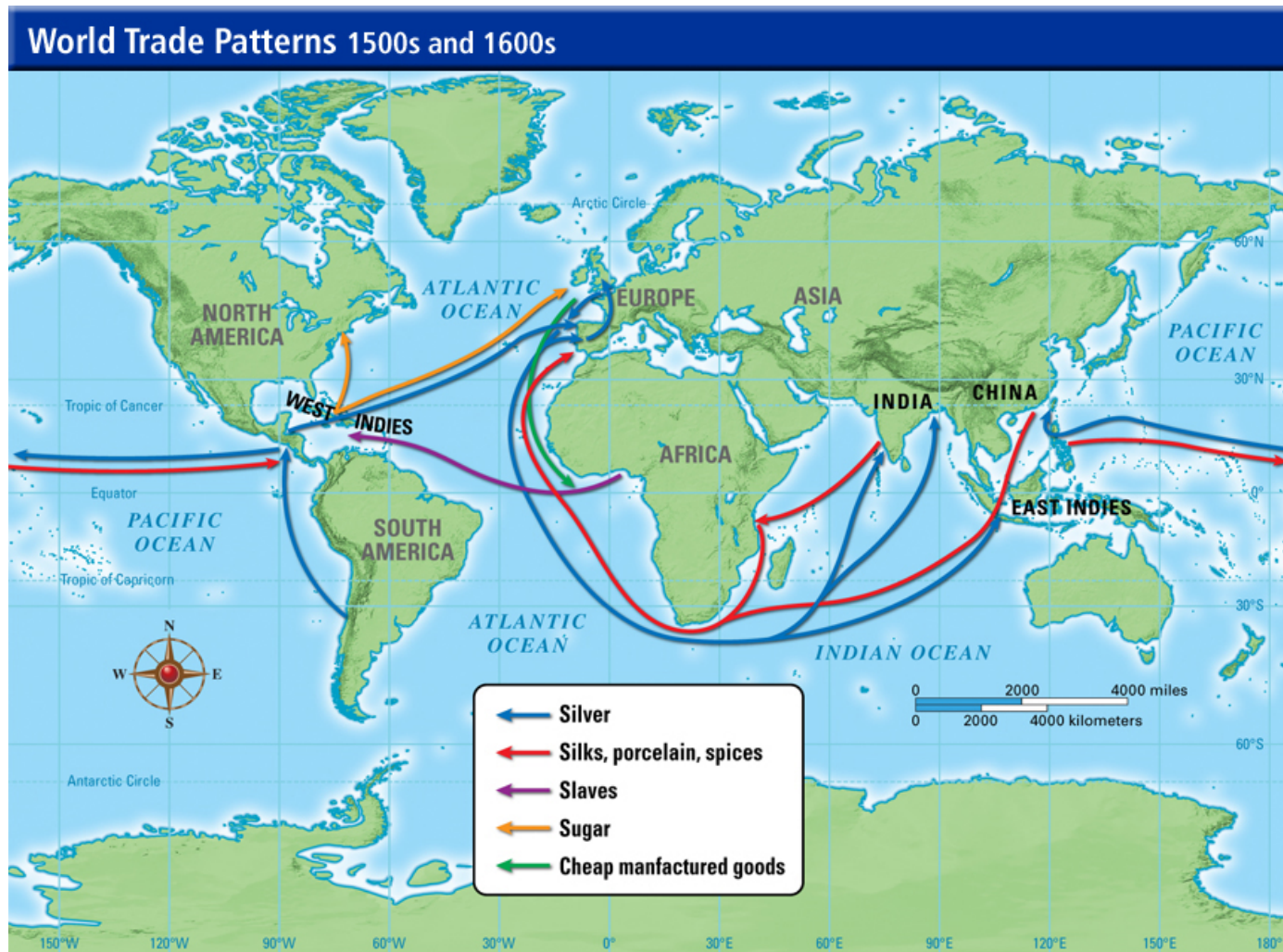
Is philosophy political?

- No, not really.
 - Political philosophy is only one area of philosophy;
 - Even there it's not “political” in the sense of local / global political economy;
 - It's after universal and timeless criteria of a just society.
- Yes.
 - There are political (economy) assumptions and implications in all metaphysics (etc.) just as there is a metaphysics in all political philosophy.
 - Human beings do philosophy, and all human beings are unconsciously (or consciously!) formed by their political situation.
 - Many philosophers unconsciously (or consciously!) hide politics in their metaphysics (etc.): “speaking in code.”

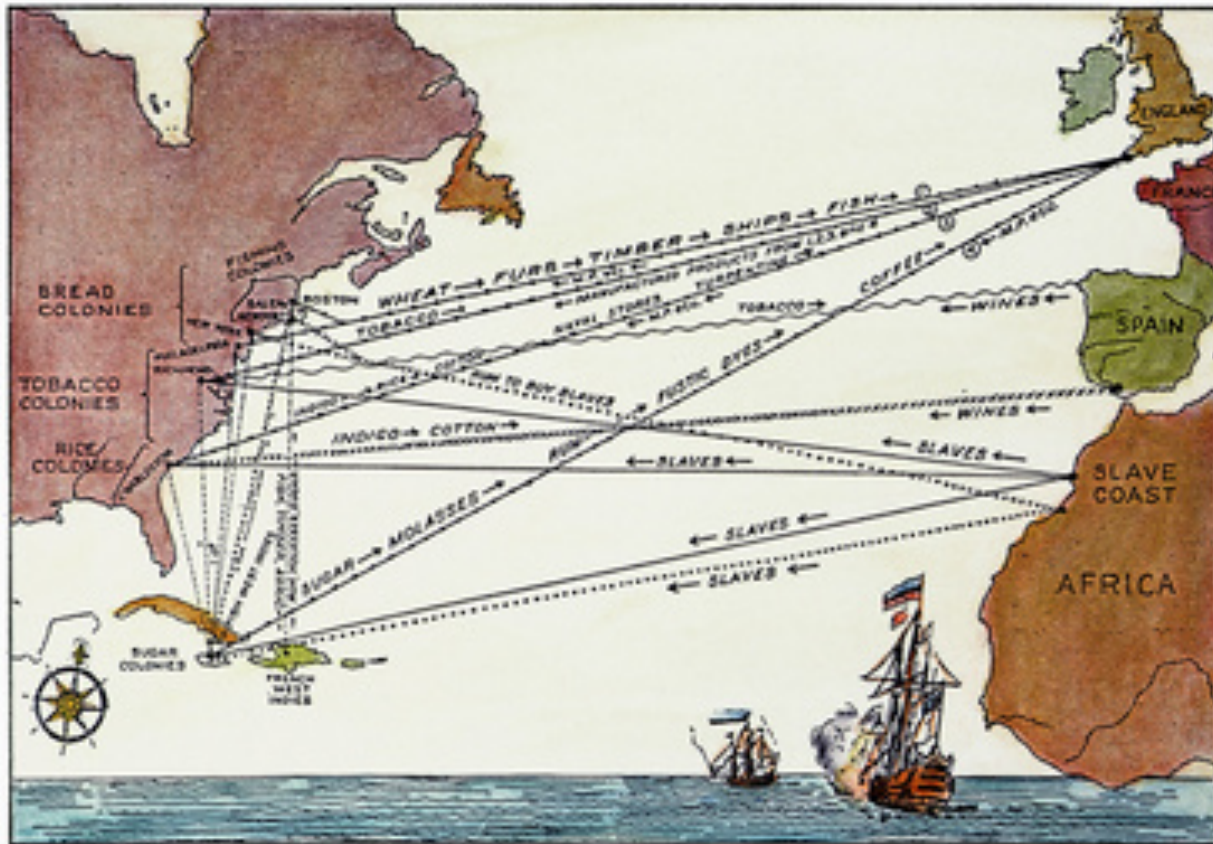
Historical context (1492-1804)

- Renaissance moves north and west
- Empire (Europe and New World), slavery, gold and silver, religion
- Reformation and Counter-Reformation
- Thirty Years War (1618-1648)
- Peace of Westphalia
- Absolutism and Capitalism: Mercantilism
- Global Revolutions (1776-1804)

Global trade and capital flows



Slavery and Atlantic trade



Themes of the course

- Reason, Sensation, Imagination, Will, Emotion, and Freedom
- in Nature, Human Nature, and Society

Logical Argument:

- Premises: What you can get your interlocutor to accept as starting points
- Inferences: links between assertions
- Conclusion: what you want your interlocutor to accept as a finishing point (your “thesis”)
 - If the premises are true and the inferences are valid
 - Then the conclusion is true
 - And the argument is sound (it “preserves the truth”)
- So, if you provide an argument, your thesis is NOT your “opinion”; it’s your CONCLUSION
 - IOW, an “opinion” is an un-argued assertion

Two other forms of persuasion

- Pathetic appeal: appeal to emotion
- Ethical appeal: appeal to character

Critique:

- Examination of an argument
 - This can be (should be!) cooperative search
 - Rather than combat for victory at any price
 - Though combat can be cooperative
 - If you have mutual respect and charitable interpretations
- Premises:
 - Enthymeme: argument with non-explicit premises
 - Begging the question: an un-argued assertion as a premise
- Inferences
 - Even if you accept (“for the sake of argument”) the premises you can test the inferences
 - E.g., is X really an example of Y? (exemplification is an inference)
- Conclusions
 - Counter-examples: accept premises but conclusion doesn’t follow