
Introduction to Early Modern Philosophy

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will read and interpret works of groundbreaking European philosophers from the early modern period (17th-18th centuries), including René Descartes, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, Nicolas Malebranche, Margaret Cavendish, John Locke, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant. The course will focus on central philosophical arguments that are representative of the period's radical shift in approaches to metaphysics and epistemology. These debates will be considered in the context of the contemporaneous dramatic developments in natural philosophy, referred to collectively as the "scientific revolution." Topics will include the existence and attributes of matter, mind, God, and the self, as well as mind-body interaction, the problem of induction, and the source and limits of human cognition and knowledge.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As a *philosophy* course our method will involve reconstructing, analyzing, and evaluating the arguments that the philosophers offer in support of their positions. Along the way you will become acquainted with basic philosophical concepts and tools.

As a *history of philosophy* course we will remain attentive to the historical and dialectical contexts in which the positions and arguments are embedded. We will practice charitable textual interpretation, aiming to determine the strongest reading of the philosopher's position and how the arguments are supposed to work.

If you come to class prepared and actively participate, you can expect to get good practice at and make improvement with your...

- ❖ *Writing.* The virtues that make for an excellent English paper aren't necessarily the ones that make for an excellent philosophy paper. So, we'll do some writing exercises designed to cultivate the skills necessary for producing an excellent philosophy paper.
- ❖ *Reading.* Reading philosophical texts requires patience, care, and practice. So, we'll read through some tough passages together to track the moves in the arguments, detect suppressed premises and presuppositions, as well as identify the larger argument.
- ❖ *Discussion.* You learn philosophy by discussing it with others. So, we'll have discussions aimed at developing your intellectual collaboration skills, e.g., disagreeing constructively, as well as your ability to engage thoughtfully with philosophical arguments by reformulating, debating and critically evaluating them.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation and Attendance

Missing class will diminish your learning experience as well as that your classmates who benefit from your contributions. Unexcused absences will thus negatively affect your attendance and participation grade. Your participation grade will be based on how your contribution brings the class, as a whole, closer to the learning objectives. This is because participation is not primarily about the volume of your spoken contribution. Rather, it is about your attentive presence in a learning community and your support for that community's intellectual values.

Essays and Rewrites

You will write two 3-page essays and two re-writes of the 3-page essays. The *first* 3-page essay will receive comments and advice, but no actual grade. I will, however, tell you what the grade would have been. The idea is to give you an honest assessment of your baseline writing and feedback on how to improve it without penalizing you for not knowing yet how to write a philosophy paper. It is a skill which takes practice. Although the first paper is ungraded, submission is required to pass the course. The more seriously you take this first paper, the better opportunity you will give yourself for development in your philosophical writing and for better results on your graded rewrite. The 3-page essays are designed to help you develop your critical reasoning and philosophical writing skills by reconstructing and evaluating arguments. The re-writes are intended to help you improve these skills by responding to feedback.

Writing Exercises

You will also write two 1-page writing exercises. These assignments are designed to give you the opportunity to hone a particular philosophical and writing skill.

Final Exam

There will be an essay format final exam for the course during exam week. Study questions will be handed out prior to the exam, and the exam will consist of a proper subset of those questions.

GRADES

Grades will be determined based on attendance, participation, essays, and writing exercises and final exam as follows:

Attendance and Participation	15%
Essay 1	0% (submission required to pass the course)
Essay 1 rewrite	15%
Essay 2	10%
Essay 2 rewrite	20%
Writing Exercise 1	10%
Writing Exercise 2	10%
Final Exam	20%

COURSE POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Collaboration and Academic Integrity

Collaboration in the form of discussion and the exchange of ideas is an essential part of philosophy. I encourage you to discuss your ideas about the course material with your classmates, and do your own research in the library and online. But the work on your written assignments and your exam must be entirely your own. If books, articles, websites, or discussions have helped you with your paper, cite them in proper footnote and bibliography form. When in doubt, cite it. There is a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty.

Technology

To help foster a conducive and respectful learning environment, we'll be going old school with technology. That means no electronics should be used during class. (An exception will, of course, be made for disability related accommodations.)

Late Papers

For each day your paper is late, 1/3 of a letter grade will be deducted (e.g. from A- to B+).

COURSE MATERIALS

Required Texts

René Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, & D. Murdoch (Cambridge)

Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, ed. and trans. Lisa Shapiro (Chicago, 2007).

Nicholas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, ed. Thomas Lennon and Paul Olscamp (Cambridge)

Margaret Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O'Neill (Cambridge).

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. Phemister (Oxford, Oxford World's Classics)

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. T. Beauchamp (Oxford, Clarendon edition)

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer & A. Wood (Cambridge)

Recommended Commentaries

Gary Hatfield, *Descartes and the Meditations* (Routledge, 2003), *introductory monograph*

Stephen Gaukroger, ed. *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations* (Blackwell, 2006), *introductory essays*

David Cunning, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes' Meditations* (Cambridge, 2014), *introductory essays*

Karen Detlefsen, ed. *Descartes' Meditations: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge, 2013), *intermediate essays*

Lex Newman, editor, *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding"* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), *introductory collection of essays*

Peter Millican, ed., *Reading Hume on Human Understanding* (Oxford University Press, 2002), *intermediate essays*

Sebastian Gardner, *Guidebook to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (Routledge, 1999), *introductory monograph*

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1

Introduction

RENÉ DESCARTES

Descartes: Context and Project

Required Reading: Descartes, *Discourse on Method* 1-3 and start *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 1

Optional Commentary: Hatfield, chs. 1-2; Gaukroger, ch. 1 (Ariew, "Descartes' *Meditations* and the *Objections* and *Replies*")

Week 2

Descartes' Method of Doubt

Required Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Synopsis, Meditation 1, Objections & Replies selections for Meditation 1

Optional Commentary: Hatfield, ch. 3; Gaukroger, ch. 2 (Larmore, "Descartes and Skepticism")

The Cogito & Sum Res Cogitans

Required Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 2, Objections & Replies for Meditation 2; *Principles of Philosophy* Part I.7-12

Optional Commentary: Hatfield, ch. 4; Gaukroger, ch. 3 (Curley, "The Cogito and the Foundations of Knowledge"); Cuning, ch. 4 (Alanen, "The Second Meditation and the nature of the human mind")

Essay 1 due

Week 3

Ideas, Causes, and Reality

Required Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 3 ¶¶1-15, Objection & Replies for Meditation 3 (on objective reality)

Optional Commentary: Hatfield, ch. 5; Gaukroger, chs. 4 & 6 (Rozemond, "The Nature of the Mind" and Nadler, "The Doctrine of Ideas"); Detlefsen, ch. 5 (Schmaltz, "Causation and causal axioms")

Proof for the Existence of God

Required Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 3 ¶¶16-end, Objections & Replies for Meditation 3 (on the idea of God); Meditation 5 ¶¶7-12, Objections & Replies for Meditation 5 (on whether God's essence implies his existence); *Principles* Part I.13-21

Optional Commentary: Hatfield, chs. 5 & 7; Gaukroger, ch. 7 (Nolan and Nelson, "Proofs for the Existence of God"); Cuning, ch. 6 (Nolan, "The Third Meditation: Causal Arguments for God's Existence")

Week 4

Essence and Existence of Body

Required Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 4 & Meditation 5 ¶¶1-6; *Discourse on Method* Parts 5-6; *Principles of Philosophy* Part I sections 53 & 68-69, Part 2 all sections, Part 4 sections 199-207

Optional Commentary: Hatfield, ch. 9; Gaukroger, ch. 10 (Clarke, "Descartes' Proof of the Existence of Matter"); Detlefsen, ch. 6 (Carriero, "Sensation and knowledge of body in Descartes' *Meditations*")

Mind-Body Dualism

Required Reading: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 6, Objections & Replies for Meditation 6; *Principles of Philosophy* Part I.47-74

Optional Commentary: Hatfield, ch. 8; Gaukroger, ch. 11 (Cottingham, "The Mind-Body Relation")

Rewrite of Essay 1 due

REACTIONS TO DESCARTES: ELISABETH OF BOHEMIA,
NICOLAS MALEBRANCHE, AND MARGARET CAVENDISH

Week 5

Elisabeth of Bohemia on Mind-Body Interaction

Required Reading: Correspondence with Princess Elisabeth

Optional Commentary: Lisa Shapiro, "Princess Elizabeth and Descartes: The union of soul and body and the practice of philosophy," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7, no. 3 (1999): 503-20

Malebranche on Causation and Natural Laws

Required Reading: *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion* VII (pp. 104-126); *Search After Truth*, Book VI, part ii, ch. 3; *Elucidation* 15

Optional Commentary: Steven Nadler, "Malebranche on Causation"; Steven Nadler, "Descartes and Occasional Causation"

Week 6

Cavendish's Materialism – Self-Moving, Animate, Sentient, and Knowing

Required Reading: Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters* - Prefaces; Section I, letters 1, 4, 13, 23, 30, and 42; Section II, letters 5-7, 10-12, and 25; Section III, letters 1, 3, 18, and 24; Section IV, letters 1 and 29

Optional Commentary: Karen Detlefsen, "Reason and Freedom: Margaret Cavendish on the Order and Disorder of Nature"

Cavendish's Theory of Mind – Material, Composite, and Everywhere

Required Reading: Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters* – Prefaces; Section I, letters 1, 4-11, 14, 18, 22, 24-25, and 35-37; Section II, letters 7, 10, and 13-22; Section III, letters 18 and 21; Section IV, letters 6 and 30

JOHN LOCKE

Week 7

Locke's Attack on Innate Ideas

Required Reading: *Essay on Human Understanding* Epistle, Book I, chs. I-ii, iv

Optional Commentary: Newman, ch. 2 (Rickless, "Locke's Polemic against Nativism")

Writing Exercise 1 due

Primary and Secondary Qualities

Required Reading: *Essay* II.i-xi focusing on viii; Galileo, excerpt from *The Assayer*

Optional Commentary: Newman, ch. 4 (Jacovides, "Locke's Distinctions between Primary and Secondary Qualities")

Week 8

Substance, Mind and Body

Required Reading: *Essay*, I.iv.18, II.xii, II.xiii.17-19, II.xxiii, Correspondence with Stillingfleet

Optional Commentary: Newman, ch. 6 (McCann, “Locke on Substance”)

Personal Identity

Required Reading: *Essay* II. Xxvii (pp. 203-219)

Optional Commentary: Newman, ch. 7 (Yaffe, “Locke on Ideas of Identity and Diversity”)

Fun Optional Reading: Egan, “Learning to be me”

Essay 2 due

Week 9

The Limits of Human Knowledge

Required Reading: *Essay* IV.ii-iii, ix-xi (pp. 336-360, 395-412)

Optional Commentary: Newman, ch. 11 (Newman, “Locke on Knowledge”)

DAVID HUME

Hume’s Science of the Mind

Required Reading: *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* §§1-3

Optional Commentary: Millican, ch. 3 (Bennett, “Empiricism about Meanings”)

Week 10

Hume on the Problem of Induction

Required Reading: *Enquiry* 4-6 & 9

Optional Commentary: Millican, ch. 4 (Millican, “Hume’s Sceptical Doubts concerning Induction”).

Week 8

Hume on Causation

Required Reading: *Enquiry* 7

Optional Commentary: Millican, ch. 7 (Craig, “The Idea of Necessary Connexion”) and ch. 9 (Blackburn, “Hume on Thick Connexions”)

Rewrite of Essay 2 due

Week 11

Hume on Liberty and Necessity

Required Reading: *Enquiry* 8

Optional Commentary: Millican, ch. 10 (Botterill, “Hume on Liberty and Necessity”)

Hume on Skepticism and Naturalism

Required Reading: *Enquiry* 12

Optional Commentary: Millican, ch. 14 (Norton, “Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy”)

IMMANUEL KANT

Week 12

Kant’s Project

Required Reading: *Critique of Pure Reason* Preface to A & B editions; *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* Preface

Optional Commentary: Gardner, ch. 1-3

Kant on the Possibility of Metaphysics as Synthetic A Priori Propositions

Required Reading: *Critique* Introduction to B edition; *Prolegomena* Preface

Optional Commentary: Gardner, ch. 1-3

Week 13

Transcendental Aesthetic, Sensible Conditions on Experience

Required Reading: *Critique* Transcendental Aesthetic as in the B edition, §§1-3, 6-8; *Prolegomena*, “The Main Transcendental Question: First Part” §§6-13

Optional Commentary: Gardner, ch. 4-5; also Charles Parsons, “The Transcendental Aesthetic”

Transcendental Logic, Conceptual Conditions on Experience

Required Reading: *Critique* Introduction to the Idea of a Transcendental Logic, Clue to the Discovery of all Pure Concepts of the Understanding

Optional Commentary: Gardner, ch. 6

Writing Exercise 2 due

Week 14

Kant’s Removal of Hume’s Doubt: Foundations of Natural Science

Required Reading: *Prolegomena* §§27-30; *Critique* Principles of a Transcendental Deduction in General & Transition to the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories, The B Deduction

Optional Commentary: Michael Friedman, “Causal Laws and the Foundations of Natural Science”

Concluding Discussion

Exam Week: FINAL EXAM