

Proposed Syllabus

History of Modern Philosophy

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Office Hours: TBD

Required Texts:

Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources, 2nd Edition
Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period

Course Description

This course will introduce you to the Modern Period of Philosophy, roughly 1600 – 1800, by exposing you to the many texts, questions, and conversations that were influential during this fruitful period of philosophical thought. Primary texts will include works by Locke, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, and Kant, as well as a number of women philosophers of the era, including Anne Conway, Mary Astell, Émilie du Châtelet, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, and Damaris Cudworth, Lady Masham. We will consider questions in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of religion, and moral philosophy, broadly construed.

Course Objectives

1. To engage with a number of classical texts in the Modern Period of Philosophy.
2. To gain an understanding of many philosophical ideas, methods, and themes in the Modern Period of Philosophy.
3. To learn to read and analyze a text closely and critically.
4. To develop the critical thinking skills required to question personal beliefs and provide reasoned arguments for them.
5. To become a more articulate writer and speaker.

Classroom Expectations and Attendance Policy

Everyone is expected to come to class. For each unexcused absence exceeding two prior to break and/or two following break students will receive a 5% deduction on their final grade. Students are required to have done the readings, and they should be prepared to discuss them. There will on occasion be passionate disagreement—it is vital that we remain courteous to each other and to each other's point of view. It is possible to criticize arguments without showing disrespect for the people who endorse them—that is what we will strive to do. Electronic devices are permitted for note-taking purposes only.

Late and Make-Up Work

No make-ups or extensions will be granted for any assignment unless you provide either (1) written (and approved) notice of absence beforehand, or (2) written documentation of an emergency situation afterward.

Academic Misconduct – [According to University Policy]

Disabilities

Any student who feels he or she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me as soon as possible. I rely on the Office of Disability Services to verify the need for accommodation based on documentation on file in that office.

Assignments and Evaluation

Citizenship (10%)

Philosophy is an activity. Like many activities, you'll only get as much out of doing philosophy as you put into it. To encourage engagement, 10% of your grade will depend in part on your being an active, appropriate, and interesting contributor to the class. I understand that speaking up in class is difficult for some students. To that end, this grade encompasses more than hand-raising. I primarily ask that all students are good citizens of the course. Thus, students who are present, clearly attentive, and who show engagement in other ways will also be rewarded.

60-seconders (15%)

For every class meeting, I will ask two of you to prepare and present a 60-second point on a specific reading.

Summary Points:

One student will be assigned a summary point. Here, I am looking for the student to remind the class of the main thesis of the article and perhaps a quick outline of the author's argument for her point. **DO NOT CRITICIZE**. It is important for philosophers to be able to present an argument from a neutral position. This is what I hope the summary points will accomplish in addition to reminding the class of the main points from the articles we have all read.

Critical Points:

The other student will be assigned a critical point. The idea is to tell us where you think the author's argument is vulnerable or underargued. **DO NOT SUMMARIZE** – we will have already heard the summary point. Instead I want you to launch directly into telling us where you think the author's argument is inadequate. Alternatively, you can do a 60-second supporting point: in this case, you should provide an argument for the author's conclusion that is different from what the author herself or himself offers. The idea here is to present additional support for some conclusion that the author didn't mention or develop. 60 seconds is a short time. In preparing for this, you will likely come up with more than one critical or supporting point. Pick one that you can articulate clearly and concisely. There will be time in the rest of class to bring up other points.

Take home essays (20%)

Students are to write a total of four short essays (1-2 pages typed, double-spaced) throughout the term. These essays will each take the form of summarizing and discussing an argument or point made in class or a reading. Students may only write one essay per topic. Essays written for a given topic are to be uploaded onto Blackboard by the beginning of the second class of the next topic.

Papers (50%)

Students will write two papers over the course of the semester, a midterm paper of 4-5 pages and a final paper of 5-6 pages. I will provide possible paper topics at least three weeks prior to the due dates of the papers. Students are permitted to write a paper based on another topic provided they meet with me to discuss their topic.

Schedule of Topics/Readings:

Introduction

Session 1: No reading

God/Substance

Session 2: Locke, "Letter Concerning Toleration"

Session 3: Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation V; du Châtelet, Chapter Two *Foundations of Physics*

Session 4: Leibniz, *Summary of Arguments from Theodicy*

Session 5: Hume, "Of Miracles"

Session 6: Spinoza, *Ethics* Book I

Session 7: Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation II; Conway, *Principles* III and V, selections

Identity

Session 8: Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter XXVII

Session 9: Reid, "Of Identity" and "Of Mr. Locke's Account of our Personal Identity"

Session 10: Cavendish, Selections of Personal Identity and Love

Love

Session 11: Conway, Selections on Love

Session 12: Astell, *Letters Concerning the Love of God*; Masham, *Discourse Concerning the Love of God*

Death

Session 13: Montaigne, "To Philosophize is to Prepare for Death"

Session 14: Spinoza, *Ethics* Book V

Free Will

Session 15: Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Ch. XXI

Session 16: du Châtelet, "On Liberty"

Happiness

Session 17: Descartes/Elisabeth, Correspondence Selections on Happiness

Session 18: Leibniz, "Felicity"

Session 19: de Châtelet, *Discourse on Happiness*

Race

Session 20: Kant, "Of the Different Human Races"

Session 21: Bernasconi, "Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race"

Session 22: Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' In Kant's Anthropology"

Session 23: Bernasconi, "Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism"

Women

Session 24: Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, Part 1

Session 25: Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, Part 2, Ch. 1-3

Session 26: O'Neill, "Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History"