

PHIL 6014: Advanced Topics in History of Philosophy
17th Century Metaphysics and Epistemology
M 2:45pm-5:15pm

Spring 2023

Major Williams 225

This course provides an in-depth examination of key themes in 17th century epistemology: What is it to be a (good) knower? What is the relationship between knowledge of ourselves and knowledge of the world? What does the world have to be like for us to know anything about it? We will examine how these epistemological issues bear on central metaphysical debates in the period, concerning the relationships between mind and body, matter and motion, and causation and order. We will also explore how these epistemological issues emerge in historically specific discussions concerning the reliability of microscopes and the justifiability of enthusiasm (i.e. claims of direct contact with the divine). Philosophers covered include: Teresa of Ávila, René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, Margaret Cavendish, and John Locke. We will pay special attention to moments in their writing in which these philosophers engage directly with one another. Throughout the course, we will also actively reflect on how doing the history of philosophy, especially through close reading, is itself a way of philosophizing.

Instructor

Philip Yaure

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Office Hours: Major Williams 224, W 2:30pm-4:30pm

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be better able to:

1. Identify key concepts, claims, and arguments in primary sources, and explicate these in their own words.
2. Identify and articulate (apparent or real) tensions in an author's concepts, claims, and arguments.
3. Integrate textual interpretation and conceptual analysis in making philosophical arguments.
4. Apply the above skills to defend an original interpretive thesis about a primary source text.

Communication with Instructor

After seminar: The instructor is available to talk about course-related issues after class meetings. You are welcome to ask questions about course content or logistics during this time. For personal issues that you wish to discuss in private, please arrange a meeting in office hours or contact me via email.

Office Hours: The instructor is available for individual meetings in his office (Major Williams 224) W 2:30-4:30pm. A sign-up sheet for office hours will be posted to the course's Canvas home page. Drop-ins are welcome, but students who have signed up will get priority during their time slot. Please note that these office hours are shared with my large lecture Morality and Justice course. For longer discussions, I am happy to schedule meetings outside of office hours—email me to arrange.

Email: If you are unable to speak with the instructor after class or during office hours, you may contact me via email. I will respond within 24 hours of your email (typically faster during the week). If you do not receive a response within 24 hours, please send a follow-up.

Required Texts

All required books are available at University Bookstore and online (links included).

Please note: This seminar will be focused on close reading and textual analysis. In order to facilitate good class discussion and ensure that we are all on the same page (literally!), it is important that you obtain the specific editions of the texts listed below.

Avila, Teresa of. *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Vol. 2*. Translated by Otilio Rodriguez and Kieran Kavanaugh. ICS Publications, 1980.

https://www.powells.com/book/-9780960087662/17-3?gclid=Cj0KCQiAtvSdBhD0ARIsAPf8oNl6cyNsy63xFPnIbyEKngXd539Xe-ehzwphMURcHNwHIDPUHiyFDYIaAgNYEALw_wcB

Descartes, René. *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings*. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

<https://www.cambridge.org/highereducation/books/descartes-selected-philosophical-writings/31324F237F501A6F837FB820B23DB694#overview>

Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan: With Selected Variants from the Latin Edition of 1668*. Edited by Edwin Curley. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994.

<https://hackettpublishing.com/leviathan>

Cavendish, Margaret. *Philosophical Letters, Abridged*. Edited by Deborah Boyle. Abridged edition. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2021.

<https://hackettpublishing.com/cavendish-philosophical-letters-abridged>

Cavendish, Margaret. *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy, Abridged: With Related Texts*. Edited by Gwendolyn Marshall. Abridged edition. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2016.

<https://hackettpublishing.com/observations-upon-experimental-philosophy-abridged-4119>

Locke, John. *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Revised edition. Oxford : New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.

<https://www.amazon.com/Essay-Concerning-Human-Understanding-Clarendon/dp/0198245955>

Note: There are two similar Clarendon editions, both edited by Nidditch. We are using the one that costs ~\$35, not the one that costs ~\$80-\$210.

Secondary source readings: Each week, one piece of contemporary scholarship on the primary source text will be assigned. Students are required to spend at least 15 minutes reading this piece. Skimming is permitted; your goal is to have some sense of the main thesis and argument of the paper. If the paper interests you, I encourage you to read it in depth.

Course Requirements

1. Active, constructive participation in seminar (3%)
2. Passage Interpretation Exit Tickets (12%)
3. Presentation (10%)
4. Term Paper (75%) - ~5000 words
 - Paper Proposal (10%)
 - Outline (15%)
 - Final Version (50%)

Active, constructive participation in seminar: Philosophy is done best in good company. History of philosophy is done best in company prepared to reference specific passages from the reading. Students will come to class prepared to discuss the assigned texts. While it is expected that students will come to class ready to raise questions/issues of interest to them, it is even more important to constructively engage with the questions/comments of your peers. We are each other's best resources in this course. Attendance is expected at all seminar meetings. If you are unable to attend a meeting (e.g. due to a doctor's appointment or family emergency), contact the instructor in advance.

Passage Interpretation Exit Tickets: Each week that we cover primary source material (i.e. other than first and last week of the course), students will bring a 1 page document to class. This document will have a passage from the assigned reading, and an interpretive question you have about the passage. At the end of each class, students will take 10-15 minutes to free write a response to the interpretive question they've posed. This response will be informed by class discussion. Your response may answer your question, refine it, or develop it in a different direction. Students will submit these documents as they leave class; the instructor will return them with brief comments in your mailboxes.

Presentation: Each student will give one 10-minute presentation during the semester. Each presentation will be on the primary source material from one week of class. Presentations will examine a key term that comes up multiple times throughout the reading. See below for example terms. Presenters will make an interpretive claim about the key term, provide passages as evidence for the interpretive claim, and pose 2-3 questions for class discussion. Presenters will provide a **2 page** (strict—no more, no less!) handout with their presentation. (If necessary, multiple students may present on the same reading, addressing different key terms.)

There are two important deadlines in the lead up to your presentation:

- (1) **You must email the instructor with your key term and one sentence describing the main thesis of your presentation the Friday before your presentation.**
- (2) **Draft handouts are due to instructor 24 hours before class (Sunday at 3pm).**

Example terms: Knowledge, certainty, doubt, motion, matter, mind, humility, clarity, seeing, God, microscopes, infinity, divisibility, cause/causation, ideas, impressions, (dis)order, nature

Example interpretive claims:

- Philosopher X defines key term Y in terms of the following 3 elements...
- There is a tension in how philosopher X uses key term Y in the following passages.

- But this tension is really only apparent.
- Key term Y should really be disambiguated.
- The tension poses a problem for the following claim/argument that philosopher X makes.
- Philosopher X argues for claim Z about key term Y using the following premises.
- What philosopher X says about key term Y implies a further claim that s/he doesn't explicitly acknowledge.

Term Paper: Students will complete a term paper that rigorously analyzes a key concept, claim, or argument from one course reading. In most of your philosophy courses, your goal in your term paper is to make a claim about the world, or to critically evaluate someone else's argument for a claim about the world. In this class, your goal is to make an interpretive claim about what the primary source text means. See above for examples. You will use the same set of philosophical skills you have developed in other courses to argue for your interpretive claim. You will also engage in detail with the text: quotation is encouraged and expected. Remember that whenever you quote from the text, you must also explain what the quotation means in your own words.

We will work towards full term papers in 3 stages. The instructor will provide feedback at each stage. (You may, and I encourage you to, submit these stages EARLY for more feedback.)

1. Paper Proposal: Students will produce an extended abstract, ~500-1000 words, outlining their thesis, main argument, and key textual evidence. Students must also identify 3 pieces of secondary literature that will be incorporated into their argument. **Due Friday 4.14**
2. Outline: Students will produce a *detailed* outline of their paper. Your outline should, at a minimum, cover the main point of each paragraph of your paper. (I won't hold you to this specific outline in your final version of course, but the goal is to produce an outline that you can fill in as your final draft.) **Due Friday 4.28**
3. Final paper: Students will produce a full version of their paper, approximately 5000 words, incorporating at least 3 secondary sources. **Due Wednesday 5.10**

Statement on Academic Integrity

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the Graduate Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code. Academic integrity expectations are the same for online classes as they are for in person classes. All university policies and procedures apply in any Virginia Tech academic environment.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit:

<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/expectations/graduate-honor-system.html>

Artificial Intelligence Policy: The use of AI-writing technology (e.g. GPT-3) is permitted in this course. Please keep in mind that current AI lacks many of the fundamental elements of graduate-level writing. For instance, GPT-3 generally does not quote or cite text, and has a propensity to make up references when you ask it for them. It is a creative tool, rather than a research tool. You are welcome to explore ways in which these technologies can contribute to your writing process. **If you use AI during your writing process, you are required to inform the instructor of the specific ways in which you have used it and provide documentation of your process (e.g. the prompts you used in Chat GPT).**

If you plan to use AI-writing technology in this course, you are required to read Emma Rodman's paper "Towards a Text-as-Data Methodology for Political Theory," focusing in particular on the section: "A New Paradigm for Text-as-Data: Computer-Supported Creativity." This paper explains the mechanics of GPT-3, and provides both big-picture reflections on and concrete suggestions about how you might use AI-writing technology in a generative way.

Statement on Accessibility

I am committed to making this course as accessible as possible. If you require a disability-related accommodation in order to fully participate in this course, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (<https://ssd.vt.edu/>) so that such accommodation may be arranged. I'm happy to assist where I can.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

1/23 – Preliminaries

Kremer, “What is the Good of Philosophical History?”

Menn, “The Intellectual Setting” (of 17th century philosophy)

1/30 – Teresa of Avila

The Way of Perfection

Chapters 1, 4, 8-13 19, 31, 38-41

Secondary:

Bueno-Gómez, “I Desire to Suffer, Lord, because Thou didst Suffer’: Teresa of Avila on Suffering”

2/6 – Teresa of Avila

The Interior Castle

I.1-2, III.2, V.1-2, VII.1-2

Secondary:

Coakley, “Dark Contemplation and Epistemic Transformation: The Analytic Theologian Re-Meets Teresa of Ávila”

2/13 – Descartes

Rules for the Direction of our Native Intelligence

Discourse on Method

Parts One, Two, Four, Five

Secondary:

Garber, “Descartes and Method in 1637,” in *Descartes Embodied: Reading Cartesian Philosophy Through Cartesian Science*

2/20 - Descartes

Meditations 1-3

Secondary:

Mercer, “Descartes’ Debt to Teresa of Ávila, or Why We Should Work on Women in the History of Philosophy”

2/27 – Descartes

Meditations 4-6

Secondary:

Paul, “Descartes’s Anti-Transparency and the Need for Radical Doubt”

3/6 – SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS

3/13 – Hobbes

Leviathan

I.1-9

Secondary:

Tabb, The Fate of Nebuchadnezzar: Curiosity and Human Nature in Hobbes

3/20 - Cavendish

Philosophical Letters

Preface and I.1-29

Secondary:

Adams, “Visual Perception as Patterning: Cavendish against Hobbes on Sensation”

3/27 – Cavendish

Philosophical Letters

I.30-45

Secondary:

Cooney, “Cavendish vs. Descartes on Mechanism and Animal Souls”

4/3 – Cavendish

Micographia excerpt in Observations upon Experimental Philosophy, pp. 90-95

The Excellent and Grounds of the Mechanical Natural Philosophy excerpt, p. 96

Observations upon Experimental Philosophy

Chapters 1-17, 31-37

Secondary:

Detlefsen, “Reason and Freedom: Margaret Cavendish on the Order and Disorder of Nature”

4/10 – Locke

Essay Concerning Human Understanding

Epistle to the Reader, I.1-2, 4

Secondary:

Atherton, “Locke and the Issue Over Innatism”

4/17 - Locke

Essay Concerning Human Understanding

II.1-7, II.11-12, II.23.1-15

Secondary:

Osler, “John Locke and the Changing Ideal of Scientific Knowledge”

4/24 - Locke

Essay Concerning Human Understanding
II.16-37, II.33, IV.19

Secondary:

Tabb, "Locke on Enthusiasm and the Association of Ideas"

5/1 – Wrap-up discussion, student paper workshop

No assigned readings