

PHIL 2125: History of Modern Philosophy
T R 2:00-3:00pm

Fall 2023
Robeson 210

Instructor: Philip Yaure
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Office Hours: Major Williams 224, R 3:30-5:30pm

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Office Hours: Major Williams Atrium (=lobby), R 10:30am-12:30pm

What kinds of knowledge are useful to us, and how can we get them? What is the relationship between mind and body? What, if anything, can we know about God? Who gets to philosophize? This course will address core themes in epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of religion through close reading of early modern philosophical texts. We will focus on the 17th century, paying special attention to direct exchanges between philosophers in this period (e.g. correspondence). This course does not presuppose background in the history of philosophy, and is a suitable introduction to philosophy for students with some background in analytical and critical writing.

Course Objectives

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

1. Identify and reconstruct arguments from philosophical texts, with special attention to the role of genre in faithful reconstruction.
2. Compare and contrast assigned philosophers' views on central course questions.
3. Critically assess and defend assigned philosophers' arguments.
4. Clearly explain philosophical arguments, criticisms, and disputes to their peers.

Course Structure

Before class: Reading, Mini-Lecture, Discussion Post
During class: Group Activities, Class-wide Discussions
Every 2-3 weeks: Assignment due Friday at 5pm

Communication with Instructor

After Class Sessions: The instructor and TA will be available for brief questions immediately after class.

Office Hours: The instructor is available for individual meetings R 3:30pm-5:30pm, or by appointment. A sign-up sheet for Thursday office hours will be posted to the introduction page to each class's module. You may also email the instructor to set-up an appointment at different time; please do so at least 24 hours before you are requesting to meet.

Email: For small logistical matters, you may contact the instructor 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 or online (links included). All other readings will be available through Canvas and/or the VT Library website.

- René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (ISBN: 9780872201927)
<https://www.hackettpublishing.com/meditations-on-first-philosophy>
- Margaret Atherton (ed.), *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period* (ISBN: 9780872202597)
<https://www.hackettpublishing.com/women-philosophers-of-the-early-modern-period>
- Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (ISBN: 9781624665141)
<https://www.hackettpublishing.com/observations-upon-experimental-philosophy-abridged-4100>
- G.W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays* (ISBN: 9780872201323)
<https://www.hackettpublishing.com/discourse-on-metaphysics-and-other-essays>
- Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *The Answer/La Respuesta* (ISBN: 9781558615984)
<https://www.feministpress.org/books-a-m/the-answer1?rq=the%20answer>

Other course readings:

- Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*
<https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/tic/index.htm>
- John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
<https://virginiatech.on.worldcat.org/oclc/842563827>

Course Requirements

1. Discussion Posts (15%)
2. Reading Exercises (10%)
3. Writing/Video Assignments (75%)
 - Assignment 1: 5%
 - Assignment 2: 10%
 - Assignment 3: 15%
 - Assignment 4: 15%
 - Assignment 5: 15%
 - Assignment 6: 15%

Discussion Posts: For each module (=1 day of class), students will complete one discussion post. Each post will ask you to respond to some aspect of the assigned reading or mini-lectures for that day of class. You may either respond to the prompt directly or to a classmate's post. Minimum 50 words. **Discussion posts are due one hour before the day's class session (T or R at 1:00pm)** The instructor will incorporate themes raised on the discussion board into class activities.

Reading Exercises: There will be 4 in-class reading exercises. These exercises will focus on close reading and interpretation. Students will complete these exercises in groups and submit a worksheet at the end of class to receive credit.

Writing/Video Assignments: Students will complete 6 assignments across the semester. Deadlines are listed below in the schedule. Assignments will be a mix of written and video essays. Each assignment will ask you to critically engage with a main problem or argument

covered in class readings and lectures. **Assignments are due at 11:59pm on the deadline day.** The GTA will provide feedback on assignments.

Late discussion posts, reading exercises, and weekly assignments will be accepted with no penalty if a valid excuse is communicated to instructor before deadline. If no valid excuse is provided, weekly assignments will be docked one point (e.g. from 13/15 to 12/15) per day; discussion posts and reading exercises will not be accepted late without a valid excuse.

Informal Expectation—Attendance and Participation: Philosophy is done best in good company. 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 live class sessions. If you are unable to attend a live class session (e.g. due to medical or family emergency), contact the instructor in advance.

Statement on Academic Integrity

The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states:

“As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.”

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the 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. All university policies and procedures apply in any Virginia Tech academic environment.

Artificial Intelligence Policy: **The use of AI-writing technology (e.g., GPT-3) is not permitted in this course.** In the writing assignments for this course, our goal is for you to practice fundamental philosophical writing skills (e.g., explaining key terms in your own words, providing clear examples to illustrate a concept). These skills are essential to analytic thinking and writing, and will be presupposed in any higher-level philosophy course you take. Violations of this policy will be treated as violations of the Honor Code.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit: <https://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>

Statement on Well-Being and 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.

In addition, the following university resources are available to you:

Cook Counseling:

540-231-6557 to schedule an appointment and/or 24/7 crisis support

ucc.vt.edu for more information

Dean of Students Office:

540 231-3787 for general advice

540-231-6411 for after-hours crisis

dos.vt.edu for more information

Hokie Wellness:

hokiewellness.vt.edu for more information about health and wellness workshops
and consultations

For a full listing of campus resources check out well-being.vt.edu .

Course Schedule (subject to change)

8/22: Introduction
Review Syllabus

8/24: Rationalism vs. Empiricism
Molyneux's Question
(no readings)

8/29: Teresa of Ávila
The Interior Castle, I.1-2

8/31: Teresa of Ávila
The Interior Castle, V.1 & VII.1

Assignment 1 due 9/1

9/5: René Descartes
Meditation I

9/7: Reading Exercise 1
BRING Teresa & Descartes readings to class

9/12: René Descartes
Meditations II

9/14: René Descartes
Meditation III

Assignment 2 due 9/15

9/19: René Descartes
Meditation IV

9/21: René Descartes
Meditation VI

9/26 – Elisabeth of Bohemia
Correspondence with Descartes in *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period*, pp. 11-21

9/28 – Reading Exercise 2
BRING Descartes & Elisabeth of Bohemia readings to class

10/3 – Margaret Cavendish
Robert Boyle, The Excellence and Grounds of the Mechanical Natural Philosophy excerpt in
Observations upon Experimental Philosophy, pp. 96-99

Philosophical Letters in *WPEMP*, XXX (pp. 24-29)
OEP, ch. 15-17 (pp. 11-13)

10/5: Margaret Cavendish
OEP, ch. 31 (pp. 27-32)

Assignment 3 Due 10/6

10/10: Margaret Cavendish
OEP, ch. 35 (pp. 32-38)

10/12: Reading Exercise 3
BRING Cavendish readings to class

10/17: Margaret Cavendish
Philosophical Letters in *WPEMP*, XXXV-XXXVI (pp. 33-36)

10/19: Margaret Cavendish
Robert Hooke, Micrographia excerpt in *OEP*, pp. 90-95
OEP, ch. 1-3 (pp. 3-10)

10/24: G.W. Leibniz
Discourse on Metaphysics §§1-6 (pp. 1-6)

10/26: G.W. Leibniz
On the Ultimate Origination of Things (pp. 41-48)

Assignment 4 Due 10/27

10/31: John Locke
An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, I.1, II.1-7

11/2: John Locke
Essay, II.2, II.12

11/7: John Locke
Essay, II.23.1-15

11/9: John Locke
Essay, II.23.16-37

11/14: John Locke
Essay, II.33

11/16: Reading exercise 4
BRING Locke readings to class

Assignment 5 Due 11/17

11/21 – Thanksgiving
NO CLASS

11/23 – Thanksgiving
NO CLASS

11/28: Sor Juana
Letter from Sor Filotea de la Cruz in *The Answer* (pp. 223-231)
The Poet's Answer to the Most Illustrious Sor Filotea de la Cruz in *The Answer*, pp. 39-77

11/30: Sor Juana
The Poet's Answer to the Most Illustrious Sor Filotea de la Cruz in *The Answer*, pp.77-105

12/5: Closing Discussion
No readings

Assignment 6 Due 12/8