

History of Philosophy: Early Modern

Summer 2020

Note: All times listed in this syllabus are US Eastern/New York.

Live Meeting Time: MW 10:30am-12pm (Zoom)

Office Hours: F 12pm-1pm or by appointment

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How can we act well as knowers in the world? What is the relationship between mind and body? What understanding, if any, can we have of the divine? This course will address core themes in epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of religion through close reading of early modern philosophical texts. Our focus will be on the 17th century. We will reflect on how the way in which a philosopher writes, and the way in which she intends for her text to be used, shapes the arguments that she makes. This course does not presuppose background in the history of philosophy, and is a suitable introduction 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, criticism, and dispute to their peers.

Course Structure

Before class: Readings, Mini-Lectures, Discussion Posts (typically 2 per class)

During class: Live Zoom discussion

End of week (Friday 5pm eastern): Weekly Assignment

Communication with Instructor

Email: Outside of live class sessions, email is the best way to contact the instructor with questions, either concerning course logistics or content. I will always 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.

(Virtual) Office Hours: The instructor is available for individual meetings via Zoom F 12-1pm or by appointment. A sign-up sheet for Friday office hours will be posted to the introduction page to each class's module. You may email the instructor to set-up an appointment; please do so at least 24 hours before you are requesting to meet.

Required Texts

All assigned texts for this course are available freely online or through Columbia's library.

- Teresa of Ávila, *The Interior Castle*: <https://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/tic/index.htm>
- René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*: <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14810465?counter=4>

- Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters*: <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14465351>
- Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, *Confession of a Philosopher*: <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/14050459?counter=2>
- John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*: <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/7176585>
- Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Reply to Sor Philothea*: <https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/4466555?counter=1>

Course Requirements

1. Attendance, Participation, Discussion Boards (25%)
2. Weekly Assignments (75%)
 - Week 1: 5%
 - Week 2: 10%
 - Week 3: 15%
 - Week 4: 15%
 - Week 5: 15%
 - Week 6: 15%

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. If a technological issue occurs during class (e.g. internet goes down), please contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Discussion Boards: For each module (=1 day of class), students will complete two discussion posts. Each post will ask you to respond to some aspect of the assigned reading or mini-lectures for that day of class. There will always be 2 discussion posts for each day of class. You may either respond to the prompt or a classmate's post. Discussion posts may either be written or recorded on video. Minimum 100 words or 1 minute. **Discussion posts are due by 10am the day of class.** The instructor will periodically comment on discussion boards and incorporate some posts into live class meetings.

Weekly Assignments: Each week, students will complete one writing, video essay, or presentation assignment. Each assignment will ask you to critically engage with main problems/arguments covered during the week, and to reflect on how the problem/argument is shaped by the way in which the philosopher writes/philosophizes. **Weekly assignments are due by 5pm Friday each week.** The instructor will provide feedback on each weekly assignment.

*Late discussion posts 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 will not be accepted late without a valid excuse.***

Statement on Academic Integrity

The CC honor code is: “I affirm that I will not plagiarize, use unauthorized materials, or give or receive illegitimate help on assignments, papers, and examinations. I will also uphold equity and honesty in the evaluation of my work and the work of others. I do so to sustain a community built around this Code of Honor.” Violations of academic integrity will not be tolerated. For more on academic integrity, see <https://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity>.

Statement on Accessibility

If you require accommodation in order to fully participate in this course, please contact the Office of Disability Services (<https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services>) so that such accommodation may be arranged. I’m happy to assist where I can.

In addition, we will be navigating the challenge of doing philosophy together remotely during a pandemic. As your instructor, I will be as flexible and responsive to circumstances/problems as they come up to ensure that everyone gets as much out of the course as possible. In return, I ask that you communicate promptly and clearly about anything you need to fully participate in the course; the better our communication, the more proactive I can be in helping ensure that this is an accessible and productive learning environment.

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Week 1: Intro + Teresa of Ávila

5/27: Review syllabus, Zoom practice, Molyneux’s Question

5/29: *The Interior Castle*, I.1-2, II.1, V.1, V. 4

Week 2: Descartes

6/1: *Meditations I, II, IV*

6/3: *Meditations III, V, VI*

Week 3: Cavendish

6/8: *Philosophical Letters*, Section 1: I-III, XXX-XXXII, XXXV-XXXVI; Section 2: I-III, XXX-XXI

6/10: *Philosophical Letters*, Section 3: XX, Section 4: All

Week 4: Leibniz

6/15: *Confession of a Philosopher* (first half)

6/17: *Confession of a Philosopher* (second half)

Week 5: Locke

6/22: *Essay I.1, II.1-2, II.12*

6/24: *Essay II.23 (selections), II.27 (selections)*

Week 6: Sor Juana

6/29: *The Reply to Sor Philothea*

7/1: *Student Presentations*