

Philosophy 201: Modern Philosophy (Spring 16)



This course aims to provide a broad but thorough -- rigorous and *fun* -- introduction to the history of modern western philosophy (roughly 1600 to 1800). We will read central works of nine major figures of the period: Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Newton, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. We will also read works by somewhat less influential figures, such as Pascal and somewhat neglected women philosophers of the period, such as Elizabeth of Bohemia.

Philosophers of the Middle Ages were largely occupied with reconciling the insights of ancient Greek philosophy (especially Plato and Aristotle) with the religious worldview of monotheism (whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim). But with the monumental discoveries of the Scientific Revolution (Copernicus, Galileo, Harvey, Newton) philosophy became increasingly focused on science rather than religion, on the natural rather than the supernatural. Thus, John Locke wrote “In an age that produces such masters as the great Huygenius, and the incomparable Mr. Newton, it is ambition enough to be employed as an under-labourer in clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge”. The early stage of modern philosophy was devoted to re-framing traditional philosophical and theological problems in light of the new scientific and humanistic worldview. At the same time, increasing emphasis on freedom and enlightenment fostered a radical re-thinking of human society and the relations among the individual, the state, and the church. As a consequence, an entirely new conception of philosophy itself was established, which persists to this day. Indeed, many of the problems that concern contemporary philosophers and scientists derive from the philosophers of 17th and 18th centuries. In this course we will be especially interested in their treatments of the following issues:

- Knowledge and Method
- Experience vs. Reality
- Individual and Social Good
- The Existence and Nature of God
- The Relation between Mind and Body
- Identity and the Self
- Freedom and Determinism
- Space, Time and Matter

Class meetings: 10:50 – 11:50 MWF, Old Main 009.

Instructors: Professors Janet Folina and Geoffrey Gorham; **Offices:** Old Main 106/110; **Phone:** 6159/6048

Preceptor: Ami Naff. Email: anaff@macalster.edu

Office Hours: Gorham: M 10:00 - 10:50; W: noon-1:00; by appointment.
Folina: W: 9:45-10:45; Th: 11:15-12:15; by appointment.

Text: *Modern Philosophy* by Ott & Dunn (OD); open source; posted to moodle. Additional readings will be posted to moodle (M), emailed (E), linked or sent telepathically.

W(a): This class carries W(a) credit. Class time will be devoted to writing instruction and at least one paper draft must be reviewed by one of the instructors.

Course Requirements

1. Exams: one mid-term exam and one final exam, each based on readings, lectures, handouts and class discussions. The mid-term exam will be ‘in-class’ on **March 11**; the final exam will be ‘take-home’ due electronically **May 6**. The final exam will be non-cumulative. Exams will consist primarily of essay questions, but possibly also some short answer questions.

2. Papers: three papers, one longer than the other two. The shorter papers will be due **February 29** and **April 11**. The longer paper will be due on the last day of class, **May 2**. General topics will be provided, which students are invited to make more specific. Use of secondary sources is *not permitted* for the first short paper. Detailed use of at least one secondary source (a book or a substantial article in a philosophical journal) is *required* for the second and third papers. Use of the internet (other than to find journal articles or books) is not permitted in researching your paper. Drafts of papers for review are welcome but not required. At least one draft is required to be reviewed by one the instructors in order to receive W(a) GE credit.

3. Conversation Starters (Convos). Every student will prepare a conversation starter (‘convo’) for **15** separate classes (no more than 15 total and at most one for any given class or reading). Convos are provocative or searching questions or objections based on the reading for the class that day. A convo should normally provide a brief quote (with page reference), some analysis on your part, and a specific and thoughtful question or objection. Your aim should be to demonstrate to the grader that you have done the reading and thought closely and critically about some important part of it. On occasion, convos will be read aloud in class. Convos must be emailed to the grader (anaff) by 10:30 AM on the day the relevant reading will be discussed. Attendance is required for convo credit. The first convo is a ‘free play’ – if you get less than 2 it will not count. These will be graded from **0-2** (including half-grades). Here are some illustrations:

Example of grade 0: Descartes sure does compliment Elizabeth a lot! Was he in love or just a suck-up?

Example of grade 1: In her first letter, Elizabeth asks Descartes to explain “how the soul of a man (since it is nothing but a thinking substance) can determine the spirits of the body to produce voluntary motions”. (11) I’m not sure what she’s asking Descartes here. And what does she mean by “spirits of the body”?

Example of grade 2: In her first letter, Elizabeth asks Descartes to explain “how the soul of a man (since it is nothing but a thinking substance) can determine the spirits of the body to produce voluntary motions”. (11) Her worry seems to be that in order to causally affect a body the cause must have position and shape; but the mind cannot have these, at least according to Descartes, since it is simply an un-extended thinking thing. In his reply Descartes explains that the soul “being united to the body can act and suffer with it”. (13) Although he goes on to draw an analogy with gravity, I don’t see how Descartes’ extreme dualism allows him to say that soul and body are “united” in any sense. And if all he means by saying they’re united is that they can interact, this hardly answers Elizabeth’s worry, which is *how* a non-physical thing can act on a physical thing.

4. Discussion, attendance, etc.: Class will normally begin with a brief lecture followed by discussion. It is very important for students to complete all assigned readings in advance of the classes in which those readings will be discussed, attend all class meetings, and participate in class discussion. We will keep informal track of these factors and assign a grade of 1-10 at the end of the year. If you always attend class, always do the readings, and regularly contribute thoughtfully to discussion, you should expect to receive 10; otherwise, you should expect to receive less than 10.

Mid-Term Exam:	40 points	A =	187 - 200 pts	C =	147 - 153 pts
Final Exam:	50 points	A- =	180 - 186 pts	C- =	140 - 146 pts
Short Papers	20 points (each)	B+ =	174 - 179 pts	D+ =	134 - 139 pts
Long Paper	30 points	B =	167 - 173 pts	D =	127 - 133 pts
Convos	30 points (total)	B- =	160 - 166 pts	D- =	120 - 126 pts
Discussion, Attendance...	10 points	C+ =	154 - 159 pts	F =	0 - 119 pts
Total:	200 points				

Accommodations. We are happy to facilitate appropriate accommodations for documented disabilities, as provided by College policy. Please make contact with Assistant Dean of Students, Robin Hart Ruthenbeck (rhartrut@macalesster.edu) and then let us know how we can help. **Religious Holidays.** We are happy to make accommodations for observance of religious holidays and practices, as provided by College policy. I appreciate being given advance notice of absences.

Academic Misconduct such as cheating and plagiarism will be dealt with in accordance with College policy and procedures. Please talk to me if you have any uncertainty about what constitutes plagiarism.

Class Schedule (subject to revision)

Friday, January 22: **Introductions**

I: Modern Pioneers: Descartes and Hobbes

Monday, January 25 **Descartes:** *Discourse on the Method* (M)

Wednesday, January 27: **Descartes:** *Meditations*, 1-2 (OD)

Friday, January 29: **Descartes:** *Meditations*, 3-4 (OD)

Monday, February 1: **Descartes:** *Meditations*, 5-6 (OD); **Arnauld:** Circularity Objection (M)

Wednesday, February 3: **Elizabeth of Bohemia:** Correspondence with Descartes (M)

Friday, February 5: **Pascal:** “Wager” and “On Diversions” (M)

Monday, February 8: **Hobbes:** Objections to Descartes (M)

Wednesday, February 10: **Hobbes:** *Leviathan* (M)

II. The Radical Enlightenment: Spinoza

Friday, February 12: **Spinoza:** *Ethics* Part I (OD)

Monday, February 15: **Spinoza:** *Ethics* Part I (OD)

Wednesday, February 17: **Spinoza:** *Ethics* Part II (M)

Friday, February 19: **Spinoza:** *Ethics* Part V (M)

Monday, February 22: **Spinoza:** *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (E)

III. Interlude: Leibniz vs. Newton

Wednesday, February 24: **Newton:** *Principia* (M)

Friday, February 26: **Leibniz-Clarke:** *Correspondence* (M)

IV. The Liberal Enlightenment: Locke

Monday, February 29: **Locke:** *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (OD); **First paper due.**

Wednesday, March 2: **Locke:** *Essay* (OD)

Friday, March 4: **Locke:** *Essay* (OD)

Monday, March 7: **Locke:** *Two Treatises on Government* (E)

Wednesday, March 9: **Review/Study Day**

Friday, March 11: **Mid-Term Exam** (in class)

Monday, March 14: **Spring Break!**

Wednesday, March 16: **Spring Break!**

Friday, March 18: **Spring Break!**

V: The Idealist Challenge: Berkeley

Monday, March 21: **Berkeley:** *Principles of Human Knowledge* (OD)

Wednesday, March 23: **Berkeley:** *Principles* (OD)

Friday, March 25: **Berkeley:** *de Motu* (OD)

VI. Skepticism and Naturalism: Hume

Monday, March 28: **Hume:** *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (OD)

Wednesday, March 30: **Hume:** *Enquiry* (OD)

Friday, April 1: **Hume:** *Enquiry* (OD)

Monday, April 4: **Hume** *Enquiry* (OD)

Wednesday, April 6: **Hume**: *Enquiry* (OD)

Friday, April 8: **Hume**: *Treatise of Human Nature* (M)

Monday, April 11: **Hume**: “Of Self-Love” (M); **Second Paper Due**

Wednesday, April 13: **Hume**: “Of the Standard of Taste” (M)

Friday, April 15: **Hume**: “Of Suicide” (M)

VII: The Great Synthesis: Kant

Monday, April 18: **Kant**: *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*. (OD)

Wednesday, April 20: **Kant**: *Prolegomena* (OD)

Friday, April 22: **Kant**: *Critique of Pure Reason* (M)

Monday, April 25: **Kant**: *Critique of Pure Reason* (M)

Wednesday, April 27: **Kant**: *Critique of Pure Reason* (M)

Friday, April 29: **Kant**: *Critique of Pure Reason* (M)

Monday, May 2: **Third Paper Due; Final Take-home distributed.**

Friday, May 6: **Final Take-Home due** by email.