

Phil 321 - History of Early Modern Philosophy (3 credits)

Tue/Thu 11:25 - 12:15

South College E470

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Course Overview

Course Description: This course introduces students to important texts and debates in Early Modern Philosophy. Our main focus will be on becoming familiar with the distinctive and rich philosophical atmosphere of early modern philosophy, the questions they were puzzled by and their unique solutions. We will cover topics such as: (i) knowledge, skepticism, and method of science; (ii) the nature of mind and matter, and the problem of interaction; (iii) free will and determinism; and (iv) human nature as it connects to debates on sex, race, and animals.

This course also serves as a general introduction to philosophy. Through class participation and coursework students will develop their skills in reading comprehension, critical thinking, and philosophical writing.

Course Objectives: The student learning objectives of this course are the following. The first is to introduce students to problems and important works in early modern philosophy. The second is to develop both general philosophical skills and the skills unique to historians of philosophy, particularly those of close reading and interpreting historical texts in a context sensitive way.

Assignments/Grades

Weekly Responses (1 pg, single or double-spaced)	30% (3.75% each; 8 total)
Paper 1 (2-3 pgs, double-spaced)	10%
Paper 2 (4-6 pgs, double-spaced)	20%
Final Paper (8-10 pgs, double-spaced)	30%
Attendance and Participation	10%

Grading Scale

A	92.6+ %
A-	90-92.5%
B+	87.6-89.9%
B	82.6-87.5%
B-	80-82.5%
C+	77.6-79.9%
C	72.6-77.5%
C-	70-72.5%

D+	67.6-69.9%
D	62.6-67.5%
D-	60-62.5%
F	<59.9%

Weekly Responses: For each week on which a paper is *not* due, you will write a one page (single or double-spaced) response paper. There are eleven weeks on which a paper is not due. (You can miss three (3) weeks for free.)

In a Response Paper, you must respond to a text assigned that week. The content of a response paper is: (i) raise **2-3 questions** (tied to the text!) and (ii) **try to answer** one of the questions in a brief paragraph or two (say why the question is important to the author's argument; how they might respond; etc.). **Submit your response papers on Canvas. Response Papers are due at the end of the week by Sunday at 11:59 pm.** The weekly responses will be graded on a minus, plus/minus, or plus scale, without comments.

Papers: You will **write three papers** during the course of the semester. The **lengths and requirements** of the papers will increase over the course of the semester (see overview above). I will post prompts and the requirements/rubrics for each paper one week prior to the due date. The point of the staggered-approach to the papers is to gradually develop your skills at writing longer, more complicated philosophical papers. I will give detailed comments on papers. **For the final paper, I require a short (1-2 page) *Précis*** as part of your grade. I will give detailed instructions about this later in the semester.

Attendance and Participation: Your participation grade is based on the extent to which you complete in-class activities, attend class, and participate in discussion. Late attendance gets half-credit unless otherwise excused. You can miss up to three (3) classes without it affecting your attendance grade, after that you will lose 5% of your attendance grade for every unexcused absence. You must email me with a legitimate reason to have your absence excused.

Additional Information

Course Materials: *All readings are available on Canvas.* If you get alternative copies, make sure they are the **same editions** as those available on Canvas.

Office Hours: I have office hours Wednesdays from 2:30 - 3:30 or *by appointment* (also meeting on Zoom is fine).

Communication: If you need to contact me outside of office hours, you can reach me by email. You must use your UMass email when emailing me. During the week, I will respond to emails within 24 hours and try to reply to emails sent during business hours the same day. If you send me an email outside of business hours, do not expect a same-day response.

Accommodation: If you find the course in any way inaccessible, please let me know. If you need academic accommodation, please contact [Disability Services](#). The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), you may be eligible for

reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements.

Academic Honesty: Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism (including the use of AI). UMass has a zero tolerance policy for academic dishonesty. If you have any questions, look [here](#) or ask me. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent

Title IX Policy: In accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 that prohibits gender-based discrimination in educational settings that receive federal funds, the University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students, free from all forms of discrimination, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and retaliation. This includes interactions in person or online through digital platforms and social media. Title IX also protects against discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, miscarriage, abortion, or related conditions, including recovery. There are resources here on campus to support you. A summary of the available Title IX resources (confidential and non-confidential) can be found at the following link: <https://www.umass.edu/titleix/resources>. You do not need to make a formal report to access them. If you need immediate support, you are not alone. Free and confidential support is available 24 hours a day / 7 days a week / 365 days a year at the SASA Hotline 413-545-0800.

***Note: The syllabus/schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.**

Readings and Assignments Schedule

***Note:** if there are no sections/pages listed, the entire article/chapter is assigned.

Week	Date	Topic	Assigned Reading	Pages / Sections	Notes
1	Tue, Sep 2	Course Introduction	Syllabus + General Background		
	Thu, Sep 4	Knowledge, Skepticism, and Method of Science	<i>Montaigne (1580), "Apology for Raymond Sebond"</i>	section 7	

2	Tue, Sep 9		<i>Bacon (1620), New Organon</i>	Aphorisms 1–3, 11–31, 36–40, 47–51, 94–106	
	Thu, Sep 11		<i>Zera Yacob (1667), Treatise & Walda Heywat (1693), Treatise</i>	selections	
3	Tue, Sep 16		<i>Descartes (1641), Meditations on First Philosophy</i>	Meditations I–III	Optional: Principles Pt. 1 §§1–5, 13–20
	Thu, Sep 18		(continue)		
4	Tue, Sep 23		<i>Locke (1690), Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i>	I.1–2; II.1–14, 21–3, 27	
	Thu, Sep 25		<i>Du Châtelet (1740), Foundations of Physics</i>	Ch. 1 and 2	Paper #1, due Sep 28 (by midnight)
5	Tue, Sep 30		<i>Hume (1757), Enquiry</i>	section 4	
	Thu, Oct 2	Nature of Mind & Matter, and the Problem of Interaction	<i>Descartes (1641), Meditations & Correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia</i>	Meditation VI; (selections)	
6	Tue, Oct 7		<i>Spinoza, Ethics</i>	selections	
	Thu, Oct 9		<i>Berkeley, Three Dialogues</i>	selections	
7	Tue, Oct 14		<i>Leibniz, Monadology</i>	selections	
	Thu, Oct 16		<i>Cavendish, Grounds of Natural Philosophy</i>	selections	
8	Tue, Oct 21		<i>Hume, Treatise</i>	selections	
	Thu, Oct 23		<i>Kant, Critique of Pure Reason</i>	selections	
9	Tue, Oct 28		(continue)		
	Thu, Oct 30	Free Will & Determinism	<i>Leibniz (1710), Theodicy</i>	Preface; sections 8–10; 37–45; 52–55; 173–177	Paper #2, due Nov 2 (by midnight)
10	Tue, Nov 4				✗ No Class Tue, Nov 4 (Election Day)

	Thu, Nov 6		<i>Du Châtelet (1740), Foundations of Physics</i>	Ch. 5	
11	Tue, Nov 11				✗ No Class Tue, Nov 11 (Veterans Day)
	Thu, Nov 13	Human Nature: Debates on Sex, Race, Animals	<i>De Gournay (1622), "The Equality of Men and Women"</i>	selections	
12	Tue, Nov 18		<i>Astell (1697), A Serious Proposal</i>	selections	
	Thu, Nov 20		<i>Cugoano (1787), Thoughts and Sentiments</i>	selections	
13	Nov 24 - 30	✗ No Class (Thanksgiving Break)			
14	Tue, Dec 2		<i>Descartes (1644), Principles</i>	Pt. 2, sections 6-7	
	Thu, Dec 4		<i>Conway (1690), Principles</i>	Pt. 2, chapter 7	
15	Tue, Dec 9		Final Review Day		Last Class
					Paper #3, due Dec 14 (by midnight)