

# Early Modern Philosophy

## CONTACT:

- Office Hours:  
M/W 2-4pm  
SY 009
- Email:  
masonse@indiana.edu

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is intended to introduce students to important philosophers and philosophical issues of the early modern period. To a large extent, the questions these philosophers raised and answers they offered set the course for the western philosophical tradition, a tradition that still informs how we understand philosophical questions and problems today.

We will be exploring a wide variety of work from this period, including work that addresses metaphysics, epistemology, political philosophy, and ethics. In order to gain an appreciation for the ongoing philosophical conversation within its historical context, we will proceed chronologically, paying particular attention to primary texts.

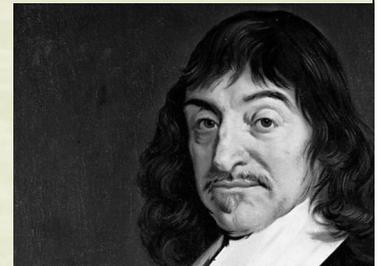
## PEOPLE

René Descartes  
Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia  
Thomas Hobbes  
Margaret Cavendish  
Baruch Spinoza  
John Locke  
Gottfried Leibniz  
Mary Astell  
George Berkeley  
David Hume

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this class, students can expect to:

- ◆ Develop a general understanding of many important philosophical issues and conversations during the 17th and 18th centuries
- ◆ Be able to articulate specific views from key philosophers of the time
- ◆ Improve their ability to read and understand historical philosophical texts, reformulate arguments from the text, and evaluate those arguments



René Descartes

## COURSE TEXTS

- ◆ *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. (2009). Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, eds. Hackett Publishing Company.
- ◆ *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period*. (1994). Margaret Atherton, ed. Hackett Publishing Company.
- ◆ All other readings will be available on Canvas under "Resources."

## GRADING SCHEME

◆ Attendance/Participation	10%
◆ Writing assignments	20%
◆ Essay	30%
◆ Exams (2)	40%



Margaret Cavendish

*“Two things awe me most, the starry sky  
above me and the moral law within me.”*  
— Immanuel Kant

## ATTENDANCE / PARTICIPATION

Much of what you learn in this course will come from your time in the classroom. Unsurprisingly, students who do not attend class regularly will not benefit from the course as much as those who attend regularly. Attendance and active participation in the class are, therefore, required.



Leibniz's house,  
Hanover, Germany

### Attendance (10%):

Each student may take up to 2 excused absences for any reason. Absences in excess of 2 will result in a deduction of 10% from your attendance/participation grade per absence. In cases of an emergency, sickness, death in the family, or other unforeseen event, I may grant additional excused absences provided that the student notifies me right away and provides appropriate documentation.

### Participation (5%):

Participation refers to your active involvement in the class through being prepared for class (doing the reading) and engaging in classroom discussion. Visits to my office hours will also count toward your participation grade. Distracting behavior (chronic tardiness, surfing the web on a laptop or mobile device, etc.) will result in points off your participation grade.

## CLASSROOM CULTURE STATEMENT

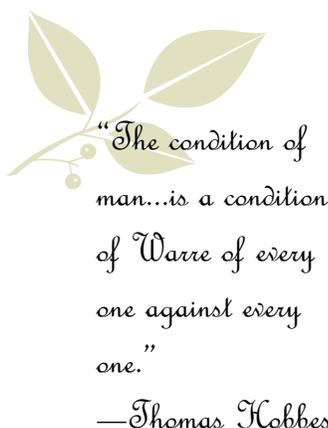
This course is designed to encourage you to think deeply about controversial issues, and as we go along you will almost certainly encounter viewpoints that challenge your own beliefs. I encourage you to view these challenges as opportunities to learn about perspectives that may differ widely from your own and to practice the skill of interacting respectfully and sympathetically with someone, despite the fact that you may strongly disagree with their point of view. Although debate and critical analysis are encouraged, it should be clear that we will not discriminate against or criticize members of this classroom community based on gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, or religion. Everyone is welcome here.

## WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

You will need to complete five short writing assignments (1-2 pages) that will help you interact more deeply with the text and will prepare you to write your essays. In these assignments, you will be asked to 1) articulate a question about a passage in the reading, 2) write a sample introductory paragraph, 3) explain an argument from one of the readings, 4) sympathetically defend a viewpoint that is not your own, and 5) identify and respond to an objection to a particular view. I will provide further assignment instructions as we go along.



George Berkeley



## ESSAY

Your essay provides the opportunity for you to interact with one of our course topics in more depth. I will give you a list of topics from which you may choose, or you may write on another topic if you get that topic approved first. All essays should be typed and will be turned in electronically.

A rough draft of the essay will be due two weeks before your final draft is due. I will be providing detailed comments on your rough draft so that you can benefit from those as you write your final draft. 20% of your essay grade will come from the grade on your rough draft, 80% from your grade on the final draft.

## EXAMS

There will be two written, take-home exams. The exams will ask you to explain important concepts, compare and contrast some of the theories we will discuss, and to critically engage the course material. Exam questions will be given out one week in advance. All exams should be submitted electronically through our online course site.

## LATE POLICY

All assignments (essays, exams) should be turned in online by midnight on the day they are due. Late work will receive one letter-grade reduction per day late up to 5 days after the assignment is due. After 5 days, you will not be able to turn in your work for credit. I make exceptions to this policy if you have an emergency, but to be considered for an exemption it is your responsibility to notify me *in advance*.

## PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

In the *Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct*, the Indiana University Faculty Council indicates that students may be disciplined for several different kinds of academic misconduct, which include: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, interference, and violation of course rules. The penalty for cheating or plagiarism in this class is automatic failure of the course. Consider yourself warned. For more information about what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, go to <https://www.indiana.edu/~tedfrick/plagiarism/index2.html>



David Hume

# SCHEDULE

Each reading should be completed before the beginning of class on the date assigned. Assignments are due at the beginning of class.

Date: Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641)  
Correspondence of Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia with Descartes  
(1643-1650)

## **Writing Assignment #1 Due**

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, 1-5, 34, and 46 (1651)  
Margaret Cavendish, selections from *Philosophical Letters* (1664)

## **Writing Assignment #2 Due**

Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* parts I, II, and V (1677)

## **Writing Assignment #3 Due**

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* I.1-2,  
(1689)

## **Midterm Due**

Gottfried Leibniz, selected readings from *Discourse on Metaphysics*  
(1686); *Monadology* (1714)

## **Writing Assignment #4 Due**

Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal* (1694); *The Christian Religion*  
(1705)

## **Writing Assignment #5 Due**

George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*  
(1713)

## **Rough Draft Due**

David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739); *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748)

## **Final Essay Due, Final Exam Due**