

Early Modern Philosophy

PHIL 206:306 | WI 2022



Meeting Time & Location

MWF 12:00–1:10 p.m. | OM ???

Professor: Dr. Brandon Polite

email: bpolite@knox.edu

Office Hours: MW 2:30–3:15

office: OM 304

Course Description

This course explores some exciting developments of the 17th & 18th centuries.

Specifically, we examine how the study of metaphysics, epistemology, and the mind were transformed by the scientific revolution. We consider the relationships between the mind and the body, and between the human person and the natural world. Philosophers studied are: Descartes, Elisabeth of Bohemia, Hobbes, Cavendish, Spinoza, Conway, Leibniz, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant.

By the end of the term, you should be able to

- **Articulate** some important positions advanced by early modern philosophers.
- **Articulate** salient objections to some of those positions.
- **Develop and defend** your own analyses and arguments on positions advanced by early modern philosophers.

course details

Website: Accessible via <https://classroom.google.com>

Required Readings: All readings are available as PDF's on Google Classroom.

Participation: You should come to class regularly and prepared to participate. If you ever feel unwell, especially if you have any Covid-19 symptoms, don't come to class. Missing class, being disengaged from class discussion, or turning work in late too frequently will negatively impact your grade, at my discretion. So, talk to me (sooner rather than later) if any of these becomes an issue for you.

Late Assignments: There is enough flexibility built into both the assignments and the structure of the course that you shouldn't find it too difficult to turn the work in on time. However, if you feel like you need some additional time and would like to negotiate reasonable, alternative deadlines for **any assignment for any reason**, including if you have academic accommodations, get in touch with me as soon as you can—preferably before it's due.

Split-Level Course: This is a split level course. Some students are taking it at the 200 level; some are taking it at the 300 level. (The 300-level section counts toward the Modern Philosophy requirement for the Philosophy major.) The amount of reading is the same for all students. The difference in workload results from the amount of, and expectations for, written work.

Assignments

Online Discussion Forum | 65%

Each week, you will have the opportunity to select **one** significant passage from **one** of that week's readings, and write a response to it. A passage may be chosen because it rings true or seems wrong, it is illuminating or confusing, it resonates or conflicts with another philosopher's view, etc. Whatever the nature of your response, it should reflect your familiarity with the reading as a whole, not just its first few pages. You will post your response on Google Classroom as a prompt for discussion in that week's "**Prompt**" assignment.

For 206 students, prompts will be 250–350 words long. | For 306 students, they will be 350–450 words long.

You will also have the opportunity each week to reply, for credit, to **two** of your classmates' prompts and **two** of your classmates' replies. "**Replies**" should be *substantive* and should deal with the *substance* of what your classmates have written. You can offer reasons to further support their views or reasons to revise or reject them. You can relate their ideas to those presented by other classmates or to other philosophers we've read. You can also piggyback off other classmates' ideas. Whatever the nature of your replies, though, they should be *thoughtful* and move the discussion forward *productively*.

Grading: Prompts & Replies will all be graded as either **Satisfactory (S)** or **Needs Work (N)**. The following table indicates how many S scores within each type of assignment you must obtain in order to receive a particular base grade:

Assignment type	A	B	C	D	(%)
Discussion Prompts	6	5	4	3	(35)
Replies to Prompts	12	10	8	6	(15)
Replies to Replies	12	10	8	6	(15)

You may post at most **one** Prompt per week for credit, by *no later than* 11:59 p.m. on Friday.

You may post at most **four** Replies per week for credit, by *no later than* 11:59 p.m. the following Tuesday.

Term Paper | 35% You will develop ideas from your online discussion prompts and replies into a term paper, which will follow the traditional philosophical format of interpreting one or more philosophical positions and developing your own argument in response to them.

206 students: 2400–2700 words (or 8–9 pgs) long. | **306 students:** 3600–4500 words (or 12–15 pgs) long.

Schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 3–9) <i>Descartes's Dualism</i>		
1/3	M	Introductions
1/5	W	René Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> , Meds I–II
1/7	F	René Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> , Med. III
Week 2 (Jan. 10–16) <i>Descartes & Princess Elisabeth</i>		
1/10	M	René Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> , Med. VI
1/12	W	Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, Correspondence (selections)
1/14	F	Further discussion
Week 3 (Jan. 17–23) <i>Hobbes's & Cavendish's Materialism</i>		
1/17	M	Thomas Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , chs 1–4
1/19	W	Margaret Cavendish, <i>Observations</i> , chs 31, 36 & 37, up to question 10
1/21	F	Further discussion

The Amount of Work

The amount of reading and assigned each week is meant to be manageable so that you'll have plenty of time to meet the Friday online discussion prompt deadline. Further, with your prompts, you will collectively produce up to 10 pages of additional reading each week, which you will need to sift through carefully prior to the Tuesday replies deadline.

Week 4 (Jan. 24–30) | Cavendish & Spinoza: Mind & Body

1/24 M Margaret Cavendish, *Observations*, "Further Observations," chs 6–16
 1/26 W Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* (selections)
 1/28 F Further discussion

Week 5 (Jan. 31–Feb. 6) | Conway & Leibniz: Substance

1/31 M Anne Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, chs 7–8, 9.2
 2/2 W Gottfried Leibniz, *Monadology*
 2/4 F Further discussion

Week 6 (Feb. 7–13) | Berkeley's & Hume's Empiricism

2/7 M George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, Sections 1–24
 2/9 W **No Class | Day of Dialogue**
 2/11 F David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sections 1–3

Week 7 (Feb. 14–20) | Hume's Empiricism, continued

2/14 M David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sections 4–6
 2/16 W David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sections 7–8
 2/18 F Further discussion

Week 8 (Feb. 21–27) | Kant's Transcendental Idealism

2/21 M Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena*, Intro, Preamble, & General Problems
 2/23 W Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena*, Main Transcendental Problem 3
 2/25 F Further discussion

Week 9 (Feb. 28–Mar. 6) | Term Paper

2/28 M **How to Write a Philosophy Paper** | Presentation & Discussion
 3/2 W No class | Optional Paper Discussion
 3/4 F No class | Optional Paper Discussion

Week 10 (Mar. 7–13) | Term Paper

3/7 M No class | Optional Paper Discussion
 3/13 Su Term Paper due by 10 p.m.

Honor Code

This course operates according to the Honor Code. Students are encouraged to talk through all course material with one another and to function as interlocutors for one another, including preparing to write your prompts. However, each student is required to write their own work, cite all sources fully, and give explicit credit where particular formulations of claims, arguments, and examples result from cooperative work.

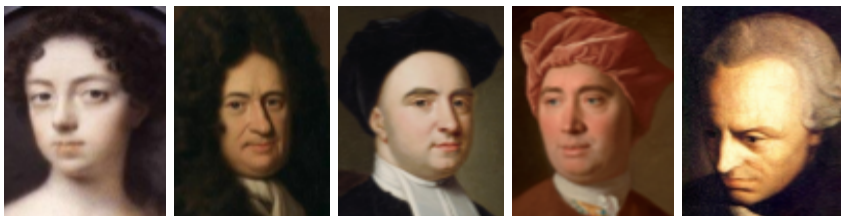
Prompts & Replies

Prompts due Fridays by 11:59 pm
Replies due Tuesdays by 11:59 pm

Further information on all assignments can be found on Google Classroom.

Podcasts

I've compiled episodes of podcasts on modern philosophers, which will deepen your understanding of them. | [link](#)



grading scale

A+	100 – 97.7	B+	89.9 – 87.7	C+	79.9 – 77.7	D+	69.9 – 67.7
A	97.6 – 93	B	87.6 – 83.4	C	77.6 – 73.4	D	67.6 – 63.4
A-	93.3 – 90	B-	83.3 – 80	C-	73.3 – 70	D-	63.3 – 60