

**PHILOSOPHY 303/ Spring 2024**  
**History of Modern Philosophy**  
**Prof. Ted Kinnaman**

Office: Horizon 6256

Office hours: Weds., 1:00 – 2:00\*; Tues., 2:00 – 3:00

(\*Wednesday office hours are on Zoom. The link for these is posted on Blackboard.)

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** In this course we will be studying the most influential philosophers of the early modern period, running from 1641 to 1785. You will write four papers. Everyone must write the paper on Descartes' *Meditations*. After that, you'll have five opportunities (one assignment per philosopher) to write three papers. You can choose which three to write. Each paper will count for 25% of your grade for the semester. The papers ought to be approximately 2000 words long. The due dates for the papers are given on the syllabus; in each case, the paper needs to be uploaded to Blackboard. The assignments themselves are given in a separate document, posted on Blackboard under Assignments.

**COURSE GOALS:** Our goals in this course are to gain an understanding of the philosophical issues that were the subject of debate in western Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries; to see the relevance of these issues for philosophy today; and to learn to develop philosophically informed judgments on these issues. The central issues we will be discussing include the existence and nature of God, skepticism and knowledge, the foundations of modern science, and the mind/body problem. To do well in this course, you need to understand the books we read— the issues the authors address, the claims they make on these issues, and their arguments for these claims. But— and this is very important— you also need to think about how you would answer these questions, and what the strengths and weaknesses are of the philosophers' arguments. You will also need to present your thoughts in clearly written essays, in which you explain the philosophers' views (making specific reference to the texts), and offer arguments for your considered judgments on the questions we discuss. You can find information on writing papers in philosophy in a clearly marked folder under Content on Blackboard.

**CLASSROOM PROCEDURE:** The meetings are intended to help you better understand some of the most important passages in the assigned texts. On the syllabus below, you will see that for every day we meet, there is an assigned text to read. The lecture will be devoted to explaining that text: What question the author is addressing; what key terms mean; what the author's argument is; and what problems there are with the author's argument. Because philosophy reading is often rather difficult, I suggest that you read the text once before lecture (or at least try it), and again after lecture. When my schedule allows it, I will try to send questions to you via email, both as a guide to what we will discuss in our meetings and as an aid in understanding the reading. You will find it difficult to do well in the class without attending lecture regularly. Finally, I recommend, but do not require, that you do not use a

laptop or other device during class. I assume you will be courteous and refrain from using devices for purposes not related to our course.

REQUIRED BOOK: Ariew and Watkins, eds., *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2019). All of the works we'll be studying are easily obtainable as used books, or in electronic format. But it will be best if you use the same book I do, since that will make it easier for you to follow what we talk about in our meetings.

## READING SCHEDULE:

BEFORE TUES., 1/16: Watch video presentation "What makes modern philosophy modern?," on Blackboard, in the 'Media Gallery' for this course.

Tues., 1/16: Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Letter of Dedication and Synopsis (pp. 35 - 40).

Thurs., 1/18: Descartes, First Meditation (pp. 40 - 3).

Tues., 1/23: Descartes, First and Second Meditations (pp. 40 - 7).

Thurs., 1/25: Descartes, Second Meditation (cont'd.).

Tues., 1/30: Descartes, Third Meditation (pp. 47 - 54).

Thurs., 2/1: Descartes, Fourth Meditation (pp. 47 - 58).

Tues., 2/6: Descartes, Sixth Meditation (pp. 61 - 8).

Thurs., 2/8: Descartes, Sixth Meditation (pp. 61 - 8), and Galileo, The Assayer, "Corpuscularianism" (pp. 21 - 4).

Tues., 2/13: Spinoza, Ethics, Bk. I (pp. 172 - 92).

Thurs., 2/15: Spinoza, Ethics, Bk. I (conc.) and Bk. II, to Proposition 7 (pp. 192 - 5).

**[Descartes paper due in Blackboard at 1:00 on Fri., 2/16]**

Tues., 2/20: Spinoza, Ethics, Bk. II, to Proposition 48 (pp. 192 - 212).

Thurs., 3/22: Leibniz, "Discourse on Metaphysics" (Sections 1-9 [pp. 252 - 7], and 12 - 16 [pp. 258 - 62]).

Tues., 2/27: Leibniz, "Discourse on Metaphysics" (Sections 24 - 30 [pp. 267 - 71] and 33-36 [pp. 272 - 5]).

Thurs., 2/29: Leibniz, conc.

## March 2 - 10: Spring Break

Tues., 3/12: Locke, *Essay* (Book I; Book II, Chaps. I - VIII [pp. 346 - 67]).

Thurs., 3/14: Berkeley, *Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, First Dialogue (pp. 494 - 514).

Tues., 3/19: Berkeley, *Dialogues*, cont'd.

Thurs., 3/21: Berkeley, *Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, Second Dialogue (pp. 515 - 24). **[Leibniz/Spinoza paper due in Blackboard at 1:00 p.m. Fri., 3/15]**

Tues., 3/26: Berkeley, *Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, Third Dialogue (pp. 524 - 543).

Thurs., 3/28: Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sections I-III (pp. 579 - 588).

Tue., 4/2: Hume, *Enquiry*, Section IV (pp. 588 - 94).

Thurs., 4/4: Hume, *Enquiry*, Sections V - VII (pp. 594 - 610). **[Berkeley paper due in Blackboard at 1:00 p.m. Fri., 4/5]**

Tues., 4/9: Hume, Sections VIII [pp. 610 - 20], and XII (pp. 639 - 46).

Thurs., 4/11: Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Preface and Preamble (pp. 719 - 30).

Tues., 4/16: Kant, *Prolegomena*, First Part of the Main Transcendental Question (pp. 731 - 7).

Thurs., 4/18: Kant, *Prolegomena*, Second Part (pp. 737 - 53) and *Critique of Pure Reason* ("Transition to the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories" [pp. 800 - 2]).  
**[Hume paper due in Blackboard at 1:00 p.m. Fri., 4/19]**

Tues., 4/25: Kant, *Prolegomena*, Second Part (cont'd.).

Thurs., 4/27: Kant, *Prolegomena*, Third Part (pp. 753 - 71).

**The last paper (on Kant) will be due in Blackboard by 1:00 p.m. on Friday, May 3.**

**LATE SUBMISSIONS:** I am usually generous about accepting assignments a bit after the due date if the student has cleared this with me beforehand. If, however, you hand in an assignment late without talking to me first, you should count on being penalized in some way. If the paper is only slightly late, I may mark it down a grade; if it is very late, I will not accept it at all. Also, please be advised that if your paper is extended, you might have to wait a while to get it back; grading on-time submissions is always my top priority.

**REWRITES:** I am frequently asked about my policy regarding the re-writing of papers—so frequently that I think it makes sense to put it in the syllabus. Strictly speaking, I do not allow rewrites. Instead, if you are unhappy with the grade you receive on an assignment, I will count that paper for something less (how much less is entirely up to me) than its allotted 25% of the grade *if* you meet two conditions: First, you must meet with me twice to talk about writing—once to talk about the paper that didn't go well, and another to talk with me about a later paper while you're in the process of writing it. Second, your other papers must show significant improvement from the one you were unhappy with.

**A NOTE ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** A general rule of thumb is, if you say something in a paper that you would not have said if you had not read Smith, even if you do not quote Smith word for word, then you need to footnote Smith. Anyone who cites or otherwise refers to the

work of someone else (including, of course, an AI bot) without acknowledging this fact in a footnote will be referred to the Honor Committee.

**OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES:** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.  
<http://ods.gmu.edu>

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