

Early Modern Philosophy - PHH3400, Fall 2020

MWF 11:45-12:35 (taught synchronously on Zoom)

Prof. Kyle Driggers – kyledriggers@ufl.edu

Office Hours: via virtual appointment, office at 330 Griffin-Floyd Hall will not be in use

Quick Response Hours via email or text : 10 AM – 4PM Weekdays

Phone: 919-907-0020 (text before calling)

Course Description

Can your mind exist without your body? Does God exist, and if so, what is God like? How are we supposed to answer these questions: can we rely on our sense experience, or do we believe that we have innate ideas? Does the physical world exist outside of our minds? In this course, we will read and discuss how philosophers from the Early Modern period answered these and other questions. We will read works by Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, Conway, Hume, Leibniz and Kant. These philosophers are interesting not only because they produced difficult and fascinating arguments in favor of radically different answers to these questions, but also because they were “systematic” thinkers. Our goal will be to get an understanding of the various philosophical “systems” constructed by these philosophers in an effort to help us answer deep questions about the nature of god, the possibility of miracles, the nature and limits of human knowledge, the nature of personal identity, the existence and nature of the material world and so on. This course is highly recommended not only for philosophy majors, but also for those interested in how thinkers from the past tried to answer the “big questions” that we ask ourselves today. This course presupposes no knowledge of the history of philosophy, though students would likely benefit from having taken Ancient Greek philosophy.

Texts

For non-majors, or majors in Philosophy that are not primarily interested in its history, I suggest getting the course readings from <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/texts> (Links to an external site.). You can click on the authors below to go straight to their author page.

Descartes (Links to an external site.)

Spinoza (Links to an external site.)

Locke (Links to an external site.)

Berkeley (Links to an external site.)

Conway (Links to an external site.)

Leibniz (Links to an external site.)

Kant (Links to an external site.)

For majors interested in further study in the history of philosophy, I suggest using the scholarly translations found in the [Past Masters \(Links to an external site.\)](#) database via the UF Library. Note: you will need to use a VPN to access this resource if you are off campus.

If you would like hard copies of the readings, I suggest (and will likely be using) the following editions.

Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Hackett edition. ISBN: 978-0872201927

Spinoza. *A Spinoza reader : the Ethics and other works*. ISBN: 978-0691000671

Locke. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Hackett edition. ISBN: 978-0872202160

Berkeley. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. Hackett edition. ISBN: 978-0915145393

Conway. *The Principles of the most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. Cambridge Texts. ISBN: 0521479045

Leibniz. *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*. Hackett edition. ISBN: 0872201325

Suggested Print Texts

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Course Goals

The goals of this course are

- To read, interpret, and critically discuss texts of systematic philosophy written by thinkers in the Early Modern period. The texts attempt to answer timeless questions about the nature of reality and our place in it. At the end of the course, I hope you will come to see the intrinsic interest in understanding the origins of your own philosophical worldview and of doing philosophy in general.

- To develop your ability to read, comprehend, and critically engage with texts concerning abstract philosophical questions written from a perspective that is likely remote from your own. Our course will emphasize the challenge and satisfaction of grappling with complex philosophical systems and arguments.
- To develop your ability to collaborate with peers on the difficult task of forming your own interpretation of a text and then assessing the merits of that text.
- To develop the skill of charitable interpretation so that you not only better understand the course material but also so that you can appreciate and productively challenge points of view you disagree with.

Achieving these Goals

- Students are expected to read assigned texts carefully before class and take notes of questions and comments you have about the text. If you would like supplemental reading material to read alongside the text, I am happy to provide it.
- I will give brief lectures to help explain the more complex material. However, most of class time will consist in my asking pointed questions about the text to help you guide your own thoughts.
- Sometimes I will ask small groups to work together to form an interpretation of an unfamiliar text to help develop the skill of constructing one's own interpretation of a text.
- When an objection to a philosopher's views is raised, I will do my best to respond "as" that philosopher. I will illustrate that though we may now reject these old beliefs, they have more merit than we might expect.
- When we find points of disagreement with a philosopher I will ask you to reflect on *why* your views are more plausible. For example, why is Descartes proof that mind and body are distinct unconvincing? What is better about *our* views on human consciousness?
- Exam questions will test not only your comprehension of the material discussed in class but also your ability to grasp the systematic points of view of many of these philosophers. For example, I might ask: how would Spinoza respond to the objection "God is not material because God does not have parts"? One should be able to answer this without our having discussed it explicitly in class.

Assignments and Grading

Three out-of-class essay exams (30 pts. each)

Out-of-class exams will consist of 3-5 questions that will require 3-5 double-spaced pages total of writing to answer. The exams will cover only historical figures that did not appear on a previous exam. Late exams will be docked 5 points for every day that they're late.

Guided Discussion Participation Over Zoom (5 pts.)

When we finish discussing a philosopher's work, students will enter break-out rooms with four or fewer of their peers to engage in philosophical discussion. These discussions will be guided by reflection on a short piece of writing, a short video, etc. and will involve completing a digital handout to be turned in at the end of the session. I will visit each room to check in with the groups. Credit will be awarded based on consistent, effortful participation. Missing more than 2 guided discussions will result in a 0 for this part of the grade.

Participation in Discussion Forum (5 pts.)

Our main focus in class and in the guided discussions will be understanding what each of these philosophers believed and why they believed it. However, many of us will want to discuss whether we agree with these philosophers and why. That's where the discussion forums come in. I will pin a thread about each philosopher, along with some questions for discussion. You are welcome to respond to those, ask your own questions, and respond to other people's questions and comments. This part of the grade will be determined holistically depending on the seriousness with which you discuss these philosophers in the forum. Those who receive the full ten points will post multiple questions, comments, and responses for each philosopher. I will join in too! Feel free to be as informal and open as you like.

Grading Scheme

Grade:	Range:
A	100 % to 94.0%
A-	< 94.0 % to 90.0%
B+	< 90.0 % to 87.0%
B	< 87.0 % to 84.0%
B-	< 84.0 % to 80.0%
C+	< 80.0 % to 77.0%
C	< 77.0 % to 74.0%
C-	< 74.0 % to 70.0%
D+	< 70.0 % to 67.0%
D	< 67.0 % to 64.0%
D-	< 64.0 % to 61.0%
F	< 61.0 % to 0.0%

Grading Policies

- All scores are rounded to the nearest half point.
- No extra credit will be assigned.
- I am happy to give extra feedback on work, but under no circumstances will I discuss grades after they have been assigned.
 - The one exception to this policy is cases of clerical error (bad math, wrongly recorded grades, etc.)

You may see how to convert your grade in this course to GPA points by seeing this site: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/#gradestext-otp1>

Course Policies

- During our Zoom sessions, you must have your video on unless you have pre-approval from me to leave it off. Cell phone use or use of the computer for anything other than participating in class is not permitted. Please make an effort to hold your meeting in a private area, free from distractions.
- Please note that my lectures will contain visual elements, as will the guided discussions. This means that calling in instead of using the Zoom software is not advised. All visual elements will be saved and uploaded to Canvas
- Because I cannot feasibly read drafts of exams for everyone, I will not read exams of papers for anyone.
- Class attendance is expected. Though there will be no grade penalty for missed classes, I will not go over the material twice for students with an unexcused absence. Class will be recorded, but I will only share the recordings with those who have excused absences. Excused absences are consistent with university policies in the undergraduate catalog (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>) and require appropriate documentation. Students who can demonstrate that they were unable to submit an assignment by the deadline due to an excused absence and who can provide appropriate documentation for the absence will be given a reasonable period of time to make up the late work.
- Discussions must be respectful. No one wants to feel uncomfortable or unsafe in a classroom. Any comment or action that discriminates or harasses on the grounds of sex, gender, race, sexual identity, nationality, ability, or any physical characteristics will not be tolerated. If you feel disrespected in any way during the class, please contact me immediately.
- Plagiarism and collaboration of any kind on papers or responses is strictly prohibited. You may not collaborate on any written assignment except as part of the peer review process. If your papers refer to or include work that is not your own, whether directly quoted, paraphrased, or even described in general terms, it must be clearly cited. I do not care which citation style you use, as long as I can check the source. If I discover any instance of plagiarism, you will receive a zero for that assignment.

- UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel.
- Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.
- Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/> ([Links to an external site.](#))
- Contact information for the Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.
- The writing studio is committed to helping University of Florida students meet their academic and professional goals by becoming better writers. Visit the writing studio online at <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or in 302 Tigert Hall for one-on-one consultations and workshops.
- Our class sessions will be audio-visually recorded. Students who participate with their camera engaged or utilize a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the "chat" feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live. The chat will not be recorded or shared. As in all courses, unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of recorded materials is prohibited.
- Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. [Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner.](#) Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. [Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students here.](#)
- If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms ([Click here for guidance from the CDC on symptoms of coronavirus](#)), please use the UF Health screening system and follow the instructions on whether you are able to attend class. [Click here for UF Health guidance on what to do if you have been exposed to or are experiencing Covid-19 symptoms.](#)

- Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work. Find more information in the university attendance policies.
- For technical issues, please contact the helpdesk at 352-392-4357 or visit their website.

Course Schedule – Subject to updates on a weekly basis

Please note: Reading for this course will often be demanding, even when the assignment is short. As well, some of the topics we will discuss are highly abstract. For that reason, I recommend reading each assignment before and after each class meeting. If you miss a class meeting, you should watch the recording of it.

8/31 – Introduction to the Class and the Time Period

Exam 1

9/2 – Descartes - *Meditations 1 and 2*

9/4 – Descartes - *Meditations 3*

9/7 – Labor Day, No Class

9/9 – Descartes' *Meditations 4*

9/11 – Descartes – *Meditations 5*

9/14 – Descartes – *Meditations 6*

9/16 – Guided Discussion, Descartes

9/18 – Selections from Correspondence between Elizabeth and Descartes (up to "The letters of xi.1643"-- I suggest finding your way with the earlymoderntexts version.)

9/21 - Spinoza – *Ethics* Part I up to 1P15

9/23 – Spinoza – *Ethics* Part I up to 1P15

9/25 - Spinoza – *Ethics* Part I 1P16 - end

9/28 - Spinoza – *Ethics* Part I 1P16 - end

9/30 - Spinoza – *Ethics* Part II up to 2P13

10/2 – Spinoza – Letters 12, 63-67 (269-73 in the *Reader*, Letter 12 on Past Masters)

10/5 - Spinoza – Letters 12, 63-67 (269-73 in the *Reader*, Letter 12 on Past Masters)

10/7 – Guided Discussion, Spinoza

Exam 2

10/9 –Locke’s *Essay* Dedication, Epistle to Reader, Book I, Chapter 1. Use Past Masters. *Do not use your book for these readings, since it is abridged.*

10/14 - Locke’s *Essay* Book II, Chapters 1, 2

10/16 - Locke’s *Essay* Book II, Chapters 6, 7, 12 – **Exam 1 Due**

10/19 - Locke’s *Essay* Book II, Chapter 23

10/21 – Locke’s *Essay* Book II, Chapter 27

10/23 – Guided Discussion, Locke

10/26 –Berkeley’s *Principles* Sections 1 - 15 (You should skip the introductory sections. These refer to sections in the main text.)

10/28 – Berkeley’s *Principles* Sections 16 – 33

10/30 - Conway – *Principles* – Chapters 1-2

11/2 - Conway – *Principles* – Chapter 4

11/4 – Conway – *Principles* – Chapter 5

11/6 – Conway – *Principles* – Chapter 6

11/9 – Guided Discussion, Conway

Exam 3 Material

11/11 - Veteran’s Day, No Class

11/13 – Leibniz - *Monadology* 1-30 (p. 68-72)

11/16 - Leibniz - *Monadology* 1-30 (p. 68-72)

11/18 - Leibniz - *Monadology* 31-60 (p. 72-77) – **Exam 2 Due**

11/20 - Leibniz - *Mondaology* 31-60 (p. 72-77)

11/23 – Guided Discussion, Leibniz

11/25 - Thanksgiving, No Class

11/27 - Thanksgiving, No Class

11/30 - Selections from *Critique of Pure Reason* (Introduction)

12/2 - Selections from *Critique of Pure Reason* (Paralogisms [1,4])

12/4 - Selections from *Critique of Pure Reason* (Antinomies [3,4])

12/7 – Guided Discussion - Kant

12/9 - Last Day of Class, Final Exam Review

Exam 3 Due during final exam period