

Syllabus

Modern Philosophy of Religion (PHH4420), Fall 2021

1. Course description

In this class, we will look at the approaches to religion taken by two prominent seventeenth-century philosophers, Thomas Hobbes and Benedict Spinoza. We will also look, more briefly, at the rather different approaches taken by Hobbes's contemporary René Descartes, and by the sixteenth-century Spanish theologian Francisco de Vitoria.

While considering the work of these philosophers, we will ask a range of questions in the philosophy of religion. For instance: Are there any good arguments for the existence of God? What should we think about reports of miracles and visions? If an eternal being exists, what is it like? What views about eternal beings count as theistic, and what as atheistic? If God exists, what is the metaphysical relationship between God and human beings? Is there a special relationship between religious knowledge and happiness or virtue? How should religion relate to politics and the structure of the state?

In thinking about these questions, our main goal will be to understand the philosophers' view and arguments. This project may well also help us as we think about the same questions today.

We will meet twice each week: period 7 (1:55-2:45pm) on Tuesdays, and periods 7 and 8 (1:55-3:50pm) on Thursdays.

The [Schedule \(https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/schedule\)](https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/schedule) of topics, readings, assignments, etc is available [on its own page \(https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/schedule\)](https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/schedule).

2. Contact information

Dr. Stewart Duncan

Email: sdrrd@ufl.edu

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:45–11:45am, and by appointment, in 330A Griffin-Floyd

Office phone: (352) 273-1808

Outside class and office hours, email will usually be the easiest way to communicate with me. In doing so, please use your ufl.edu email address.

3. Books and reading

(This explanation is organized following the structure of the class described on the [Schedule](https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/schedule) (<https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/schedule>) page. See also [A note on secondary literature](https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/a-note-on-secondary-literature). (<https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/a-note-on-secondary-literature>))

For the **Introduction** to the class, readings are linked from the [Schedule](https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/schedule) (<https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/schedule>) page. If you already have a copy of a modern translation of Descartes, feel free to use that instead.

For **section 1 on Hobbes**, our main text will be Hobbes's *Leviathan*. You need to be able to do the reading, and also to have a book you can refer to during our class discussions. While there are several editions of *Leviathan* available, I recommend this one:

[Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Edwin Curley \(Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994\). ISBN: 9780872201774](https://www.hackettpublishing.com/leviathan) (<https://www.hackettpublishing.com/leviathan>). List price: \$17.00

If you have questions about other editions, please ask. In addition, and while you do need a book in this case, electronic texts can also be useful. There is a freely available version of *Leviathan* at <https://englishphilosophy.org/texts/hobbes/> (<https://englishphilosophy.org/texts/hobbes/>). There is also a version in the 'British Philosophy: 1600-1900' section of the Past Masters database, to which the library subscribes.

For **section 2 on Vitoria**, we will read two of his works, 'On the American Indians' and 'On Civil Power'. These are both available (in English translation) in:

[Francisco de Vitoria, *Political Writings*, edited by Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance \(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991\). ISBN 9780521367141](https://www.cambridge.org/us/academic/subjects/politics-international-relations/texts-political-thought/vitoria-political-writings?format=PB) (<https://www.cambridge.org/us/academic/subjects/politics-international-relations/texts-political-thought/vitoria-political-writings?format=PB>). List price: \$31.99.

The library's physical copy of the book is on 24-hour reserve in Library West. There should in time be an e-book available through the library website, so you can easily access the parts you need, though that is not yet the case.

For **section 3 on Spinoza**, we will focus on his *Ethics*, but we will also read a short extract from his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and some chapters of his *Tractatus Theologico-*

Politicus (TTP). The easiest way to have access to all those materials in a good, modern translation is to use this book:

[Benedict de Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*, edited and translated by Edwin Curley \(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994\). ISBN: 9780691000671](https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691000671/a-spinoza-reader)

[\(https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691000671/a-spinoza-reader\)](https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691000671/a-spinoza-reader). List price: \$29.95

Curley's translation of the *Ethics* is also published, without the other material in the reader, in a Penguin paperback. There are also other good versions of the *Ethics* available, in particular the one translated by Shirley and published by Hackett, and the one translated by Silverthorne and Kisner and published by Cambridge. That Hackett volume also includes the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. If you already have a copy of one of these translations, it may well make sense to use it rather than the reader, but you will still need to get hold of the other Spinoza readings.

Spinoza's *Ethics* and his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* are in the 'Continental Rationalists' section of Past Masters: the [Ethics](#)

[\(http://library.nlx.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/xtf/view?](http://library.nlx.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.03.xml;chunk.id=div.spinoza.v1.109;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.spinoza.v1.109;brand=default)

[docId=rationalists/rationalists.03.xml;chunk.id=div.spinoza.v1.109;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.spinoza.v1.109;brand=default](http://library.nlx.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.03.xml;chunk.id=div.spinoza.v1.109;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.spinoza.v1.109;brand=default) is here and the [Treatise](#) [\(http://library.nlx.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/xtf/view?](http://library.nlx.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.03.xml;chunk.id=div.spinoza.v1.4;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.spinoza.v1.4;brand=default)

[docId=rationalists/rationalists.03.xml;chunk.id=div.spinoza.v1.4;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.spinoza.v1.4;brand=default](http://library.nlx.com.lp.hscl.ufl.edu/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.03.xml;chunk.id=div.spinoza.v1.4;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.spinoza.v1.4;brand=default) is here. There is a translation of the TTP by Shirley, also published by Hackett, and the library's copy of this is available on 24-hour loan in Library West.

4. Assessment

Graded assignments are described below. In addition, there is a **syllabus quiz** on Canvas, due by 5pm on Tuesday 8/31. This will not itself be worth any points towards your final grade. However, if you do not take the syllabus quiz, you will not receive a grade for any other assignment.

4.1 In-class quizzes (10% of course grade)

There will be 10–12 short quizzes in class during the semester. Their dates will not be announced in advance. A quiz might ask you to write a short paragraph in response to a reading, or to answer a couple of multiple choice questions.

Each quiz will count equally towards your overall quiz grade, except that I will drop your two lowest quiz grades. Makeup quizzes will only be given if you have good excuses. In appropriate cases (which is most of them) these reasons should be documented in writing. I will

excuse absences only for the acceptable reasons stated in the UF attendance policy (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx> (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>)).

If you arrive too late for a quiz, you may not take it. If you leave class before the end, but after the quiz, you will receive a grade of zero for that quiz.

4.2 Short paper (20% of course grade)

This assignment will be a paper of no more than 1500 words. This will be due by the start of class (1:55pm) on Thursday 9/30, the last day of the Hobbes section on the [Schedule](https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/schedule) (<https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/schedule>). Detailed assignment instructions will be available two weeks before the deadline. All papers must be submitted electronically on Canvas and on paper at the start of class.

Any papers submitted late without a good excuse will be penalized. Papers submitted on the deadline day, but after the appropriate time, and papers submitted the next day, will be penalized three points (on a 100-point scale). Papers submitted after that will be penalized a further three points for each extra day they're late. No papers will be accepted after the end of classes (more precisely, after 5:00pm on Wednesday 12/8). If you fail to submit a paper, you will receive a grade of zero for it.

Information on the standards for grading papers is available on Canvas: [Paper grading guide](https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/paper-grading-guide) (<https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/paper-grading-guide>).

4.3 In-class exam (20% of course grade)

There will be an in-class exam on Tuesday October 19th. You will have to answer questions about both Hobbes and Vitoria. More details about the exam will be available on Canvas on Tuesday October 5th.

4.4 Final paper and preparatory assignments (50% of course grade)

These assignments will count together for 50% of your course grade: the proposal and presentation will each count for 5%, and the paper itself for 40%.

Paper proposal (5% of course grade)

In your proposal, you will describe the project that you will tackle in your final paper. (The paper assignment itself is described below.) Proposals should be between 500 and 1000 words long. Detailed instructions for the proposal assignment will be available on Canvas on

Tuesday 10/5. The proposal itself is due by 1:55pm on Thursday 11/4. Late proposals will not be accepted without an extension. Otherwise, if you fail to submit the proposal on time, you will receive a grade of zero for it.

Presentation (5% of course grade)

The last three class meetings (four class periods) of the semester will be devoted to these presentations. Those are the meetings on 11/30, 12/2, and 12/7. You will each give a brief presentation about your paper project to the class, after which there will be time for discussion and feedback. Detailed instructions for this assignment, as well as grading information, will be available on Canvas on 11/4.

Final paper (40% of course grade)

A paper of 2700-3000 words is due by 5pm on Wednesday 12/15 (the Wednesday of final exam week). The deadline gives everyone at least one more week to work on their paper after making their presentation to the class.

This should be based on the proposal above. If you wish to change your topic significantly, you must clear this with me in advance.

All paper submission will be done on Canvas. No late papers will be accepted, except in the unusual circumstances that justify the award of an Incomplete grade for the class (see section 4.6 below). Otherwise, if you fail to submit your final paper, you will receive a grade of zero for it.

Information on the standards for grading papers is available on Canvas: [Paper grading guide \(https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/paper-grading-guide\)](https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/paper-grading-guide).

More detailed instructions for the paper will be available on Canvas on Tuesday 10/5, at the same time as the instructions for the proposal.

4.5 Numerical grades and letter grades

All assignments will be given a numerical grade. At the end of the semester, your overall numerical grade will be calculated, based on your grades for and the relative weights of the assignments. This numerical grade will be converted to a letter grade using the following scale.

Numerical grade (n)	Letter grade	GPA*
00 0 < n <		

90.0 ≤ n < 100	A	4.0
86.7 ≤ n < 90.0	A-	3.67
83.3 ≤ n < 86.7	B+	3.33
80.0 ≤ n < 83.3	B	3.0
76.7 ≤ n < 80.0	B-	2.67
73.3 ≤ n < 76.7	C+	2.33
70.00 ≤ n < 73.3	C	2.0
66.7 ≤ n < 70.0	C-	1.67
63.3 ≤ n < 66.7	D+	1.33
60.0 ≤ n < 63.3	D	1.0
56.7 ≤ n < 60.0	D-	0.67
0 ≤ n < 56.7	E	0

* Current UF policies for assigning grade points may be found at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx> (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>).

4.6 Incomplete grades

Grades of I (Incomplete) may only be assigned in certain special circumstances. These are described in the CLAS Incomplete Grade Contract, which can be found at <https://www.advising.ufl.edu/academicinfo/clas-policiesprocedures/incomplete-grades/> (<https://www.advising.ufl.edu/academicinfo/clas-policiesprocedures/incomplete-grades/>).

5. Academic honesty

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 honesty and integrity by abiding by the Student 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://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/> [_ \(https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/\)](https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-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. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

You should expect the minimum penalty for academic dishonesty to be a grade of E for the class (not just the assignment). All incidents of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean of Students Office. Repeat offenders may be penalized by suspension or expulsion from the university.

You should already have a good idea of what constitutes plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. I will also review this when handing out paper assignments. If you have any questions about this, ask me before it's too late.

All papers submitted for the course will be checked using turnitin.com [_ \(http://turnitin.com\)](http://turnitin.com).

6. Schedule

See the separate [Schedule page \(https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/schedule\)](https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/schedule)

7. Other policies and information

7.1 Accommodations for students with disabilities

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/get-started/> [_ \(https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/\)](https://disability.ufl.edu/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

as early as possible in the semester.

7.2 Classroom behavior

Please remember that it is not enough to be merely physically present in class. You are expected to do all assigned reading in advance—which is not to say you should not revisit it again afterwards. You should also be paying attention, taking notes as appropriate, and participating in class discussions.

My aim is to have a classroom atmosphere that is both serious and relaxed. Things will go well if you come to class prepared, avoid behavior that is rude or distracts others, and remember to treat others with respect in classroom discussions.

7.3 Use of electronic devices

Use of laptops, phones, and other electronic devices in class is only allowed in two circumstances.

- You may use an electronic device to make a permitted recording. If you plan to do this, be sure to review the information about UF policy (and related law) on the [Permitted recording](https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/permitted-recording) (<https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/433461/pages/permitted-recording>) page.
- You may only use electronic devices for other purposes if you have my explicit written permission. If you believe that I ought to allow you to use a laptop in class for purposes other than recording (e.g., to take notes) please contact me.

Anyone violating this policy may be asked to leave class.

7.4 Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available

at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/> (<https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>). 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 <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/> (https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__ufl.bluera.com_ufl_&d=DwMFAg&c=sJ6xIWYx-zLMB3EPkvcnVg&r=y2HjEMjRMHJhfdvLrqJZIYczRsfp5e4TfQjHuc5rVHg&m=WXko6OK_Ha6T00ZVAsEaS_h99qRXHOgMNFRywCoehRho&s=itVU46DDJnlg4CW6efJOOLgPjdzsPvCghyfzJoFONs&e=)).

Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students

at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/> (<https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>).

7.5 Other contact information

Counseling and Wellness Center: <https://counseling.ufl.edu> [_ \(https://counseling.ufl.edu\)_](https://counseling.ufl.edu), 392-1575

University Police Department: 392-1111, or 911 for emergencies.

Schedule

Detailed reading assignments, and what we discuss on each day, may change as the semester goes on. The general pattern, and the assignment due dates, will not change unless something big happens.

INTRODUCTION

Tuesday 8/24. Introduction to the class.

Thursday 8/26. Topic: Themes from Descartes. We will look at the arguments for the existence of God in the Third and Fifth Meditations, the discussion of the will in the Fourth Meditation, and the discussion of the distinction between mind and body in the Sixth. Reading: If you've read the *Meditations* before, review the arguments of those four meditations. If you haven't read them before, then ideally you would read the whole text. The text of the *Meditations* is available at

[http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?](http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.3;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d)

[docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.3;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d](http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.3;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d)
[escartes.v2.3;brand=default](http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.3;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d) [_\(http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?](http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.3;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d)

[docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.3;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d](http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.3;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d)
[brand=default\)](http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.3;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d). (To access that text, you will need to be on the campus network, or using the

VPN.)

Tuesday 8/31. Topic: Hobbes against Descartes. Reading: Hobbes's Objections to Descartes's *Meditations*, and Descartes' replies to those Objections. These are the Third Set of Objections to the *Meditations*, which were published with them. The text is available on the Past Masters database, at [http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?](http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.20;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d)

[docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.20;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.](http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.20;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d)
[descartes.v2.14;brand=default](http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.20;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d) [_\(http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?](http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.20;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d)

[docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.20;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d](http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.20;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d)
[14;brand=default\)](http://library.nlx.com/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.20;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.d). (To access that text, you will need to be on the campus network, or using the

VPN.)

SECTION 1: HOBBS

Thursday 9/2. Topic: human beings. Reading: *Leviathan*, chapters 1-11.

Tuesday 9/7. Topic: religion. Reading: *Leviathan*, chapter 12.

Thursday 9/9. Topic: basic political theory. Reading: *Leviathan*, chapters 13-16.

Tuesday 9/14. Topic: government and freedom. Reading: *Leviathan*, chapters 17-21.

Thursday 9/16. Topic: the kingdom of God by nature and the principles of Christian politics.
Reading: *Leviathan*, chapters 31-2. Short paper topics available.

Tuesday 9/21. Topic: spirits and miracles. Reading: *Leviathan*, chapters 34 and 37.

Thursday 9/23. Topic: salvation, churches, and bishops. Reading: *Leviathan*, chapters 38, 39, 42, and 43.

Tuesday 9/28. Topic: the influence of philosophy on religion. Reading: *Leviathan*, chapter 46.

Thursday 9/30. Topic: Hobbes's later thoughts. Reading: *Leviathan*, A Review and Conclusion and the Latin Appendix. **Short paper due.**

SECTION 2: VITORIA

Tuesday 10/5. This week we will focus on Vitoria's 'On the American Indians'. Though we will spread our discussion over two days, you should read as much of it as possible before Tuesday's class, and certainly to the end of Question 2 on p.277 in the Pagden and Lawrance translation. It may also be useful to look at the SEP entry on the [School of Salamanca](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/school-salamanca/) (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/school-salamanca/>).

- On 10/5, I will also release on Canvas (1) details of the in-class exam on 10/19, (2) details of the paper proposal assignment, and (3) details of the final paper assignment

Thursday 10/7. Continued discussion of 'On the American Indians'.

Tuesday 10/12. This week we will focus on Vitoria's 'On Civil Power'.

Thursday 10/14. Continued discussion of 'On Civil Power'.

IN-CLASS EXAM

Tuesday 10/19 **In-class exam**

SECTION 3: SPINOZA

(The general outline of the Spinoza section is sketched here. More detailed reading assignments will be provided closer to the time.)

Thursday 10/21. Topic: Spinoza on religion. Reading: TTP extracts from reader

Tuesday 10/26. Introduction to Spinoza's metaphysics and epistemology. Reading: TIE extract from reader, appendix to Part 1 of the *Ethics*.

Thursday 10/28. *Ethics*, part 1.

Tuesday 11/2. *Ethics*, part 2, up to the scholium to proposition 13.

Thursday 11/4. *Ethics* part 3. **Paper proposal due.** Presentation instructions and grading information available on Canvas.

Tuesday 11/9. *Ethics* part 4.

Tuesday 11/16. *Ethics* part 4.

Thursday 11/18. *Ethics* part 5.

Tuesday 11/23. Final class on Spinoza.

PAPER PRESENTATIONS

Tuesday 11/30.

Thursday 12/2.

Tuesday 12/7.

EXAM WEEK

The **final paper** is due on Wednesday 12/15 (the Wednesday of exam week) by 5:00pm.