

PHH 3400: Modern Philosophy (syllabus v1.0)

Spring 2026 / MWF 11:45am–12:35pm / MAT 117

Instructor: Dr. Chuck Goldhaber

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Office Hours: W 3:00–5:00pm

Office: FLO 320

Course Description

The early modern era was an exciting time in the history of European thought. Sudden developments in the natural sciences overturned ancient theories of nature and our place in it, calling for radically new approaches. The intellectual atmosphere was full of optimism about rejecting authority and prejudice, and about thinking through things for oneself. Carried by this enthusiasm, philosophers developed novel and competing theories about the nature of mind, matter, morals, and much more. They did so in systematic ways, helping to reveal important links between philosophy's many topics.

This course introduces you to the history of early modern European philosophy, focusing on four philosophers from that era: René Descartes, Elisabeth of Bohemia, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and David Hume. The selection of readings balances exposure to the traditional philosophical canon with a new narratives approach, highlighting women philosophers and topics in social and practical philosophy. Through interpretation of historical texts, you will develop your writing and argumentative skills, as well as form and defend views on central philosophical topics.

Course Goals

By the end of the term, you will be able to...

- share, explain, and defend your ideas in group discussion.
- argue and write clearly, succinctly, and persuasively.
- understand the role of history in shaping early modern ideas, as well as our own.
- think both abstractly and concretely about central philosophical topics, including the nature of mind and body, God, causation, freedom, skepticism, prejudice, and feminism.

Course Requirements

% of course grade

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| – Up to 50 pages per week of dense philosophical reading | |
| – Regular participation in class discussion | 15% |
| – A short (“meditation”) writing exercise (450–900 words) | 10% |
| – Two papers (900–1200 words) on a selection of provided topics | each 25% |
| – A final exam | 25% |
| – An optional reflection (450–900 words) on attending a conference | 5% EC |

Required Texts (total \$49.75)

- Descartes, René. *Meditations on First Philosophy: with Selections from the Objections and Replies*. 1641/2008. Trans. Michael Moriarty. Oxford World Classics. (ISBN: 0192806963, \$11.95).
 - Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. *Selected Works*. 2016. Ed. Anna More. Trans. Edith Grossman. Norton Critical Editions. (ISBN: 039392016X, \$20.85).
 - Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. 1748/2008. Ed. Peter Millican. Oxford World Classics. (ISBN: 0199549907, \$16.95).
 - All other required texts are available on [Canvas](#). = **C**
- (Free audiobooks: Descartes’s *Meditations* and Hume’s *Enquiry*)

Recommended Texts

- Hatfield, Gary. *The Routledge Guidebook to Descartes’ Meditations*. 2003. Routledge. (ISBN: 0415672767).
 - Eds. Detlefsen, Karen and Lisa Shapiro. *The Routledge Handbook of Women and Early Modern European Philosophy*. 2023. Routledge. (ISBN: 113821275X).
 - Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. 1740/2023. Ed. Angela Coventry. Broadview Press. (ISBN: 1554811171). [Available at <https://davidhume.org/> = **DH**]
 - Stroud, Barry. *Hume*. 1981. Routledge. (ISBN: 0415036879).
- (Note: All recommended texts are available online for free through the UF Library.)

Readings

In the schedule below, readings are listed underneath the dates by which they must be read. All readings are dense and tough, and each page may take more than twice as long to read as a typical page from a non-philosophy course. The early modern style of course texts may make them take longer to read than texts from other philosophy courses. Make sure you budget enough time to read them carefully, and several times.

You must acquire physical copies of all the required books. The exact editions listed above are highly recommended. Try searching by ISBN, if buying online. If you already own or want to use other editions, please show them to me, so that I can approve of them. Reserve copies of all books are available at West Library circulation.

Always bring the week’s required reading to class. Some required and optional readings are available on [Canvas](#), and are marked ‘**C**’. The recommended commentaries (see above) are not on [Canvas](#), but copies are available at the library (both online and physical access). You can find links to the relevant library entries on this syllabus. Optional readings are clearly marked ‘Optional.’

Participation

Attendance is mandatory, but it alone will not secure you a good participation grade. Regular verbal participation in group discussions is required for that. This can take the form of asking a question, answering a question, sharing what you find interesting or strange about a text or topic, responding to a classmate, or reading a passage out loud. Over time, you will need to put forward, explain, and defend your own viewpoints on philosophical issues and your own readings of course texts. Doing so is crucial for developing philosophical reasoning skills, which are very closely related to conversational and debate skills. If you are feeling shy in class, come to office hours, and let's start talking there. Now is the time to confront any shyness and get comfortable taking part in the enjoyable, collaborative process of thinking together as a group.

Writing Assignments

The meditation exercise (450–900 words) and two papers (900–1200 words) are due 1/30, 3/9, and 4/24 by 9:00pm sharp. They must be uploaded *as PDF files* through the course's [Canvas](#) site. Each writing assignment must address one of several provided topics concerning the course texts. These will be distributed by 1/21, 2/16, and 4/3. You may write on your own topic for the papers, but only if you submit the topic to me for approval at least a week in advance of the deadline *and* get my written approval.

Papers will be evaluated with regard to their accuracy, clarity, concision, rigor, and persuasiveness. They must use quotes and page citations when presenting the views or arguments from the course readings. Each paper must evaluate these views or arguments through use of objections and replies. More details to follow when papers are assigned.

I encourage everyone to take advantage of UF's Writing Studio (2215 Turlington Hall), which offers students help with all parts of the writing process. You can make an appointment with a writing consultant online, or come for a drop-in consultation 2–4pm most weekdays. For more information, see: <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

Final Exam

The final exam (4/29, 10am–noon, in our normal classroom) will include true/false and essay questions. Essay questions will be graded according to accuracy, cogency, persuasiveness, and completeness. Possible essay questions will be provided in advance.

The will be open note/text. You can bring the course books, printouts of materials from the course [Canvas](#) site, course handouts, and any physical notes written by you alone (handwritten or printed).

You will *not* have access to any electronic devices during the exam. You must bring in your own pens and blue books. These are available at the UF Bookstore.

Hume and Hellenism Conference and Extra Credit

Partway through the term, UF will be hosting a conference on the Hellenistic influences on David Hume's thought (Fri/Sat, 2/20–21). All students in the course are warmly invited to participate in the conference. For the complete program, click [here](#).

We'll have a full unit on Hume's famous *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* at the end of the course. But, in preparation for the conference, students are encouraged to read four short essays in which Hume impersonates characters inspired by the sects of Hellenistic philosophy: "The Epicurean" "The Stoic," "The Platonist," and "The Sceptic" (about 40 pages altogether). If there is sufficient student interest, we'll have an optional evening class to discuss these four essays during the week leading up to the conference (likely Wednesday, 2/18).

Students who read these four essays and attend two or more of the conference's sessions are invited to write an optional extra credit "Conference Reflection" (450–900 words, due 3/2 by 9pm) on their experience at the conference. Reflections should address the following questions: What sessions did you go to? What were they about? What did you learn about Hume's essays and/or about the practice of professional philosophy? Conference reflections can earn extra credit, up to 5% of the course grade.

Contacting Me

The best way to contact me outside of class or OH is via email (cgoldhaber@ufl.edu). I aim to answer emails within two business days. You are welcome to send a reminder email, if you have not heard back within that span. *Please do not message me through Canvas, as I do not monitor my Canvas mailbox.*

Grading Scale

Numerical and letter grades use the following equivalences. I sometimes boost borderline final grades for students who show consistent improvement and participation all term.

		87–89%	B+	77–79%	C+	67–69%	D+	<60	E
93–100%	A	83–86%	B	73–76%	C	63–66%	D		
90–92%	A–	80–82%	B–	70–72%	C–	60–62%	D–		

For more information, including GPA equivalents, see UF's Grades and Grading Policies: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

Attendance and Late Policies

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For general information on those policies and resources for students, please see the "Academic Policies & Resources" page at <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>.

Late essays will drop a third of a letter grade per each 24 hours late (e.g., A– to B+).

I understand that extenuating circumstances may arise. If you need an extension for a valid (e.g., medical) reason, please reach out at least 48 hours before the deadline.

Accommodations

UF is committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body and provides equitable access to students with disabilities. If you have (or think you may have) a disability related to mental health, chronic health, neurological state, and/or physical condition, please contact the Disability Resource Center (in person in Reid Hall or online at <https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>). It is never too late to request accommodations—our bodies and circumstances are continuously changing. All inquiries are handled in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Students who have already been approved to receive academic accommodations and want to use these accommodations in this course should share their accommodation letter with me *as soon as possible*. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice in order to successfully implement.

Academic Integrity

You may not use ChatGPT or any other LLMs or AI tools for this course. The course's aim to teach originality and self-driven interpretation and critical thinking skills would be negatively impacted by the use of such tools.

This course has a zero-tolerance policy for academic dishonesty. Any form of academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism, or use of AI tools, will be reported to the Student Conduct & Conflict Resolution committee (see <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/>), which may impose sanctions up to and including expulsion from the university. If cases of suspected academic dishonesty arise, I will advocate for failure in the course in communications with SCCR. You are responsible for knowing what counts as academic dishonesty. Please consult UF's Student Honor Code: <https://policy.ufl.edu/regulation/4-040/>

To ensure a safe and constructive learning environment for all, please join me in the commitment to respect everyone's identities and rights, regardless of difference.

Prohibitions

I very strongly discourage the use of laptops and tablets in class. If you plan to use a laptop or tablet in class, *you must discuss your reasons with me in person*. Please disconnect from the internet and other potential distractions, if you do opt to use them.

Cell phones must be silenced for the duration of class. *Absolutely no cell phones may be used in the classroom, even before/after class.* Please put cell phones away and out of sight as soon as you enter the classroom. Let's make the classroom a space to 'disconnect' from external pressures, distractions, and noise—a rare privilege these days!

No eating or chewing gum is allowed in the classroom.

Course 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/>.

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.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Course Schedule

Meeting 1 (1/12) – Introduction

- No reading

— Unit I: Descartes —

Meeting 2 (1/14) – Doubting everything

- Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Letter of Dedication pp. 2–6
- Descartes, First Meditation pp. 13–17
- Optional: Editor’s Introduction to the *Meditations* pp. ix–xl
- Optional: Hatfield, Ch. 3 [UF Lib](#)

Meeting 3 (1/16) – Review and discussion

- Reread Letter of Dedication and First Meditation

1/19 – MLK Day, no class

Meeting 4 (1/21) – Undeniably, I exist

- Descartes, Second Meditation, first half pp. 17–21
- Optional: Hatfield, Ch. 4 [UF Lib](#)

Meeting 5 (1/23) – What a thinking thing is

- Descartes, Second Meditation, second half pp. 21–24

Meeting 6 (1/26) – Searching within for the outside

- Descartes, Third Meditation pp. 25–37

Meeting 7 (1/28) – Proving that God exists

- Reread Third Meditation
- Descartes, Preface to the Reader pp. 7–9
- Descartes, Synopsis of the Six Following Meditations pp. 10–12
- Optional: Hatfield, Ch. 5 [UF Lib](#)

Meeting 8 (1/30) – Review and discussion

- Reread first, second, and third Meditations

*****1/30 – Meditation exercise due at 9pm*****

Meeting 9 (2/2) – Error is our fault, not God's

- Descartes, Fourth Meditation pp. 38–45
- Optional: Hatfield, Ch. 6 [UF Lib](#)

Meeting 10 (2/4) – Review and discussion

- Reread Fourth Meditation

Meeting 11 (2/6) – Proof and clarity

- Descartes, Fifth Meditation pp. 45–51
- Optional: Hatfield, Ch. 7 [UF Lib](#)

Meeting 12 (2/9) – A thinking thing... with a body?

- Descartes, Sixth Meditation, first half pp. 51–58
- Optional: Hatfield, Ch. 8 [UF Lib](#)

Meeting 13 (2/11) – Restoring faith in the senses

- Descartes, Sixth Meditation, second half pp. 58–64
- Optional: Alison Simmons, “Re-Humanizing Descartes” C

Meeting 14 (2/13) – Review and discussion

- Reread fourth, fifth, and sixth Meditations

— Unit II: Elisabeth —

Meeting 15 (2/16) – Letters on mind-body interaction

- Elisabeth of Bohemia, 1643 correspondence with Descartes C: pp. 61–73

Meeting 16 (2/18) – Does happiness depend on the will alone?

- Elisabeth, 1645 correspondence with Descartes (through 13 Sept) C: pp. 85–111
- Optional: Lisa Shapiro, “Princess Elizabeth and Descartes: The Union of Soul and Body and the Practice of Philosophy” C

Optional Evening Class (2/18) – Hume’s Four Essays on Happiness

*** *Time and Location TBA* ***

- David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, “The Epicurean,” “The Stoic,” “The Platonist,” and “The Sceptic” C: pp. 138–79
- Optional: Colin Heydt, “Relations of Literary Form and Philosophical Purpose in Hume’s Four Essays on Happiness” C

2/20 – Hume and Hellenism Conference, no class

Conference Schedule (in Reitz Union)

Friday, 2/20	Saturday, 2/21
10:00–11:30: Hume’s Four Essays	10:15–11:45 Hume and Stoicism
12:30–2:00 Hume and Epicureanism	1:00–2:30 Hume and Platonism
2:30–4:00 Politics in Hume’s Essays	3:00–5:30 Hume and Skepticism

Meeting 17 (2/23) – Living without regret

- Elisabeth, rest of 1645 correspondence with Descartes

C: pp. 111–32

Meeting 18 (2/25) – Review and discussion

- Reread Elisabeth-Descartes correspondence

— Unit III: Sor Juana —

Meeting 19 (2/27) – The accused rhetorician

- Bishop of Puebla, *A Letter from Sor Filotea to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* pp. 83–90
- Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Response of the Poet to the Very Eminent Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, Opening and Part I pp. 90–101
- Optional: Editor’s Introduction to Sor Juana’s *Selected Works* pp. xi–xx

Meeting 20 (3/2) – For the love of learning!

- Sor Juana, *Response of the Poet*, Parts II–III pp. 102–25
- Optional: Adriana Clavel-Vázquez and Sergio Gallegos Ordorica, “The Socratic Pedagogy of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz” (in *Handbook*) [UF Lib](#)

3/2 – Optional Conference Reflection due at 9pm

Meeting 21 (3/4) – Review and discussion

- Reread Sor Juana’s *Response of the Poet*

3/6 – No class; use the time to work on your first papers

3/9 – No class; first paper due at 9pm

Meeting 22 (3/11) – The melancholic’s ballad

- Sor Juana, “Let us pretend I am happy” (Ballad 2) pp. 5–9
- Optional: Sor Juana, “Finjamos que soy feliz” (Bilingual Spanish-English) [C](#)
- Optional: Lisa Shapiro, “Sor Juana’s ‘Let us pretend I am happy’” [C](#)

Meeting 23 (3/13) – Hypocrisy and wit

- Sor Juana, “O foolish men who accuse” (Redondilla 92) pp. 20–22
- Sor Juana, “Not having an upright father” (Epigram 95) p. 24
- Sor Juana, “O World, why do you wish to persecute me?” (Sonnet 146) p. 34
- Optional: Sor Juana, Spanish-language poems [C](#)

3/14–22 – Spring Break, no class

— Unit IV: Hume —

Meeting 24 (3/23) – Two kinds of philosophy

- David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Adv., §I pp. 1–11
- Optional: Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Introduction [DH](#)
- Optional: Stroud, Ch. 1 [UF Lib](#)

Meeting 25 (3/25) – The origin of our ideas

- Hume, *EHU*, §§II–III pp. 12–17
- Optional: Hume, *Treatise*, 1.1.1–3 [DH](#)
- Optional: Stroud, Ch. 2 [UF Lib](#)

Meeting 26 (3/27) – Review and discussion

- Reread *EHU*, §§I–III

Meeting 27 (3/30) – Hume’s fork

- Hume, *EHU*, §IV, Part I pp. 18–23

Meeting 28 (4/1) – Causal reasoning is not based in reason

- Hume, *EHU*, §IV, Part II pp. 23–29
- Optional: Hume, *Treatise*, 1.3.6 [DH](#)
- Optional: Stroud, Ch. 3 [UF Lib](#)

Meeting 29 (4/3) – Review and discussion

- Reread *EHU*, §IV

Meeting 30 (4/6) – Causal reasoning is based in custom

- Hume, *EHU*, §V, Part I pp. 30–34
- Optional: Stroud, Ch. 4 [UF Lib](#)

Meeting 31 (4/8) – Reasoning like animals!

- Hume, *EHU*, §V, Part II pp. 34–40
- Hume, *EHU*, §IX pp. 76–78
- Optional: Hume, *Treatise*, 1.3.7, 1.3.16 [DH](#)

Meeting 32 (4/10) – Review and discussion

- Reread *EHU*, §§V and IX

Meeting 33 (4/13) – The idea of necessary connexion

- Hume, *EHU*, §VII, Part I pp. 44–53
- Optional: Hume, *Treatise*, 1.3.14 [DH](#)

Meeting 34 (4/15) – Hume’s definitions of *cause*

- Hume, *EHU*, §VII, Part II pp. 53–57

Meeting 35 (4/17) – Review and discussion

- Reread *EHU*, §VII

Meeting 36 (4/20) – Kinds of skepticism, and what they’re good for

- Hume, *EHU*, §XII pp. 109–20
- Optional: Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.7 [DH](#)

Meeting 37 (4/22) – Final exam review session

- No new reading, but come in with questions about the possible essay questions!

*****4/24 – Second paper due at 9pm*****

*****4/29 – Final exam 10:00am-noon*****