

PHH 3400 MODERN PHILOSOPHY

3.0 credits

Spring 2026 Class # 25830

For information on UF-wide academic policies regarding attendance, honesty, and other matters, as well as several academic and health and wellness resources, see <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>.

I. Basic Information

Instructor

Jon Rick

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Office: 310 Griffin-Floyd Hall

Phone: 352-392-2084

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10-12, or by appointment

Meetings

Everyone in the class meets together on Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays.

Class #	Class Meetings
25830	MWF, Period 7, 1:55 – 2:45 Mattherly Hall (MAT) 0117

Customized Description

Modern Philosophy is an introduction to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European philosophy. In the first half of the term, we will focus on Early Modern-to-Modern theories of metaphysics and epistemology. In the second half of the term, we will turn our attention towards Early Modern-to-Modern theories of ethics and political philosophy. The thinkers we will cover will include René Descartes, Elisabeth of Bohemia, Baruch Spinoza, Francis Bacon, Pierre Gassendi, Galileo Galilei, John Locke, David Hume, and Lady Mary Shepherd.

Course Materials

No purchase of books is necessary for this course. All assigned readings will be available through the class Canvas page. Students are required to bring a copy of the day's assigned reading to each class and discussion section meeting; failure to do so will result in loss of participation points. A full list of the required readings for this course can be found in the Course Schedule, below.

Materials Fee

N/A

II. Course Goals/Objectives & Reading/Writing Recommendations

PHH 3400 Course Goals/Objectives

This course is designed to introduce students to the practice of philosophy through the study of central questions and arguments, as represented by a selection of philosophical readings from the Modern Era. Beyond acquiring a grasp of the substantive theories of several Modern Philosophers, students will learn some of the basic principles of good reasoning, including how to understand arguments, represent them clearly and fairly, and evaluate them for cogency. Students will also learn to develop their own arguments and views regarding the philosophical topics studied in the course in a compelling fashion. In these ways the course aims to develop students' own reasoning and communication skills in ways that will be useful in any further study of philosophy they undertake and beyond the bounds of philosophy itself.

PHH 3400 Student Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate their competencies in understanding and assessing the philosophical theories studied in the course via written and oral assignments (detailed below), in which they will be assessed for their achievement of the following Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

- (i) Understand and apply basic concepts of good reasoning
- (ii) Accurately and fairly describe and explain philosophical views represented in works assigned for the course
- (iii) Formulate arguments of their own while anticipating possible lines of objections and responding in a conscientious fashion
- (iv) Speak and write clearly and persuasively about abstract and challenging matters of the sort raised by the philosophical material in the course.

In this class, success in achieving the relevant SLOs is assessed by coursework as indicated below.

- Success with SLO (i) is assessed through Assessments 2-5
- Success with SLO (ii) is assessed through Assessments 2-5
- Success with SLO (iii) is assessed through Assessments 2-5
- Success with SLO (iv) is assessed through Assessments 1-5

PHH 3400 Reading and Writing Recommendations

For this course, I recommend you use the free online version of the first edition of Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*. Here is the link: <http://www.bartleby.com/141>

UF has a dedicated writing program with a "writing studio" that is intended to provide students with several resources for improving their writing, including style guides, access to tutors, and more. See <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

Please note that what makes for a good paper in philosophy is not always the same thing as what makes for a good paper in other disciplines. If you get help from a tutor for written work in philosophy, you should be sure to provide the tutor with appropriate information about what is expected in philosophy. This could be a sample of a good philosophy paper, a guide for writing in philosophy, or other resources that might be made available to you in this class.

A note on citation. There are several different, equally acceptable ways of providing reference information. A good general resource is a page on citation made available by the UF libraries: <https://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/libraryresearch/cittingsources>. While any of the main citation styles is acceptable, Chicago Style is the one that is most common in Philosophy and so the style recommended in this course.

III. Grade Determination and Policies

Grade Determination

Your course grade is determined by the following factors:

Assessment #1 – Class Attendance	5%
Assessment #2 – Verbal Participation	10%
Assessment #3 – In-Class Writing	35%
Assignment #4 – Essay 1	20%
Assignment #5 – Essay 2	30%

Grading Scale

In this class, we will use the following grade scale:

Grading Scale		
Letter	4 pt. scale	100 pt. scale
A	4.0 (3.835-4.0)	94-100
A-	3.67 (3.495-3.834)	90-93
B+	3.33 (3.165-3.494)	87-89
B	3.0 (2.835-3.164)	84-86
B-	2.67 (2.495-2.834)	80-83
C+	2.33 (2.165-2.494)	77-79
C	2.0 (1.835-2.164)	74-76
C-	1.67 (1.495-1.834)	70-73
D+	1.33 (1.165-1.494)	67-69
D	1.0 (0.835-1.164)	64-66
D-	0.67 (0.495-0.834)	60-63
E	0.0 (0.0-0.494)	0-59

IV. Assessments and Expectations

General expectations

As a student in this class, you are expected to

- be familiar with all policies and requirements as set out in the course syllabus;
- attend and participate in all class sessions (unless excused for a legitimate reason);
- be aware of all deadlines throughout the semester;
- stay informed by keeping up with all announcements made in class and via Canvas;
- keep up with reading assignments and hand in work on time;
- maintain academic integrity in all of your work—or risk failing the entire course;
- be respectful of your classmates, even when engaged in lively critical dialogue with them;
- inform the instructor promptly of any emergencies or problems that will affect your ability to do what is needed in the course ask questions and seek help when you need it.

Graded Assessments

Assessment #1 – Class Attendance

You will be expected to attend all class meetings. For each class meeting missed, without a legitimate, UF sanctioned excuse, you will lose 5 points – each student starts with 100 out of a possible 100 points. **Class Attendance is worth 5% of the Total Course Grade.**

Assessment #2 – Verbal Participation

You will be expected to have read and to be prepared to discuss the texts assigned for each class meeting. Verbal participation will be assessed in terms of questions, comments, and contributions to in-class group assignments that show engagement with the readings assigned for that class meeting. This participation grade can be augmented by participating in Office Hours. Attendance is a separate grade, and mere attendance without verbally participating does not count towards the verbal participation grade. This participation grade will be updated weekly in Canvas – See the rubric in Appendix II below. **Verbal Participation is worth 10% of the Total Course Grade.**

Assessment #3 – In-Class Writing Assignments

You will be expected to complete at least 7 In-Class Writing assignments. These will involve you writing responses to questions that are given in class. The course schedule below details the dates for these assignments. If changes are made to the course schedule you will be alerted via Canvas with sufficient warning. Accommodations will be granted for all legitimate, UF sanctioned requests. These In-Class Writing assignments will be expected to take 10-to-25 minutes, at most. The timing will be determined by the instructor for each instance. Discussion will follow, and it will detail adequate responses. In addition to the expectations outlined in the appended Grading Rubric, the following assessments will be made:

- 0 points will be granted for no response.
- 1 point will be granted for a response that shows no understanding of the prompt question.
- 2 points will be granted for a response that shows little understanding of the prompt question and little understanding of how to reply to it.
- 3 points will be granted for a response that shows understanding of the prompt question yet offers an inaccurate answer to the prompt question.
- 4 points will be granted for a response that shows understanding of the prompt question and answers it adequately, yet with errors.
- 5 points will be granted for a response that shows understanding of the prompt and answers it with accuracy.

These in-class writing assignments will each count for 5% of your total grade. If there are more than 7 of these in-class writing assignments offered over the course of the term (as is scheduled), your lowest grade on these will be dropped. There is no extra credit offered here. To be clear – you will be assessed on your 7 best in-class writings - be there 7 or more. **In-Class Writing Assignments are worth 35% of the Total Course Grade.**

Assessment # 4

Essay 1 – This essay will be a minimum of 500 words. It will involve reconstructing an argument from our required readings and the construction of an objection argument. Instructions and prompts for this assignment will be made available by 2/8/26. This assignment is due via Canvas submission by 11:59pm on 2/22/26. **Essay 1 is worth 20% of the Total Course Grade.**

Assessment # 5

Essay 2 – This essay will be a minimum of 1000 words. It will involve reconstructing multiple arguments from our required readings as well as the construction of multiple objection and reply arguments. Instructions and prompts for this assignment will be made available by 4/1/26. This assignment is due via Canvas submission by 11:59pm on 4/22/26. **Essay 2 is worth 30% of your Total Course Grade.**

V. Class Policies

Attendance and Make-Up Policies

For UF-wide policies on attendance, see the general policy link at <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>. *This section spells out attendance policies specific to this course.* In this class, attendance is expected at every class session. Taking an active role in class is crucial to success and you cannot take an active role when you are absent. Of course, it can happen that you become ill or have another good reason to miss class. If you are ill, please stay home and call your primary health care provider or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 to be evaluated.

If you do miss a class, it is your responsibility to inform the instructor as soon as is feasible to make appropriate arrangements. UF policy provides a list of kinds of absences that must be counted as excused. Other kinds of absences may be excused at the instructor's discretion.

If, due to an excused absence, you are unable to complete an assignment, contact the instructor to schedule a make-up opportunity.

Each student will begin the term with a grade of 100 out of 100 possible points for course attendance. Each unexcused absence will result in a deduction of 5 points from this attendance grade, which (as noted above) counts as 5% of your final, overall course grade.

Electronic Devices

Students are permitted to use laptops and tablets to take notes and to access required readings in our class meetings, unless these devices are restricted for the purpose of completing an in-class assignment or activity.

Academic Honesty

For UF-wide policies on academic honesty, see the general policy link at <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>. *This section spells out academic honesty policies specific to this course.* If you have any questions or concerns about the policies spelled out here, please consult with the instructor or TAs for this class. Students are responsible for knowing that these behaviors are prohibited.

Collaboration: Collaboration with others in the writing of written assignments (including persons who are not students in this class) is prohibited unless explicitly allowed in the directions for a particular assignment. It is permissible for you work with others in the formulation of your ideas and arguments as well as in the editing of written assignments. Collaboration on group assignments is required, and specific instructions will be provided for these group assignments.

Use of Artificial Intelligence: Unless specified explicitly in the instructions for a particular assignment, the use of any Artificial Intelligence is strictly prohibited for this course. This includes the use of generative AI for producing substantive content as well as for grammar review. Detected use of AI on assignments will be considered as an incident of academic dishonesty.

Consequences of Academic Dishonesty: Any incident of academic dishonesty is 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. In this course, when cases of suspected academic dishonesty arise, I will advocate for failure for the course in communications with SCCR. If

you remain enrolled in this class past the end of the drop/add period, this will be understood as agreement with this policy.

If you find yourself having trouble with a particular assignment please contact me for help and for the possibility of an extension. I will work with you to help you with any difficulties that arise. This is always a better option than engaging in academic dishonesty.

VI. Course Schedule

The schedule below provides information on topics, readings, and due dates for assignments. It is possible the schedule may need to be adjusted to accommodate disruptions or student needs; any such changes will be announced both in class and on Canvas. The readings assigned for a given date must be read prior to the class meeting on that date.

WEEK 1: COURSE INTRODUCTION & RENÉ DESCARTES

Monday, 1/12 – Course Overview & Syllabus Review – *No Readings Assigned*

Wednesday, 1/14 – René Descartes – *Meditations on First Philosophy* (I)

Friday, 1/16 – René Descartes – *Meditations on First Philosophy* (II)

WEEK 2: RENÉ DESCARTES

Monday, 1/19 – No Class – MLK Day

Wednesday, 1/21 – René Descartes – *Meditations on First Philosophy* (III)

Friday, 1/23 – **In-Class Writing Assignment #1**

WEEK 3: RENÉ DESCARTES

Monday, 1/26 – René Descartes – *Meditations on First Philosophy* (III-IV)

Wednesday, 1/28 – René Descartes – *Meditations on First Philosophy* (IV-V)

Friday, 1/30 – **In-Class Writing Assignment #2**

WEEK 4: RENÉ DESCARTES & ELISABETH OF BOHEMIA

Monday, 2/2 – René Descartes – *Meditations on First Philosophy* (V-VI)

Wednesday, 2/4 – Elisabeth of Bohemia – “Letters to Descartes” (pp. 105-117)

Friday, 2/6 – **In-Class Writing Assignment #3**

WEEK 5: BARUCH SPINOZA

Monday, 2/9 – Baruch Spinoza – *Ethics* (selections from Part I)

Wednesday, 2/11 – Baruch Spinoza – *Ethics* (selections from Part I)

Friday, 2/13 – Baruch Spinoza – *Ethics* (selections from Part I)

WEEK 6: FRANCIS BACON & PIERRE GASSENDI

Monday, 2/16 – **Francis Bacon** – *New Organon* (selections – pp. 83-109)

Wednesday, 2/18 – **Pierre Gassendi** – *Dissertations* (selections – pp. 111-120)

Friday, 2/20 – **Bacon & Gassendi** – Continued...no new readings.

Essay 1 – Due via Canvas Submission by 11:59pm on Sunday, 2/22

WEEK 7: JOHN LOCKE

Monday, 2/23 – **John Locke** – *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Book I: selections from Chps. 1-2; pp. 316-322)

Wednesday, 2/25 – **John Locke** – *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Book II: selections from Chps. 1-2; pp. 322-329)

Friday, 2/27 – **In-Class Writing Assignment #4**

WEEK 8: JOHN LOCKE & GALILEO GALILEI

Monday, 3/2 – **John Locke** – *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Book II: selections from Chp. 8; pp. 332-337)

Wednesday, 3/4 – **Galileo Galilei** – *The Assayer* (selections – pp. 64-68)

Friday, 3/6 – **In-Class Writing Assignment #5**

WEEK 9: JOHN LOCKE

Monday, 3/9 – **John Locke** – *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Book II: selections from Chp. 27; pp. 367-377)

Wednesday, 3/11 – **John Locke** – *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Book II: selections from Chp. 27; pp. 367-377)

Friday, 3/13 – **In-Class Writing Assignment #6**

WEEK 10: SPRING BREAK

No Class on Monday (3/16), Wednesday (3/18), & Friday (3/20)

WEEK 11: DAVID HUME

Monday, 3/23 – **David Hume** – *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Sections 1-3)

Wednesday, 3/25 – **David Hume** – *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Section 4)

Friday, 3/27 – **David Hume** – *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Sections 5-6)

WEEK 12: DAVID HUME

Monday, 3/30 – (David Hume – *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Section 7)

Wednesday, 4/1 – (David Hume – *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Sections 8)

Friday, 4/3 – In-Class Writing Assignment #7

WEEK 13: DAVID HUME

Monday, 4/6 – David Hume – *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Sections 9-10)

Wednesday, 4/8 – David Hume – *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Section 11)

Friday, 4/10 – David Hume – *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Section 12)

WEEK 14: DAVID HUME & LADY MARY SHEPHERD

Monday, 4/13 – David Hume Review – No New Readings

Wednesday, 4/15 – Lady Mary Shepherd – *Essay Upon the Relation of Cause and Effect* (pp. 99-114)

Friday, 4/17 – Lady Mary Shepherd – *Essay Upon the Relation of Cause and Effect* (pp. 99-114)

WEEK 15: DAVID HUME & LADY MARY SHEPHERD

Monday, 4/20 – Hume & Shepherd Review

Wednesday, 4/22 – In-Class Writing Assignment #8

Essay 2 – Due via Canvas Submission by 11:59pm on Wednesday, 4/22

Appendix I: Writing Assessment Rubric

GENERAL GRADING RUBRIC FOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

A	B	C	D	E
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Overall, the paper does an excellent job of responding to the topic question and reflects a more than competent command of the relevant texts and material discussed in class.The introduction does an excellent job of identifying the issues raised by the topic to be discussed in the rest of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Overall, the paper responds well to the topic question and reflects a competent command of the relevant texts and material discussed in class.The introduction does a good enough job of identifying the issues raised by the topic to be discussed in the rest of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Overall, the paper provides a merely sufficient response to the topic question and reflects a less than competent command of the relevant texts and material discussed in class.The introduction does not adequately identify the issues raised by the topic to be discussed in the rest of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Overall, the paper only partially responds to the topic and reflects an incompetent command of the relevant texts and materials discussed in class.The introduction does not identify the issues raised by the topic to be discussed in the rest of the paper.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Overall, the paper does not respond to the topic and fails to draw upon relevant texts and materials discussed in class.The introduction does not identify the issues raised by the topic to be discussed in the rest of the paper.

<p>paper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main ideas of the paper are clear and convincing All the content of the paper supports its main ideas with no irrelevant material. The paper's claims are all well-grounded in cogent interpretations of the relevant textual evidence. The argument advances in a manner that is easy to follow. 	<p>paper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main ideas of the paper are for the most part clear and convincing. Almost all the content of the paper supports its main ideas with no irrelevant material. The paper's claims are generally well-grounded in cogent interpretations of the relevant textual evidence. The argument advances in a manner that is for the most part easy to follow. 	<p>paper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main ideas of the paper are only partially clear and convincing. The content of the paper generally supports its main ideas, though there is some irrelevant material. Only some of the paper's claims are well-grounded in cogent interpretations of the relevant textual evidence. The argument is difficult to follow in places. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main ideas of the paper are only marginally clear and convincing. The content of the paper tends not to support its main ideas, and there is a good deal of irrelevant material. None of the interpretations on which the paper's claims are based are cogent. The argument is difficult to follow or incomplete. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is unclear what the paper's main ideas are supposed to be. How the content of the paper is supposed to support its main ideas is unclear, and there is far too much irrelevant material. None of the paper's claims are based on interpretations of the relevant textual evidence. The argument is very difficult to follow.
<p>Grammar: The document <i>Basic Grammar for Writing Assignments</i> posted under the "Resources" tab discusses some common grammatical errors you must avoid. Grammatical errors will incur deductions as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improper formation of plurals and possessives (- 2 points) Confusion of <i>it's</i> and <i>its</i> (- 2 points) Failure of agreement between subject and verb (- 2 points) Sentence fragment (<i>Basic Grammar</i> §1) (- 4 points) Run-on sentence (<i>Basic Grammar</i> §2) (- 4 points) Faulty Modification (<i>Basic Grammar</i> §3) (- 2 points) Unclear Pronoun Reference (<i>Basic Grammar</i> §4) (- 2 points) Faulty Parallelism (<i>Basic Grammar</i> §5) (- 2 points) 				

Appendix II: Participation Rubric

Verbal participation will be assessed on the following bases:

1. Asking questions in class that reveal engagement with the assigned reading for that class meeting.
2. Making comments in class that reveal engagement with the assigned reading for that class meeting.
3. Asking questions or making comments in office hours that reveal engagement with assigned readings.

Students will begin with 0/100 total possible verbal participation points. In each unique class meeting that the student participates in a manner that reveals engagement with the assigned readings for that class meeting, they will receive up to 5 verbal participation points, up to, but not exceeding 100 possible points. Contributions in unique office hours meetings, which reveal engagement with the assigned readings will also count for up to 5 verbal participation points. Office

hours participation points will be limited to a maximum of 30 points. The combined number of participation points for both in-class and office hours participation will not exceed 100 out of a possible 100 points.