

**PHL-211-01**  
**Introduction to Modern Philosophy**

Professor | Dr. Aminah Hasan-Birdwell

**Course Description**

This course serves as an introduction to European early modern philosophy. It will primarily be an overview of the intellectual landscape of the seventeenth to early eighteenth century. We will attend to issues concerning epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of science, theology, and the distinction between rationalism and empiricism. The material covered in the course provides a historical narrative of the major concepts, arguments, and schools of thought during this significant era in European thought, as well as their social-political context. In addition to the overarching goal of the course, we will focus more acutely on the origins, development, and early criticisms of Cartesian philosophy that began with Descartes' radical form of skepticism and dualism. With respect to this, we will attend to the acute, critical responses to Cartesian thought by figures such as Berkeley, Hobbes, Spinoza, Hume, and Locke. However, the most significant of these early critiques of Cartesian philosophy were from women philosophers such as Marie de Gournay, Emilie Châtelet, Anne Conway, Mary Shepherd, Elisabeth of Bohemia, and Margaret Cavendish, and philosophers of color such as Anton Wilhelm Amo. These figures have been overlooked in the history of philosophy; this course attends to highlight and revive this suppressed intellectual history.

**Assignment Descriptions**

**Group-Led Discussions** | Students will be required to lead class discussion collectively (with a group of two-to-three, max four) twice during the course of the semester. Each student/group can choose the date and reading they wish to present on at the beginning of the semester. The purpose of student presentations is to demonstrate knowledge of the text: to be able to give an overview of the main ideas and arguments in the text and facilitate discussion amongst your classmates. Group presentations will give each student the opportunity to think collectively, to closely consider other points of view, and provide a space to engage with course with material with their classmates outside of the context of the classroom. Presentations should be a minimum of 10 minutes. A detailed worksheet will be given to students at the beginning of the course, which will outline group presentation expectations and a grading rubric. Both group-led discussions combined equal 20% of your final grade.

**Take-Home Quizzes** | A short response consisting of 500 words will be due every Friday at the start of class. The take-home quizzes are an avenue to maintain a regular writing schedule and an opportunity to engage with the text on a deeper level. I will accept only printed copies, not emailed or digital submissions, unless explicitly directed. All of your summaries total will equal 30% of your final grade.

**Midterm** | The Midterm is a proposal for your Final Paper. The objective of the Midterm Paper is to prepare you for writing the final paper. It is to allow you to test out a working thesis statement in order to develop it and revise it for the final paper. Your paper proposal should be no less than three double-spaced pages, no more than five pages, in addition to a list of primary and secondary resources. The topic for your paper is open, but you must use only writers, ideas, and themes treated in this course. Please refer to the assignment outline and rubric before writing.

This assignment is worth 10% of your grade.

**Final Paper** | Your final paper should a minimum of twelve pages, examine at least one primary source, and include at least four secondary sources. You will also be required to give a five-minute presentation on your final paper thesis during the final week of the course. This assignment is worth thirty percent of your grade.

**Article Reviews** | Students are required to write three article reviews of secondary sources during the course of the semester. Each article review will be worth 5% of your final grade, totaling 15%. A rubric and outline of the assignment is available on Canvas.

**Classroom Participation** | Classroom participation is based upon your general participation in the class, which includes class preparation, participation in classroom discussions, taking notes, and your ability to ask and/or answer questions during lectures and student presentations, etc. This being said, if you do not feel comfortable speaking or are unable to speak during class (for whatever reasons), you can make up this portion of your grade by coming to my office and discussing the readings with me.

| Day       | Pre-class Activity/Assigned Reading  | Class Topic/Assignments Due                                    |
|-----------|--|--|
| Monday    | Review Syllabus  | What is Modern Philosophy?                                     |
| Wednesday | Aristotle, <i>Physics</i> (II: 3)<br>Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> (V: 2)<br>Handout   | Aristotle's Four Causes  |
| Friday    | Michel de Montaigne, <i>Essays</i> (selections)<br>Marie de Gournay, <i>Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works</i> (selections)   | Skepticism and Modern Thought                                  |
| Monday    | Required Reading: Descartes, Dedication/Preface/Synopsis to the <i>Meditations</i> + Meditation I  | Descartes' Epistemology: Efficient Causality and Radical Doubt |
| Wednesday | (Meditation I continued...) +<br><br>Baruch Spinoza, <i>Principles of Cartesian Philosophy</i> , pp. 121–127 (Handout)<br><br>Letter from Elizabeth, <i>Correspondence of Elisabeth of Bohemia &amp; Descartes</i> , 6 May | (topic continued...)   |

|           |  |   |
|-----------|--|---|
|           | 1643 to 1 July 1643 (pp. 61–73)  |   |
| Friday    | Meditation II<br>+Descartes' <i>Passions</i> 17–29<br><br>+ Descartes' <i>Optics</i> 4–6   | Topic: Descartes' Epistemology: Certainty |
| Monday    | (continued)<br><br>Letter from Elizabeth,<br><i>Correspondence of Elisabeth of Bohemia &amp; Descartes</i> , 8 July 1644 to 24 July 1645 (pp. 81–96) | (topic continued...)                      |
| Wednesday | Descartes' <i>Principles of Philosophy</i> , Part I, 8–12 (Handout)  | (topic continued...)                      |

|        |  |                      |
|--------|--|----------------------|
|        | Spinoza, <i>Principles of Cartesian Philosophy</i> , pp. 129-130 (Handout) |                      |
| Friday | Leibniz, <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> (selections)                      | (topic continued...) |
| Monday | Descartes, <i>Principles of Philosophy</i> , Part II, 1–15                 | Cartesian Matter     |

|           |   |   |
|-----------|---|---|
| Wednesday | (reading continued...)- 16-21 + Cavendish, <i>Observation Upon Experimental Philosophy</i> , pp. 66-75  | (topic continued...)  |
| Friday    | (reading continued...)  |   |
| Monday    | Hobbes' Reply to Descartes (Third Set of Objections)<br><br>Hobbes' <i>De Corpore</i> (selections)<br><br>Berkeley, <i>Principles of Human Knowledge</i> (selections) | Materialism   |
| Wednesday | Leviathan, Part I   | (focus continued...)  |
| Friday    | (Leviathan, continued...)<br><br>+ Cavendish's Critique of Hobbes' Materialism in <i>Observation Upon Experimental Philosophy</i>                                     |   |
| Monday    | Meditation III  | Descartes' Theology or Metaphysics? On the Existence of God |
| Wednesday | (reading continued...)<br><br>Hume's "Origin of Ideas"  |   |

|        |  |  |
|--------|--|--|
|        | Spinoza, <i>Principles of Cartesian Philosophy</i> , pp. 130-139<br><br>Cavendish's Poem, "The Reason Why the Thoughts Are Only in the Head" |  |
| Friday | (reading continued...)<br><br>Du Châtelet, <i>Foundations</i> ,  |  |

|           |   |  |
|-----------|---|--|
|           | Chapter Two, "On the Existence of God"  |  |
| Monday    | Spinoza's <i>Ethics</i> , Part I, pp. 3–21<br>Cavendish, <i>Observations</i> (selections)   | Spinoza's Response to Descartes' Theory of Substance |
| Wednesday | Spinoza's <i>Ethics</i> , Part I, pp. 21–41<br>Cavendish, <i>Observations</i> (selections)  | (topic continued...)                                 |
| Friday    | (reading continued...)<br><br>Leibniz, <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> (selections)   |  |
| Monday    | Meditation IV + V<br><br>Spinoza's <i>Ethics</i> , pp. 74–85<br><br>Locke, <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> (selections)<br><br>Du Châtelet, <i>Foundations</i> (selections) | On Error and Falsity                                 |
| Wednesday | (continued...)  | (topic continued...)                                 |
| Friday    | Meditation VI   |  |

|        |  |                                     |
|--------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Monday | (Meditation VI, continued...)<br>Elizabeth of Bohemia,<br><i>Correspondences</i> (selections)<br><br><i>Principles</i> IV.189 (Handout)<br><br><i>Passions of the Soul</i> , I. 30-34<br>(Handout) | The Real Mind & Body<br>Distinction |
|--------|--|-------------------------------------|

|           |   |   |
|-----------|---|---|
| Wednesday | Francois Poullain de la Barre, <i>On the Equality of the Two Sexes</i>                      | Cartesian Feminism?   |
| Friday    | Francois Poullain continued...  |   |
| Monday    | Anne Conway, <i>The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy</i> , Chapters 1–3 | Contesting Dualism  |
| Wednesday | (continued...)<br>Anton Wilhelm Amo's Dissertation  |   |
| Friday    | Anton Wilhelm Amo's Dissertation  |   |
| Monday    | Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> , pp. 186–120  | On the Union of Mind & Body and the Origin of Emotions          |
| Wednesday | Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> , pp. 121–156  |   |
| Friday    | (continued...)  |   |
| Monday    | Locke, <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> (selections)                             | Beyond Dualism: Sensation, Observation, and Empirical Knowledge |
| Wednesday | (continued...)<br>Locke's Second Treatise, Part I (selections)                              |   |

|           |      |  |   |
|-----------|------|--|---|
| Friday    | 4.12 | Locke's Second Treatise, Part I (Selections)<br><br>+ Laws of Virginia on Slaves, 1705 |   |
| Monday    | 4.15 | Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> (selections)                    |   |
| Wednesday | 4.17 | Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> (selections)                    |   |
| Friday    | 4.19 | Mary Shepherd's critique of Hume's causation in <i>Writings</i> , selections           |   |
| Monday    | 4.22 | Mary Shepherd's critique of Hume's causation in <i>Writings</i> , selections           |   |
| Wednesday | 4.24 | Hume, "Of Natural Character," <i>Essays: Moral, Political, Literary</i>                | Problems in Empiricism: Natural Histories |
| Friday    | 4.26 | Hume, <i>Essays</i> (selections)   |   |
| Monday    | 4.29 | Hume, <i>Essays</i> (selections)   |   |

Secondary Sources (To Assist in the Article Review Assignment)

Della Rocca, Michael. 1999. "When a Body Meet a Body." In *New Essays on The Rationalists*. Edited by R. J. Gennaro and C. Huenemann. Oxford University Press. 48–81.

Des Chene, Dennis. 1996. *Physiologia*. Cornell. Chapter 8, "Motion and Its Causes," and Chapter 9, "Parts of Matter."

Hatfield, Gary. 1997. "Force (God) in Descartes' Physics." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 10: 113–140.

Reid, Jasper. 2014. "Descartes and the Individuation of Bodies." *Archiv* 96(1): 38-70.

Woolhouse, Roger. 1994. "Descartes and the Nature of Body." *BJHP* 2(1): 19-33.

Brown, Deborah. 2011. "Cartesian Functional Analysis." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.



- Des Chene, Dennis. 2001. *Spirits & Clocks: Machine & Organism in Descartes*. Cornell. Introduction, Chapter 4, "Tools of Knowledge," and Chapter 6, "Unity of the Body."
- Detlefsen, Karen. 2015. "Descartes on the Theory of Life and Methodology in the Life Sciences." In *Early Modern Medicine and Natural Philosophy*. Edited by P. Distelzweig et al. Springer.
- Hatfield, Gary. 2008. "Animals." In *A Companion to Descartes*. Edited by J. Broughton and J. Carriero. Blackwell. 404–425.
- Hatfield, Gary. 2012. "Mechanizing the Sensitive Soul." In *Matter and Form in Early Modern Science*. Edited by G. Manning. Brill. 151–186.
- Alanen, Lilli. 2003. *Descartes's Concept of Mind*. Harvard. Chapter 3, "Thought, Consciousness, and Language."
- Pasnau, Robert. 2007. "The Mind-Soul Problem." In *Mind, Cognition and Representation: The Tradition of Commentaries on Aristotle's De Anima*. Edited by P. J.J.M. Bakker and J. M.M.H. Thijssen. Ashgate. 3–20.
- Rozemond, Marleen. 2006. "The Nature of the Mind." In *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations*. Blackwell. 48–66.
- Simmons, Alison. 2012. "Cartesian Consciousness Reconsidered." *Philosophers' Imprint* 12(2): 1–21.
- Koivuniemi, Minna and Curley, Ed. 2015. "A Kind of Dualism." *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy*. Oxford.
- Normore, C.G. 2011. "Cartesian Unions." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 35: 223–239.
- Perler, Dominik. 2016. "Human Being." *The Cambridge Descartes Lexicon*. Edited by Larry Nolan. Cambridge.
- Rozemond, Marleen. 2003. "Descartes, Mind-Body Union, and Holenmerism." *Philosophical Topics* 31(1-2): 343-367.
- Simmons, Alison. 2017. "Mind-Body Union and the Limits of Cartesian Metaphysics." *Philosophers' Imprint* 17(14): 1-36.
- Yandell, David. 1997. "What Descartes Really Told Elisabeth: Mind-Body Union as a Primitive Notion." *BJHP* 5(2): 249-273.
- Fowler, C.F., O.P. 1999. *Descartes on the Human Soul: Philosophy and the Demands of Christian Doctrine*. Kluwer.

- Hutton, Sarah. 2003. "Henry More and Margaret Cavendish." In *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle*. Edited by Stephen Clucas. Ashgate. 185-198.
- Reid, Jasper. 2003. "Henry More on Material and Spiritual Extension." *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 42(2): 532-553.
- Detlefsen, Karen. 2007. "Reason and Freedom: Margaret Cavendish on the Order and Disorder of Nature." *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 89: 157-191.
- Hacking, Ian. 1983. "Microscopes." In *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science*. Cambridge University Press. 186-209.
- Shaheen, Jonathan. 2017. "Part of Nature and Division in Margaret Cavendish's Materialism." *Synthese*.
- Boyle, Deborah. 2015. "Margaret Cavendish on Perception, Self-Knowledge, and Probable Opinion." *Philosophy Compass* 10(7): 438-450.
- Cunning, David. 2006. "Cavendish on the Intelligibility of the Prospect of Thinking Matter." *HPQ* 23(2): 117- 136.
- Michaelian, Kourken. 2009. "Margaret Cavendish's Epistemology." *BJHP* 17(1): 31-53.
- Broad, Jacqueline. 2002. *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge.
- Hutton, Sarah. 2004. *Anne Conway: A Woman Philosopher*. Cambridge.
- Lascano, Marcy. 2013. "Anne Conway: Bodies in the Spiritual World." *Philosophy Compass* 8(4): 327-336.

### Other Resources

- Project VOX: a website devoted to compiling materials on women philosophers of the early modern period:  
<http://projectvox.library.duke.edu>
- Kroetsch, Cameron. Annotated Guide to Margaret Cavendish's Texts: <http://www.digitalcavendish.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Kroetsch2013.pdf>
- Duncan, Stewart. Guide to Margaret Cavendish's Philosophical Letters:  
<http://stewartduncan.org/letters-philosophical-letters/>
- Shapiro, Lisa. "What is a Philosophical Canon?" (manuscript posted on

<https://philosophymodsquad.wordpress.com>)

Smith, Justin. "The Two Libraries Problem" (manuscript posted on <https://philosophymodsquad.wordpress.com>.)