

**Syllabus**  
**PHIL 331W-0 (3 Cr.)**  
**Modern Philosophy**  
**Fall 2023**

Instructor: Dr. Kristopher G. Phillips

Office: Pray Harrold 702-B

Student Hours: M: 10a-11a, T: 12:00p-3:00p, W: 10a-11a & also by appointment

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Class Meets:

MW: 11:00a -12:15p Pray-Harrold 402

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** The traditional narrative surrounding the development of philosophy in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries revolves around a dispute between so-called “rationalists” (Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz), “empiricists” (Locke, Berkeley, and Hume), culminating in a great unifier (Kant). There are a number of reasons to be unhappy with this narrative. It oversimplifies the complex interactions and influences important thinkers had on one another; ignores the contributions women made to the intellectual scene; forces us to study systematic thinkers in an incomplete way; and offers at best a shallow understanding of tremendously rich philosophical and scientific issues.

In this class, we will focus on only three figures from the “modern” era: Rene Descartes, Margaret Cavendish, and David Hume. We will devote substantial time to developing and understanding their philosophical systems and the interconnections between these thinkers. The idea is to develop the skills required to approach the works from this era (for example: how to read texts closely, how to extract extended arguments from longer manuscripts, how to reconstruct arguments in a way that is charitable to the author, how to be sensitive to and avoid anachronism, and how to approach a philosopher’s work *systematically*). The reason that we will focus on these skills is that they will allow you continue to read modern philosophy carefully and attentively well beyond our short time together. To that end, I have included on the last page a list of works from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that we will not read this semester, but that deserve careful attention, and will prepare you for future studies better than almost any of your peers.

This course fulfills Section II of the required knowledge areas as well as the *writing intensive* designation for the philosophy major.

**Course Learning Outcomes:**

- **Critical Thinking:** The successful student will begin to be able to differentiate between good and bad reasons for holding philosophical beliefs and will be able to seek out and identify the assumptions that lie at the basis of philosophical positions.
- **Inquiry and Analysis:** The successful student will begin to be able to break complex philosophical problems into their components, and will be able to identify the consequences and implications of philosophical positions.
- **Writing:** The successful student will be able to express some abstract and complex philosophical ideas in clear, precise, and logical prose.

Learning outcomes will be evaluated through take-home exams, a paper, and discussions both in-class and on Canvas.

**TEXTS:** Rene Descartes: *Descartes: Selected Philosophical Writings* Trans. Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch; Cambridge University press, 1998. ISBN: 978-0-521-35812-5 (**CSM**)  
Margaret Cavendish: *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* Ed. O’Neill; Cambridge University Press, 2001. ISBN: 978-0-521-77675-2 (**OEP**)

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David Hume: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed. Steinberg; Hackett Publishing, 1993.  
ISBN: 978-0-87220-229-0 (EHU)

These can be found at the College Bookstore, and are *required*.

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS:**

This list of readings is tentative. Specific reading assignments will be given on a day-to-day basis.

**Week 1**

**Introduction**

*Dedicatory Letter to the Sorbonne & Preface to the Reader* (Canvas)

*Synopsis & First Meditation* (CSM 73-79) & Selections from *Objections and Replies* (CSM 123-126)

**Weeks 2-6**

**Descartes**

Labor Day – No class Sept. 4

*Second Meditation* (CSM 80-86) & Selections from *Objections and Replies* (CSM 126-131)

*Third Meditation* (CSM 86-98) & Selections from *Objections and Replies* (CSM 131-133)

*Fourth Meditation* (CSM 98-105) & Selections from *Objections and Replies* (CSM 133-135)

*Fifth Meditation* (CSM 105-110) & Selections from *Objections and Replies* (CSM 135-143)

*Sixth Meditation* (CSM 110-122) & Selections from *Objections and Replies* (CSM 143-150)

*Passions of the Soul* (CSM 218-238)

**[Descartes Exam – Due Oct. 9]**

**Weeks 7-11**

**Cavendish**

**Recommended:** Cunning: *Introduction* (Canvas)

Fall Break – No class Oct. 16th

**Part I**

*Sections 1-3, 9* (OEP 46-53)

*Section 16-17* (OEP 74-75) & Descartes *Principles* II (CSM 189-199) & Letter XXX (Canvas)

*Sections 18, 20-21* (OEP 79-90)

*Section 31* (OEP 125-131)

*Sections 35-37* (OEP 137-194)

**Part II**

*Sections 1-3* (OEP 195-200)

*Section 6* (OEP 204-208)

*Sections 9-10* (OEP 214-216)

*Sections 13-15* (OEP 218-224)

*Section 20* (OEP 227-240)

*Section 26* (OEP 247-248)

**Part III**

*All* (OEP 249-275)

**[Cavendish Exam – Due Nov. 5]**

**Weeks 12-15**

**Hume – Passages from the *Treatise* are recommended**

*Sections 1-3* (EHU 1-15) [*Treatise* 1.1.1-1.1.7 (Canvas)]

*Section 4-5* (EHU 15-37) [*Treatise* 1.3.1-1.3.6 (Canvas)]

*Section 6* (EHU 37-39) [*Treatise* 1.3.11-1.3.13 (Canvas)]

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*Section 7* (EHU 39-53) [*Treatise* 1.3.14-1.3.15 (Canvas)]

*Section 8* (EHU 53-69) [*Treatise* 2.3.1-2.3.3 (Canvas)]

*Section 10* (EHU 72-90)

*Section 12* (EHU 107-111) [*Treatise* 1.4.1 (Canvas)]

**[Term Paper Due – Nov. 20]**

**[Hume Exam – Due Dec. 8]**

**ASSIGNMENTS, EVALUATION, POLICY:**

“Extrinsic motivation, which includes a desire to get better grades, is not only different from, but often undermines, intrinsic motivation, a desire to learn for its own sake” – Alfie Kohn (1999), *Punished by rewards: The trouble with gold stars, incentive plans, A’s, praise, and other bribes*. Rev. ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

**Let’s Talk Motivation:** In recent years I have become increasingly unhappy with grades as a measure of anything at all. I often tell my students that it’s probably easy to get an A in my class – you can relatively easily “hack” my grading system and figure out the “formula” for writing a paper for me. Once you figure it out, getting an A on papers in my classes is easy. But I don’t want you to get an A by “hacking the system.” I want you to push yourself to learn new things because you found something you’re excited about and wanted to try to go beyond what’s comfortable and familiar. I’ve long thought that an A- or a B+ that was the result of taking risks was worth more than a safe, but well-written A paper.

In short, grading is not a good measure of learning, and the focus on grades distracts from the real goal of education. If you’re aiming for a specific grade, you’re not aiming to get the most out of your educational opportunities.

**Evaluation:** Here’s what we will do. I will ask you to fill out a brief survey to help us both better understand where your strengths are and where you can improve with regard to various intellectual virtues. I will then ask you to write a self-evaluation considering the following questions:

- (a) What are your reasons for taking this class?
- (b) What do you hope to get out of this class?
- (c) Where and how do you think you can improve on your academic work?
- (d) What do you think I hope you’ll take away from the class?
- (e) Which of the listed virtues do you consider to be the most important? Why?
- (f) On which of them do you want to focus this semester?

You and I will meet one-on-one at the start of the semester to establish concrete goals for the class.

I will ask you to do a mid-semester check-in reflection paper just after your mid-term exam.

We will meet up again at the end of the semester to discuss what progress have you made with regard to our goals.

The idea is that we will **collaboratively** come to a determination about what sort of progress you’ve made, where you think you can continue to improve (and how to best do so). As such, I will not provide you with numerical or letter grades on individual assignments. I will provide my standard level of *qualitative* feedback on your work (discursive comments regarding clarity, precision, critical engagement, etc.), but the gradebook will only note whether you turned the assignment in.

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You are responsible for working with me to determine your final grade in this class. We will come to an agreement based on formal self-assessments, the collected feedback you received from me over the course of the semester, and a final discussion. *I reserve the right to adjust the final grade, but I will not do so without telling you first.*

**Assignments:**

- **Introductory Self-Reflection Paper** (Due **Sept 3, 11:59p**).
- **Introductory Goal-Setting Meeting.** Sign up for a 15 minute meeting (zoom or office) where we will discuss your goals, motivations, etc.
- **Descartes Take-Home** (Due **October 9**).
- **Mid-point Reflection Paper** (Due **Oct 18**).
- **Cavendish Exam** (Due **Nov. 5**)
- **Term Paper/Book Review Project** (Due **Nov. 20**)
- **Hume Exam** (Due **Fri Dec. 8**)
- **Final Meeting** (During finals week). We will meet to discuss your progress toward your goals over the semester, and determine your final grade. I will post the Calendly link as we get closer.
- **Participation** Philosophy is best done in open, careful dialogue with one another. I know not everyone is comfortable speaking in front of their peers, but I want to encourage you to genuinely engage one another regarding the ideas in the class. There are a number of ways one can be an active participant in the course. Whether that is asking questions in class, organizing discussion boards, setting up study groups, visiting during student hours, or something else you come up with, I'd like to see you really engage with both the material and one another. That said, it's virtually impossible to engage meaningfully with the course material if you do not **attend class regularly**.

*Three Exams:* The exams will be take-home. You will be expected to complete the exams in roughly five days. I expect each exam to be 4-5 pages typed. Since philosophy is best done in dialogue, I encourage you to discuss the material with one another prior to and during the process of writing the exams. You must still turn in your own work, but collaboration is not only allowed, I encourage it.

*Standard Term Paper:* You will be expected to complete a term paper on any topic relevant to the modern philosophy. You are not limited to topics that we discuss explicitly in class, and you are welcome (and encouraged) to do research (whether secondary or primary) beyond the books we read. Your paper should be between 2000-3000 words. For standard approaches to writing papers in the history of philosophy, please see the "Some Basic Structures for Historical Papers" file on the Canvas homepage.

--OR--

*Book Review Project:* You will be expected to write a scholarly book review of one (section) of one of the texts from the Modern period that we have not covered in class. On the last page of the syllabus, you will find a list of works by philosophers from (roughly) the Modern period. Select **ONE** of these texts and set up a meeting with me where we will determine which section(s) of it you will read.

Your review should not exceed 2000 words in total. In short, I would like a critical response to the book (or section) you've read. To do so you must first summarize the central argument of the book (or section). After you have summarized the central argument in the text, you will need to raise *ONE theory internal* and *ONE theory external* objection to the view defended in the text. You must also explain how the author *should* respond. You may use secondary sources in order to better understand the text you are reading, but standard citation rules apply. I will post a few examples of published scholarly book reviews on Canvas.

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**OTHER IMPORTANT POLICIES & RESOURCES**

**University Policies** In addition to the articulated course specific policies and expectation, students are responsible for understanding all applicable university guidelines, policies, and procedures. The [EMU Student Handbook](#) is the primary resource provided to students to ensure that they have access to all university policies, support resources, and student's rights and responsibilities. Changes may be made to the EMU Student Handbook whenever necessary, and shall be effective immediately, and/or as of the date on which a policy is formally adopted, and/or the date specified in the amendment. Electing not to access the link provided below does not absolve a student of responsibility. For questions about any university policy, procedure, practice, or resources, please contact the Office of the Ombuds: 248 Student Center, 734.487.0074, [emu\\_ombuds@emich.edu](mailto:emu_ombuds@emich.edu), or visit the website at [www.emich.edu/ombuds](http://www.emich.edu/ombuds). [CLICK HERE to access the University Course Policies](#)

**Classroom Conduct:** The classroom constitutes a community of which we are each an important part. The very foundation of philosophy as a discipline is the ability to charitably listen, understand and represent the views of ourselves and others. Philosophy as a discipline requires careful dialogue. As such, respect for your fellow student, your instructor, and the course is of critical importance. We can, should, and will disagree with one another often, but this *MUST* be conducted with respect. As such threatening behavior, offensive language (including “hate speech”) will not be tolerated.

**Academic Dishonesty** Academic dishonesty of any kind is expressly prohibited. Engaging in academic dishonesty of any kind will result in failure of the course, a referral to the [Office of Wellness and Community Responsibility](#) for disciplinary action, and a deeply uncomfortable final conversation at the end of the term. You're already paying an awful lot of money to take this class, and I am committed to helping you develop the philosophical, intellectual, and personal skills to the best of your ability. Engaging in any form of cheating really cuts against the whole purpose of the whole education thing.

**A Note on AI, Large-Language Models, and Their Use** Using AI tools appropriately is a big part of our cultural development at this point in our history. This class is focused on building your philosophical skills, especially interpreting, designing, and critiquing arguments and theories. AIs can sort of do some of these things, but there are myriad reasons *not* to employ them in place of doing the work yourself. One such reason is that allowing an AI to do any part of the coursework for you is not just cheating yourself out of the opportunity to get better at philosophy, it is failing to do what the assignment is asking you to do – display and develop *your* philosophical abilities. If there is good reason to believe an AI did the work for you, any of the following may well occur: you will be asked to meet to discuss the work and you will be asked to redo the work. In class we will discuss further reasons to refrain from having AI do the work *for* you, as well as ways that it *can* appropriately be employed.

**Recording Class** I will not record class meetings and I ask that you also please refrain from recording the class meetings without prior permission both from me and from your classmates.

**University Writing Center** The [University Writing Center](#) (UWC) offers writing support to all undergraduate and graduate students. In doing so, we value the diversity of our campus and honor all students and the languages they bring with them to the university.

**Holman Success Center** Provides [Academic Support](#) through a variety of virtual and in-person services.

**Disability Resource Center** I warmly welcome any of you who have disabilities. Students with medical, psychological, learning or other disabilities desiring academic adjustments, accommodations, or auxiliary aids must contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC). The [DRC](#) works collaboratively with students, faculty, and staff to create an accessible, sustainable, and inclusive educational environment.

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**University Library** Research support is available to all students, 24/7. This includes getting started with research, identifying sources to search, developing search strategies, evaluating resources, and more. See <https://www.emich.edu/library/help/ask.php> for all of the ways in which you can get help with research. Some University Library services have changed, and may continue to change, in response to the pandemic. Please check for current information at <https://www.emich.edu/library/news/covid.php>

**Title IX** Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex under any education program or activity receiving federal financial aid. Sexual assault and sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX. [What you need to know about Title IX](#)

**Student and Exchange Visitor Statement** The Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) requires F and J students to report numerous items to the [Office of International Students & Scholars](#) (OISS)

**Other Important Works from the Modern Period (a non-exhaustive list)**

Machiavelli: *The Prince*  
Montaigne: *Essays* (esp. *Apology for Raymond Sebond*)  
Bacon: *The New Organon*  
Galileo: *The Starry Messenger*  
Galileo: *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*  
Hobbes: *Leviathan*  
Hobbes: *De Cive*  
Descartes: *Principles of Philosophy*  
Descartes: *Le Monde* (The World)  
Descartes: *L'Homme* (Treatise on Man)  
Elisabeth of Bohemia: *Correspondence with Descartes*  
Cavendish: *The Blazing World*  
Spinoza: *Theological-Political Treatise*  
Spinoza: *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*  
Spinoza: *Ethics*  
Conway: *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*  
Leibniz: *Discourse on Metaphysics*  
Leibniz: *Monadology*  
Leibniz: *Correspondence with Clarke*  
D. Cudworth: *Correspondence with Leibniz*  
Newton: *De Gravitatione*  
Newton: *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*  
Locke: *Two Treatises of Government* (esp. the second)  
Locke: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*  
Cockburn: *A Defense of Mr. Locke's Essay of Human Understanding*  
Malebranche: *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion*  
Malebranche: *The Search After Truth*  
Berkeley: *Three Dialogues*  
Berkeley: *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*

Berkeley: *Correspondence with Johnson*  
Pascal: *Pensées*  
Butler: *Fifteen Sermons*  
Mandeville: *The Fable of the Bees*  
Hutcheson: *An Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil*  
Smith: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*  
  
Hume: *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Parts II, III)  
Hume: *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*  
Reid: *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*  
Reid: *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*  
Rousseau: *The Social Contract*  
Rousseau: *The First and Second Discourses*  
Du Chatelet: *Commentary on Newton's Principia*  
Du Chatelet: *Discourse on Happiness*  
Du Chatelet: *Foundations of Physics*  
Wollstonecraft: *A Vindication of the Right of Woman*  
Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason*  
Kant: *Critique of Practical Reason*  
Kant: *Critique of Judgment*  
Kant: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*  
Shepherd: *An Essay Upon the Relation of Cause and Effect...*  
Shepherd: *Essays on the Perception of the External Universe*  
Amo: *Philosophical Dissertations on Mind and Body*