Syllabus
PHIL 433/533 (3 Cr.)
Topics in the History of Philosophy: Philosophy, Education, and the Scientific Revolution
Winter 2026

Instructor: Dr. Kristopher G. Phillips
Office: Pray Harrold 702B
Office Hours: M: 3:30p-5:00p (office), T: 10:00a-12:30p (zoom), W: 12:30p-1:30p (office) & also by appointment
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Class Meets: MW: 2:00-3:15
Pray-Harrold 202 (Hyflex – Online Synchronous)

COURSE DESCRIPTION: What is philosophy's proper place in contemporary higher education? In order to address this question, we need to find answers to at least two other questions: what is philosophy, and what should contemporary higher education aim to accomplish? In this class, we will attempt to find answers to these questions (and more) by looking at several figures from the history of philosophy. The early modern period in Europe (17th and 18th centuries) was a tumultuous time epistemically, politically, theologically, and morally. Europe saw a scientific revolution, civil (and non-civil) wars, plague, religious persecution, global imperialism, the development of the concept of race (and thus racism), and, as some scholars have argued, an increasingly narrow sense of what counts as "reason." Less studied among philosophers, however, is the increased emphasis on the importance of education (particularly for women). In this class we will consider a number of figures from the modern period in terms of how they thought about philosophy's place in education. Through considerations of Margaret Cavendish's criticisms of the British Royal Society, a reconceptualization of René Descartes' *Meditations*, Anton Amo's and Émilie du Châtelet's views on philosophy's relationship to human flourishing, and Adam Smith's account of education as a public good, we will consider questions about the nature and aims of philosophy, education, the relationship between philosophy and science, the appropriate state of academic philosophy, and what we have inherited from the early modern period. We will then explore to what extent the lessons from early modern philosophy apply to higher education today.

PHIL 433 fulfills the History of Western Philosophy requirement in the philosophy program.

Course Learning Outcomes:
• *Charitable Thinking*: The successful student will approach the positions and arguments of philosophers charitably (i.e. to take seriously and try to understand how a smart, thoughtful, and careful person might hold a view like that). A successful student will understand why, even if it looks at first as if a view must be wrong, there are good reasons for why others might think it is correct.
• *Close Reading*: The successful student will demonstrate the ability to identify what a passage actually says (without imposing assumptions onto the text), what a passage logically implies, and how to connect a passage to its broader context.
• *Writing in Philosophy*: The successful student will be able to express some abstract and complex philosophical ideas in clear, precise, concise, and logical prose. The successful student's writing will be grounded in source texts without becoming a mere book report.

Evaluation of these learning outcomes will be conducted through papers, in-class assignments and weekly reading reflections.

TEXTS: All required texts for this class will be made available on Canvas. I expect you to ensure you have access to the texts in class, whether that is by printing the readings or bringing a laptop/tablet. We will work directly with the texts in class.

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

Weeks 1-2 Introduction – Seminars, Community Building, & Education
Lani Watson: *The Epistemology of Education*
Kris Phillips: Chapter 1: *Education, Professionalism, and Character – Rethinking the Ends of Higher Education*

Weeks 3-5 Metaphilosophy
Graham Priest: *What is Philosophy?*
Kristie Dotson: *How is this Paper Philosophy?*
Mary Midgley: *Philosophical Plumbing*
Kris Phillips: Chapter 2: *Why* Philosophy? *What is Philosophy and How Should We Teach it?*

Weeks 6-9 Scientific Revolution and Philosophy
Genevieve Lloyd: *The Man of Reason*
David Hargreaves: *Teaching as a Research-Based Profession: Possibilities and Prospects*
Margaret Cavendish: selections from *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*
Kris Phillips: Chapter 3: *Why Early Modern Philosophy? Scientism Then and Now*
Kris Phillips: Chapter 4: *Margaret Cavendish's Defense of (the History of) Philosophy*
Recommended: C. Thi Nguyen: *The Seductions of Clarity*
Recommended: Christia Mercer: *The Contextualist Revolution in Early Modern Philosophy*

Weeks 10-12 "Rationalism" and Mysticism
René Descartes: *Meditations on First Philosophy*
Kris Phillips: Chapter 5: *René Descartes'* Meditations *as Transformational Education*
Kris Phillips: Chapter 6: *The Mystagogical* Meditations *and Philosophical Education Today*
Recommended: Christia Mercer: *Descartes' Debt to Teresa of Avila or Why We Should Work on Women in the History of Philosophy*

Weeks 13-15 Education, Happiness, and Wellbeing
Adam Smith: selections from *The Wealth of Nations*
Émilie du Châtelet: *Discourse on Happiness*
Kris Phillips: Chapter 7: *Philosophical Education as a Personal and Public Good*

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 first share a short reflection paper in order to help us both better understand how you can get the most out of this class. In your reflection, please consider 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 the course learning outcomes mean to you? How do you think you can work on improving with regard to them?
(e) What are three concrete goals you'd like to work on over the course of the semester with regard to your academic work/performance? For example, you might want to work on reading comprehension, charitable interpretation, speaking up in class more often, etc.

In your initial reflection, I ask that you please identify a some concrete goals that you intend to work on in my class this semester. Ideally, you'll also find a time to meet with me one-on-one so that we can work out how to make the class work best for you – this can be during my student hours or by setting an appointment to meet and chat.
I will ask you to do a mid-semester check-in reflection paper where you will discuss the efforts you've put in, any progress you've made, and offer insights into how we can continue the upward trajectory or improve things in the second half of the term. In this and the final reflection, I expect you to point to the feedback you've received on your written work as evidence for your claims.
We will meet one-on-one 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 *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. With each assignment, I will inquire into the amount and nature of feedback you would like on your written work.

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. It's really important that you develop a clear sense of the quality of your own work and how to evaluate it. It's a difficult skill to master and requires tremendous self-awareness. That's why we're going to work together to ensure that the assessment reflects the work you've done over the course of the term.

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Before the midterm reflection, I will provide a rubric to help you identify, in terms of a grade, what your performance might look like. Again, your final grade will be determined **collaboratively** with me.
I reserve the right to adjust the final grade, but I will not do so without discussing such a change with you first.

Assignments (Due dates are subject to change):

- **Introductory Self-Reflection Paper** (Due **Jan. 18th**).
- **Big Question in Philosophy** (Due **Jan. 26th**).
- **SEP/Source Discussion and Tentative Thesis** (Due **Feb. 23rd**)
- **Mid-point Reflection Paper** (Due **March. 11th**).
- **SPRING BREAK** (March. 2-6).
- **Paper Outline** (Due **March 19th**).
- **Paper Draft** (Due **April 6**).
- **"Final" paper** (Due **April 20**).
- **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.
- **Weekly Reading Reflection Assignments** (due by **9a each Monday**).
- **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. In order to do so, you must **attend class regularly.**

Leading the Seminar
Seminars are typically more discussion-based than traditional lecture. As such, I ask that each of you take a portion of class and lead the discussion.
If you are an undergraduate, you are responsible for leading *one-half* of one seminar meeting. You may do this by pairing up with another student and jointly leading a class discussion, or by striking out on your own and working directly with me to identify material you'd like to discuss for roughly ½ of a class period.
If you are a graduate student, you are responsible for leading *one full* seminar meeting on your own.

In preparing your presentations, it is not necessary to solve every interpretive or philosophical problem about the texts you are presenting. Although you should certainly aim to guide us through the text, explaining it and encouraging us to think about puzzles where they come up, it is at least equally important to pose fruitful interpretive and philosophical questions about it for group discussion. **You are welcome but not required to prepare a handout** that will guide us through the section or the text that you present on. You should meet with me and discuss a plan for your handout/discussion in advance of your presentation. I will be happy to print out copies of the handouts and to post them to Canvas in advance of the seminar meeting.

Scaffolded Research Paper
Over the course of the semester, I will ask you to write a philosophy paper on some topic of your choosing (as long as it's related to the *philosophy*). I want you to start with a big question. What is something you've always wondered about? I will help you tailor the question and find sources that address that question. I will then ask you to carefully read and articulate what various philosophers have said about that question. I want to see how you engage with the texts, so I expect to see a thoughtful, charitable, reconstruction of the arguments at issue grounded in the texts Themselves. At this point, I would also like to see a tentative thesis – what are you adding to the conversation? I would like to see some sort of critical engagement with the argument (where are possible weaknesses) and some

discussion beyond what was covered in class. This is about demonstrating understanding and thinking critically, not about content retention. Then I'll ask you to produce a paper (roughly 3000 words) on that subject. I will give more details in class.
Graduate students are expected to incorporate secondary literature where relevant.

Attendance, Participation, & Reading Reflections
Seminars only work if everyone is present and engaged. The onus is on participants to have an interesting discussion. I will try not to lecture on the material when I lead the seminar, and I expect you not to do so either. Leading discussion is a difficult skill to master, but a valuable one. It's virtually impossible to pull off with a group who is under- or un-prepared. Please do your best to keep up with the content and come with ideas, questions, and objections. You will learn a lot more if you're engaged and participating.

To facilitate discussion and keep you on track, you are expected to complete weekly reading reflections. **You can miss up to three reflections with no questions asked.**
I will post more details on Canvas but in short, the reflections must engage with the text in three different ways total (though you're allowed to engage in more ways than this, if you want to). Your three reflections must be from at least two different groups (comprehension, queries, connection, criticism, epiphany, or other). Use separate paragraphs for each reflection task. There is no word minimum or maximum, but you should write at least three sentences for each of your three engagements. Be sure to label each reflection, include the page numbers from which you're getting the information, and state how long it took you do to the reading as well as how long it took to do the reflection.

Revisions: You are more than welcome to revise your written work at any time and as frequently as you would like in order to take full advantage of our feedback. This is not a requirement for the course, but those students who do take the time to thoughtfully respond to my feedback and revise their work will get the most out of the class and will develop the most as writers and thinkers.

Late Work: I get that life happens and things sometimes take longer than we anticipate. As a result, I will accept late work for up to 24 hours after the deadline with no questions asked. I ask that you do your best to meet the deadlines – please consider that I too am a busy person with a life outside of school, and that I have to budget and schedule time carefully. If too many people turn in papers late, it throws off my plans and creates more work for me. Please try to be mindful of the work you create for others. If you are going to need more than 24 hours, you must contact me we can discuss how to move forward.

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.
I don't like doing this, and let me be clear – I trust you. I am not going to look to bust you, and I do not see our professional relationship as adversarial. If you're struggling and you don't know what to do, how to cite sources, etc. **please come talk to me**.

A Note on AI, Large-Language Models, and Their Use Using AI tools appropriately is supposedly 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 (not all that well though), 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 (that is, thinking, reading, writing, and being a person), it is failing to do what

the assignment is asking you to do – display and develop *your* philosophical abilities. **As such, I ask that you *do not* use AI, LLMs, or such tools on any assignment** (this includes ChatGPT, some versions of Grammarly, Gemini, and others). I want to see how *you* think – and writing *is* thinking.
Thus, 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, you will be asked to redo the work without the help of generative AI, you will receive an incomplete for the assignment, or you will fail the class. In class we will discuss further reasons to refrain from having AI do the work *for* you.

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.

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, or visit the website at www.emich.edu/ombuds. CLICK HERE to access the University Course Policies

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.

Recording Class I will not record class meetings and I ask that you also please refrain from recording the class meetings without prior, explicit, written permission both from me and from your classmates (except as necessary as part of a university approved accommodation. Students with such accommodation must inform me prior recording *any* class activity. Regardless of accommodation, all students must stop recording during small group work unless they obtain written permission from the members of their group prior to recording. Any approved recordings are exclusively reserved for the student's own private use.

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

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.

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Holman Success Center Provides Academic Support through a variety of virtual and in-person services.

Sexual Misconduct Prevention & Response Office (formerly Title IX Office): 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)

Disclaimer: Information contained in this syllabus, other than the grading, late assignments, makeup work, and attendance policies are subject to change, with advance notice, as I deem appropraite.