

Philosophy 2210: Early Modern Philosophy

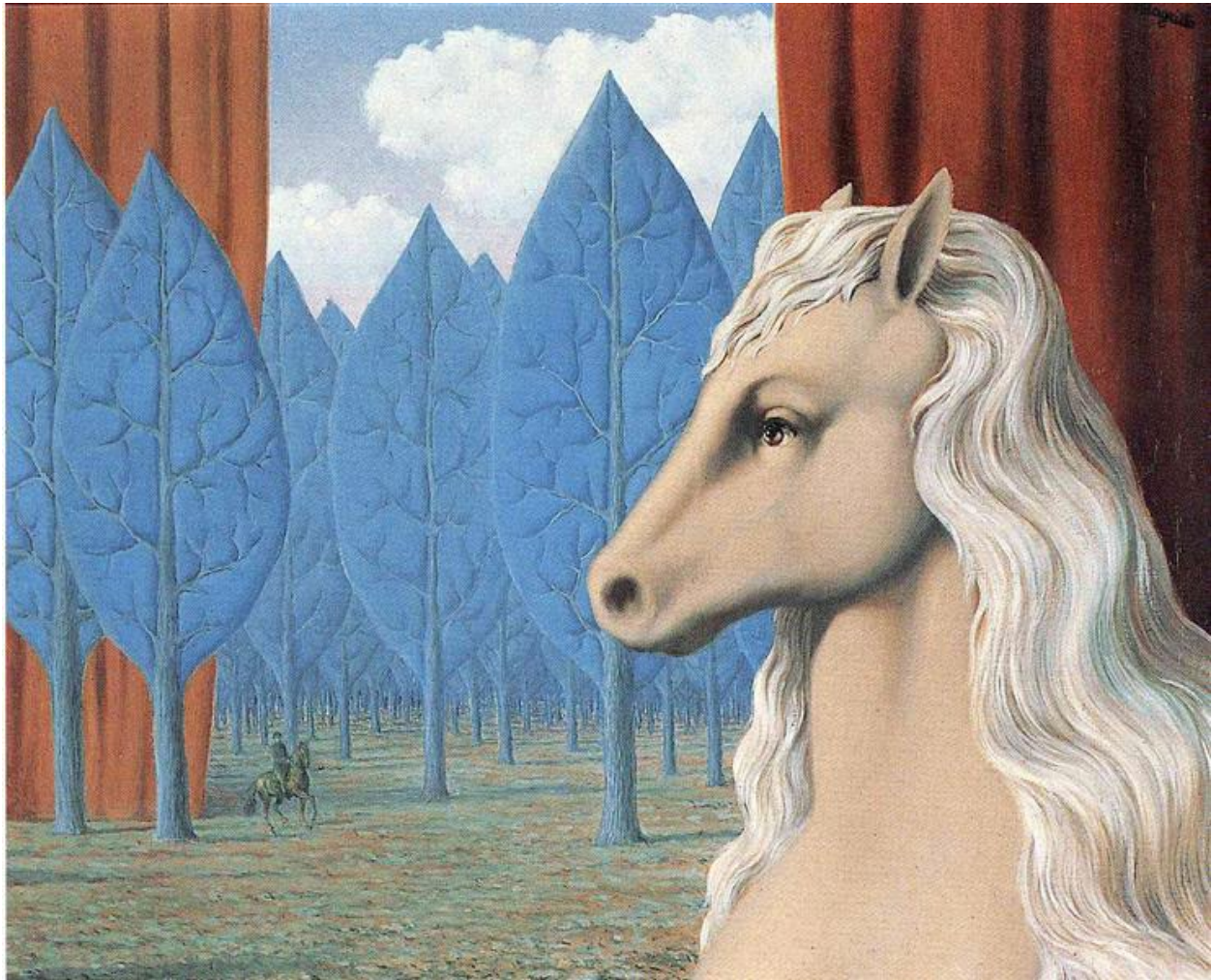
Fall 2023

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Pure Reason
by René Magritte, 1948

Course Overview

Early modern philosophy is typically defined as the European philosophical tradition spanning from René Descartes to Immanuel Kant. This period is marked by the emergence of experimental and mathematical sciences developed in part by figures such as Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Bacon and Newton. These scientific discoveries implied a revolutionary overturning of religious orthodoxy

throughout Europe, which in turn called for philosophical reflection: What of old religious beliefs can be maintained in the face of the successes of the natural sciences? Is there such a thing as a soul? How is the concept of a soul related to personal identity? Is knowledge possible, and if so, what are its limitations? What is the ultimate nature of reality? Does God exist? Do *I* exist? These questions were raised and addressed by a series of philosophers we will examine in this course: Montaigne, Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, Princess Elisabeth, Amo, Spinoza, Leibniz, du Châtelet, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. Throughout our readings we will address questions related to epistemology (the study of knowledge), metaphysics (the study of ultimate reality), and philosophy of mind. While one of the goals of the course will be to respect the historical circumstances of the authors in question, another aim is to show that the concerns of this period of philosophers remains relevant today.

Learning Outcomes and Objectives

My aims for this course are twofold. On the one hand, I want us to learn about early modern philosophy together. This is already a challenge task, as early modern philosophy is known for its difficulty and rigor. But early modern philosophy is also the course which serves as the prerequisite for the largest number of upper-level philosophy courses, including graduate coursework. Accordingly, on the other hand, I see it as one of my central goals in this course to prepare you for the sort of research environment and expectations of upper-level humanities coursework. Hence many of our activities are structured around developing the skillset that is required for upper-level humanities coursework (as well as many other professional environments): such as close reading of primary texts, engaging with secondary material, and writing an argumentative final paper.

Required Text

Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins (eds.), *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (third edition), Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2019, ISBN-13: 978-1624668050.

Method of Evaluation

Your grade is composed of two parts.

1. Unit Papers (3): 60% of final grade.
2. Final: 40% of final grade.

Your grade for the semester will be determined based on two components: unit papers due at the end of Weeks 4, 9, and 12, and a final paper due at the end of Week 16. Rubrics detailing the requirements for each assignment as well as the due date will be posted in another document on learn.

Extra Credit

There is only one extra credit opportunity for this course. Located on Canvas will be a folder of supplementary readings. For up to 5-points of extra credit you may write a 2-page response to one of these readings. More detailed instructions and an example will be posted to Canvas.

Grading Scale

All grades except discussion posts are graded out of 100. The grading scale is provided below.

97-100 = A+
 93-96 = A
 90-92 = A-
 87-89 = B+
 83-86 = B
 80-82 = B-
 77-79 = C+
 73-76 = C
 70-72 = C-
 66-69 = D
 65 and below = F

Other Rules for the Course

1. All grades are final and non-negotiable. If you have a question about a grade for a particular assignment, eMail me to discuss it.
2. No incompletes will be given for the semester unless you can demonstrate valid and compelling reasons.
3. There will be no additional extra-credit assignments besides what is offered in the syllabus.
4. If you fail to turn in a final, you will fail the course.
5. No form of academic dishonesty will be tolerated. All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the university administration. (If you plagiarize, I will catch you. I have caught people **almost every single semester** I have been an instructor!)
6. Use of ChatGPT or artificial intelligence to produce ostensibly original material constitutes academic dishonesty and will result in a 0, likely failing you in the course.
7. You must demonstrate the appropriate respect for all fellow inquirers.
8. I promise to do my best in responding to your eMails and questions right away, typically within 1-2 business days.

Reading Schedule

Week 1 (8/21): Enlightenment and Religion

Pierre Bayle – *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet* (selections), **Online** (~8 pages).

Week 2 (8/28): Skepticism and the Senses

Michel de Montaigne – “The Senses are Inadequate,” 4-16.

René Descartes – *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 35-47.

Week 3 (9/4): On God

René Descartes – *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 47-58.

Blaise Pascal – *Pensées* (selections), **Online**.

Week 4 (9/11): Substance Dualism

René Descartes – *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 58-68.

Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes – *Correspondence*, 93-99.

Anton Wilhelm Amo – *On the Apathy of the Human Mind*, 332-334.

CARTESIANISM UNIT PAPER DUE 9/17

Week 5 (9/18): Descartes and Spinoza

René Descartes – *Principles of Philosophy* (Selections), **Online**.

Baruch Spinoza, “Letter on the Infinite,” **Online** (~5 pages).

Baruch Spinoza “Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect,” **Online** (~30 pages).

Week 6 (9/25): Spinoza’s *Ethics*

Baruch Spinoza – *Ethics*, 173-195 (up to part two proposition 7).

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing – “On the Existence of Things Outside God,” **Online** (~2 pages).

Pierre Bayle – “Spinoza” in his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (selections), **Online** (~5 pages).

Week 7 (10/2): The Problem of Evil

Pierre Bayle – “Manicheans” in his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (selections), **Online** (~10 pages).

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz – *Theodicy*, **Online** (~14 pages).

Week 8 (10/9): Leibniz on Metaphysical Laws and Natural Science

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz – “Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas,” **Online** (~5 pages).

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz – “Primary Truths,” 293-296.

Emilie du Châtelet – *Foundations of Physics*, Selections, 709-718.

Week 9 (10/16): *Discourse on Metaphysics* and *Monadology*

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz – *Discourse on Metaphysics*, 252-275.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz – “Monadology,” 303-311.

RATIONALISM UNIT PAPER DUE 10/22

Week 10 (10/23): Empiricism and Innate Ideas

Francis Bacon – *New Organon*, 16-21.

John Locke – *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 346-362.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz – *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, **Online** (~17 pages).

Week 11 (11/6): Primary and Secondary Qualities

Galileo Galilei – “Corpuscularianism,” 21-24.

John Locke – *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 362-367.

George Berkeley – *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 475-493.

Week 12 (11/13): Hume’s *Enquiry*

David Hume – *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 579-611.

Week 13 (11/20): Hume’s *Enquiry*, cont’d.

David Hume – *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 611-646.

EMPIRICISM UNIT PAPER DUE 11/26

Week 14 (11/27): Kant’s Critical System

Immanuel Kant – *Prolegomena*, 719-737

Immanuel Kant – “Letter to Marcus Herz,” **Online** (~6 pages).

BONUS

Moses Mendelssohn – “On Evidence in the Metaphysical Sciences,” **Online** (~9 pages).

Immanuel Kant – “Introduction” in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, 775-787.

Week 15 (12/4): Kant’s *Prolegomena*, cont’d.

Immanuel Kant – *Prolegomena*, 738-774.

FINAL PAPER DUE BY 12/10