

PH 310: HISTORY OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

TIME: T/Th 10am-11:30am

LOCATION: TBD

Instructor: Lewis Wang

E-mail: kwang39@bu.edu

Office Hours: On Zoom by appointment

Course Description

The Early Modern period, spanning roughly from the 16th century to the end of the 18th century, is a period of transition from the medieval world to the modern world. This period saw numerous changes that have profound and long-lasting impacts on European and world history: the Protestant Reformation, the Age of Discovery, the rise of modern science, the emergence of modern nation-states, and the Enlightenment. It also saw some of the darkest episodes in human history: the slave trade, the oppression of women, colonization and the destruction of indigenous culture around the world. European philosophy, much like the broader European society, also underwent significant changes during this time. Philosophers moved away from the scholasticism that dominated the medieval time toward new philosophical inquiries that continue to shape modern philosophy to this day. These questions include: what am I? Is there anything real other than minds? Is knowledge possible? Do we have free will? What kinds of things are there in the world? In this course, we will explore and examine the answers by some of the most important philosophers of that era to some of these questions. We will study the works of important philosophers such as Bacon, Descartes, Princess Elisabeth, Leibniz, Hobbes, Cavendish, Spinoza, Berkeley, Kant, Anne Conway, Locke, Hume, Mary Sheperd, Zera Yacob, and Wang Yangming, as well as some of their contemporary commentators.

Learning Objectives

This course will be reading and writing intensive, with the aim of cultivating in students the following abilities:

- The ability to read, understand complex, abstract, difficult, historical and potentially translated text;
- The ability to clearly and concisely summarize the main question, claim and argument of a piece of writing, both verbally and in writing.
- The ability to understand where different interpretations of a text disagree with each other and why they disagree with each other, as well as the ability to argue for the interpretation one prefers.
- The ability to analyze and evaluate an argument, including its logical structure and the strength of its premises.

- The ability to gather resources and information from online and offline sources and conduct some research on one's own.
- The ability to connect old texts and their ideas with our life and world.
- The disposition to keep an open mind to foreign, outdated, unfamiliar or seemingly strange thoughts and conceptual framework.

Required Texts

Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins (eds), *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources (Third Edition)*, Hackett Publishing Company, 2019. ISBN: 978-1624668050 (Abbreviated as AW in the course schedule below)

Other readings will be made available on **Blackboard** in pdf format.

Course Assignments and Grading

Participation and Attendance (15%)

Participation in class is a central and essential part of this course. There are multiple ways in which one can participate in this course: answer my questions, ask questions, participate in group discussions, and talk to me in office hours, etc.

Attendance is not separately graded in this class; instead, it is part of participation. After all, you cannot participate in the class unless you attend the class. If you need to miss a class for what you take to be a proper, justifiable reason, please let me know so that I can take that into account when I assign the participation grade at the end of the semester. Attendance will be taken via the in-class reflections (see below).

Reading Reflections & In-class Reflections (10% each)

Before each week's class, you are required to complete a **reading reflection** about one of the readings from the upcoming week. There is no hard requirement on the length, content or format of the reading reflection, so long as I can see that you have put in the effort to engage with the reading. It can include any thoughts, comments, or reactions you have of that reading, and the writing need not be polished or formal at all. My only requirement is that you include **at least two questions** you find interesting or confusing about the reading you are discussing. This assignment is meant to help you with your reading process. It is meant to help you gather your thoughts and questions as you read. **It will be graded based on effort rather than quality.** As long as I can sense that you have read and thought about the readings seriously, that is good enough.

The last 5-10 minutes of each class will be dedicated to an in-class reflection exercise. You will be asked to reflect on what you have just learned and discussed in that class and

write **one or two paragraphs** on what you find most interesting from that class and what you are still unclear about or want to know more about. You can also add any thought, comment, or question you have regarding that class. Finally, you need to come up with **one potential paper topic** based on what we have covered in that class. **This assignment will also be graded based on effort rather than quality.**

Both kinds of reflections should be submitted on **Blackboard's Discussion Board**.

Papers (2 x 20% = 40%)

There will be two papers in this course. Each paper should be 900-1200 words long, double spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt font. You will be asked to determine your own paper topics, which you need to clear by me ahead of time. You can select a topic from those you have come up with in your in-class reflections or come up with a new one. **If you really have trouble finding a paper topic, please feel free to ask me for some ideas.**

For both papers, you will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit. The process runs as follows:

- For your initial submission, I will give you substantive comments and a grade.
- If you would like a second chance to improve your grade, you can submit a revised version of your essay plus a brief explanation of the changes you have made. I will give you a new grade that takes into account both the quality of the revised version and your effort in making the revision, especially how seriously you have treated my comments and how well you have incorporated them in your revision.
- **Revision is due a week after I returned the paper to you.**
- The final grade of a paper = 25% initial version grade + 75% revised version grade (or, if you choose not to resubmit, 100% initial version grade).

Final Project (25%)

For the final project of this course, you will be asked to present on a piece of philosophical text in the early modern time (roughly 1500-1800) that we **did not read** in this course. I encourage you to seek out someone we did not encounter in this course, especially those philosophers that belong to underrepresented groups. If you do pick someone we encountered in this course, pick a text or chapter by that person which we did not read. There is no limit on the genre of the text: it could be a novel, a play, a memoir, a poem, a dialogue, or a philosophical treatise. The text length is flexible, but it should be reasonable and manageable. **The most important thing is that it contains a clear main idea or thesis and at least one argument for that main thesis.** You need to run your text by me before you start the project. If you want to work on a text but cannot locate it, let me know and I am happy to help you.

Once you have decided on the block of text you want to work on, you need to read it, analyze it, and present it in any format you prefer. Be creative here: the presentation can

take the form of a podcast, comedy, play, animation, poem, short story, poster, pamphlet, or a philosophy paper. Do make sure, however, that in your presentation you include: (1) some information about the author and their time; (2) the question the author is interested in the text of your choice; (3) the main claim/thesis the author is making; (4) the argument(s) the author is offering for the main claim, and (5) some thoughts, comments, reflections or objections of your own.

Grade Breakdown

Participation – 15%

Reading Reflections & In-Class Reflections – 10% + 10% = 20%

Papers x 2 – 20% x 2 = 40%

Final Project – 25%

Grading Scale

94 - 100 = A

90 - 93.99 = A-

87 - 89.99 = B+

84 - 86.99 = B

80 - 83.99 = B-

77 - 79.99 = C+

74 - 76.99 = C

70 - 73.99 = C-

60 - 69.99 = D

Below 60 = F

Course Policies

Deadline and Extension Policy

All papers must be submitted using the course Blackboard page in **.docx** or **.pdf** format. Please do not submit a Google Doc link or a .pages file; I cannot open them and they will not be graded. Papers are due at 11:59 pm on the date indicated.

I do not require a reason or any documentation for a small extension of **up to 24 hours** if you inform me via email before the deadline. If you need to a longer extension, or you need an extension after the deadline, then you do need to send me an email with your reason for it. Late submissions without informing me or beyond the extension I granted will have 5 points taken off for each day they are late. **Timely communication is key.**

Electronics Policy

You are welcome to use laptops or tablets for the purpose taking notes or accessing course materials. Please do not do things unrelated to the class with your electronic devices. Remember: not paying attention in class will ultimately affect your own performance and grades. **No use of phone is allowed during class time, unless it is needed to accommodate a special condition of you.** If you think you might need to use phone in class, please come talk to me.

For the purpose of saving the planet, in this course I will minimize printing and try to conduct most business electronically. That means that you'll need to bring an electronic device that you can type on – either a laptop or a tablet – to every class in order to access the handouts, powerpoints, and readings posted online and to do the in-class reflections. If you do not anticipate to have access to a laptop or tablet during this course, please let me know and I will prepare printed copies of course materials for you.

Academic Integrity

Students are responsible for adhering to the CAS Academic Conduct Code:

<https://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>

All instances of cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic misconduct will be addressed in accordance with this policy. Penalties for academic misconduct can range from failing an assignment or course to suspension or expulsion from the university.

Be especially attentive to the requirements regarding plagiarism. Please note that copying, restating, or paraphrasing the views of others (including online sources) without citing them counts as plagiarism. Ignorance of this policy is not an acceptable excuse; if you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism, please contact me.

Accommodation Due to Disabilities

Students with documented disabilities, including learning disabilities, may be entitled to accommodations intended to ensure that they have integrated and equal access to the academic, social, cultural, and recreational programs the university offers. If you believe you should receive accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability & Access Services at 617-353-3658 or access@bu.edu to discuss your situation. If you already have a letter of accommodation, please share it with me as soon as possible. **If you have difficulty getting a letter but think you have some needs that require accommodation, please come to talk to me. I am happy to provide accommodation even without a letter.**

Course Schedule (may be changed with due notice)

9/3: Syllabus; The Early Modern World

- Required Readings:
 1. SYLLABUS
 2. Beat Kümin, "Introduction", *The European World 1500-1800*

9/5: History of Philosophy, Its Canon Problem, and Its Historiography

- Required Readings:
 1. Leibniz, *Discourse on the Natural Theology of China* (excerpts)
 2. Huaping Lu-Adler, *Kant, Race and Racism*, ch.6.
- Optional Readings:
 1. Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe*, ch. 24.
 2. Eileen O'Neill, "Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History".

9/10: Prelude: Medieval Philosophy

- Required Readings:
 1. (Podcast) Peter Adamson, "The Ox Heard Round the World – Thomas Aquinas", <https://historyofphilosophy.net/aquinas> (if you prefer reading this rather than listening to the podcast, a chapter based on this podcast is also available on Blackboard)

9/12: A New Approach to Knowledge

- Required Readings:
 1. Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* (New Organon) Book I, §1-3, 11-22, 31, 36 45-46 (all to be found at AW pp.16-20).

Unit 1: Dualism, Materialism, Idealism

9/17: Descartes' Philosophical Method, His Skepticism, and the *Cogito*

- Required Readings:
 1. Rene Descartes, *Discourse On Method*, Part I & II, AW pp. 25-33.
 2. Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, I & II, AW pp.40-47.

9/19: Descartes' Dualism and Princess Elizabeth's Criticism

- Required Readings:
 1. Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, VI (excerpt), AW pp. 64-67
 2. Princess Elisabeth, *Correspondence* (excerpt), Letters dated May 6th 1643, 21st May 1643, 10th June 1643, 1st July 1643, AW pp.93-96, 98-99.

9/24: Pre-established Harmony

- Required Readings:
 1. G. W. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §33, AW pp. 272-3.
 2. Correspondence between Lady Masham and Leibniz, Letters dated June 3rd 1704, June 30th 1704 & August 8th 1704, AW pp.455-62.

9/26: Hobbes' Material Mechanism

- Required Readings:
 1. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (excerpts, pdf on Blackboard)
 2. Thomas Hobbes, "Third Objections to Descartes' Meditations" (excerpts, pdf on Blackboard)

10/1: Leibniz against Mechanism

- Required Readings:
 1. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §8-23. AW pp.256-67.

10/3: Cavendish's Vital Materialism

- Required Readings:
 1. Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters*, I.30, 33, 35-37, 42. AW pp. 143-53.
 2. Margaret Cavendish, *Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, Part I (excerpts, pdf on Blackboard).
- Optional Readings:
 1. Karen Detlefsen, "Atomism, Monism, and Causation in the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish".
 2. Marcy Lascano, "Matter and Spirit", in her *The Metaphysics of Margaret Cavendish and Anne Conway*.

10/8: Spinoza's Pantheistic and Panpsychist Monism: Part I

- Required Readings:
 1. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I. AW pp. 172-92.

10/10: Spinoza's Pantheistic and Panpsychist Monism: Part II

- Required Readings:
 1. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part II (selections). AW pp. 192-215.

10/15: No Class (Substitute Monday Schedule)

10/17: Berkeley's Idealism I: Against Mind-Independent Existence

- Required Readings:
 1. George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between between Hylas and Philonous*, The First Dialogue, AW pp. 495-514.

10/22: Berkeley's Idealism II: on Ordinary Objects

- Required Readings:
 1. Berkeley, *Three Dialogues*, The Third Dialogue, AW pp. 524-543

Paper I Topic due 10/ 23 at 11:59pm

Unit 2: God

10/24: Proving God I: The Cosmological Argument

- Required Readings:
 1. Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, Meditation III, AW pp. 47-54.
- Optional Readings:
 1. Lawrence Nolan, "Cosmological Argument", in *The Cambridge Descartes Lexicon* (PDF available on Blackboard)

10/29: Proving God II: The Ontological Argument

- Required Readings:
 1. Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, V (excerpt), AW pp. 59-60.
 2. G. W. Leibniz, Letter to Countess Elisabeth (excerpt), AW pp. 109-10.
- Optional Readings:
 1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A598-603/B624-31

10/31: Proving God III: The Moral Argument

- Required Readings:
 1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A804-15/B832-43
- Optional Readings:
 1. Alexander T. Englert and Andrew Chignell, "Kant on The Highest Good and Moral Arguments"

Paper I due 11 / 3 at 11:59pm

11/5: The Problem of Evil

- Required Readings:
 1. Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §1-7, AW pp. 252-6.

11/7: Anne Conway on God, Creation, and the World

- Required Readings:
 1. Anne Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, Chs.1-5, 8-9.
- Optional Readings:
 1. Jessica Gordon-Roth, "What Kind of Monist is Anne Finch Conway?", *Journal of the APA* 4(3) 280-97.

Unit 3: Knowledge

11/12: Locke's Empiricism

- Required Readings:
 1. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, I.ii.§1-5, §12. AW pp. 348-350.
 2. Locke, *Essay* II.i.§1-6, II.ii. AW pp. 352-3, 358-9.
 3. Locke, *Essay* IV.i.§1-2; IV.ii.§1-6, §14. AW pp. 416, 419-20, 422.

11/14: Leibniz's Rationalism

- Required Readings:
 1. Leibniz, Preface to the *New Essays*, AW pp. 463-74.

11/19: The Problem of Induction

- Required Readings:
 1. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 2, Section 3 (paragraphs 1-3), and Section 4; AW pp. 588-94.
- Optional Readings:

1. L. Henderson, "The Problem of Induction".
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/induction-problem/>

11/21: Mary Shepherd on Induction

- Required Readings:
 1. Mary Shepherd, *An Essay Upon the Relation of Cause and Effect*, Chapters 1 & 2. AW pp. 687-9

11/26: Kant's Transcendental Idealism and the Problem of Induction

- Required Readings:
 1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, "Preface to the Second Edition".
 2. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena*, §26-30.
- Optional Readings:
 1. G. de Pierris and M. Friedman, "Kant and Hume on Causality".
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-hume-causality/>

11/28: Thanksgiving break, no class

12/3: Elsewhere in the World I: Africa

- Required Readings:
 1. Zera Yacob, "God, Faith, and the Nature of Knowledge" (pdf on Blackboard)
- Optional Readings:
 1. Bjorn Freter, "Onto-Normative Monism in the Hatata of Zera Yacob"

12/5: Elsewhere in the World II: China

- Required Readings:
 1. Wang Yangming, *Chuanxi Lu* (excerpts, pdf on Blackboard).
- Optional Readings:
 1. Harvey Lederman, "The Introspective Model of Genuine Knowledge in Wang Yangming".
 2. Harvey Lederman, "What Is the "Unity" in the "Unity of Knowledge and Action"?"

Paper II Topic due 12/6 at 11:59pm

12/10: Final Project Presentation

- Required Readings: None!

Paper II due 12/16 at 11:59pm