

Course Syllabus
Douglas Marshall
March 27, 2022

PHIL 272
EARLY MODERN
PHILOSOPHY

1 Logistics

MEETING TIMES: Spring 2022, M W 9:50–11:00 a.m., F 9:40–10:40 a.m.

MEETING LOCATION: Leighton Hall 304

INSTRUCTOR: Douglas Marshall (dmarshall@carleton.edu)

OFFICE HOURS:* T, 3:30–4:30 p.m., F, 11:20 a.m.–12:20 p.m.

COURSE WEBSITE:

<https://moodle.carleton.edu/course/view.php?id=38646>

* Please book office hours using my Google appointment calendar. A link to the calendar is on the course website. In the beginning of the term, I will hold office hours over Zoom.

2 Texts

Please purchase or otherwise arrange reliable access to the following texts:

1. René Descartes (J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, Trans.) *Selected Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)
2. Anne Conway (A. Coudert and T. Corse, Trans. and Eds.) *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)
3. G. W. Leibniz (R. Ariew and D. Garber, Trans.) *Philosophical Essays* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989)
4. David Hume (P. Millican, Ed.) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

Course Texts FAQ

- Q: If I already have another translation of Descartes, Conway, or Leibniz, may I just use that instead? A: **For purposes of this course, you must use the translations just listed. Other translations are unacceptable.**
- Q: Hume's *Enquiry* is not a translation. It was written in English. May I use another edition of Hume's *Enquiry*? A: It's probably fine to use another edition. If you're having trouble getting the Millican edition of Hume's *Enquiry*, it's acceptable to use the free e-text at <https://davidhume.org/texts/e/>.
- Q: May I get digital editions of these books? A: If it's possible, I recommend getting physical copies of the books. But under the circumstances, it is also acceptable to get digital versions. The main drawback is that if you get certain digital editions, then you won't have page numbers for purposes of understanding my citations or writing your own. But if you need to cite by e-book location instead of by page, that's OK. I will do my best to give clear reading assignments that don't depend on whether you're reading a physical or digital copy.
- Q: Are there any other texts we need for this course? A: All other assigned readings will be available for download from the course website. Also, all the readings for the first two weeks of class are available as PDFs on our website.

3 Course Requirements

1. Reading If readings are assigned for a given day, you should be sure to do the readings before we meet that day. Reading philosophical texts is hard. You will not be prepared if you don't do the reading carefully and critically. I recommend doing every reading for the class at least twice.

2. Writing: You will write three papers over the course of the term. The papers will be approximately five to six pages long, with 1,800 words as the maximum number of words in the paper (though bibliography items do not add to the word count). The first paper will be about Descartes' *Meditations* and may also consider Elisabeth of Bohemia's objections to Descartes. The

second will be about either Anne Conway's *Principles* or the philosophy of G.W. Leibniz. The third will be about Hume's *Enquiry*. You will have the opportunity to resubmit a revised version of your paper on Descartes at the end of the term (though this is optional).

3. Class Participation: Participation includes class attendance, contributions to class discussions, and participation in class exercises (usually in small groups). I will take attendance at each meeting. If at all possible, you should avoid missing more than one week of class meetings.

It is possible that at some point you may need to attend the class via Zoom. In that case, I ask that if possible, you leave your camera on during the class meeting. I reserve the right to give less than full attendance credit to students on Zoom who appear to be away or unresponsive.

4. Reading Quizzes: There is a unit in the course for each of the four main philosophers we read: Descartes; Conway; Leibniz; Hume. At the end of each unit, you will take an online quiz to check your comprehension of the readings. As the term progresses, the quizzes may also ask some questions to check for cumulative understanding (especially: asking you to compare the philosophical systems of different thinkers we have read).

4 Tentative Schedules of Readings and Assignments

The following weekly schedule is approximate and subject to change. Please see the course website for up-to-date weekly readings and assignments. After the first week, the readings for a given week will always be posted by Friday of the previous week.

WEEK	AUTHORS	TEXTS
1	Descartes	Discourse on the Method I–II; Meditation I
2	Descartes	Meditations II–IV
3	Descartes; Elisabeth of Bohemia	Meditations V–VI; Correspondence
4	Conway	Principles of Philosophy I–VIII

5	Conway; Leibniz	Principles of Philosophy IX; Discourse on Metaphysics 1–16
6	Leibniz; Malebranche	Discourse on Metaphysics 17–37; Excerpt from “The Search After Truth”
7	Leibniz; Hume	Monadology Enquiry I–IV
8	Hume	Enquiry V–VIII
9	Hume	Enquiry IX–XII
10	Kant	1772 Letter to Herz, Selection from the <i>Pro- legomena to Any Future Metaphysics</i>

PAPER	TOPIC	TENTATIVE DUE DATE
First Paper	Descartes	April 22 (Week 4)
Second Paper	Conway or Leibniz	May 13 (Week 7)
Third Paper	Hume (and, at your option, a rewritten Descartes paper)	June 4 (Week 10)

5 Grading

First paper (Descartes): 20%

Second paper (Conway or Leibniz): 25%

Third paper (Hume): 25%

Reading Quizzes: 20%

Participation: 10%

See the course website for an explanation of how grades will be assigned to papers. I will use the percentages above to compute a final score at the

end of the semester for each student. Your grade for the course will be based on this score, but it will take improvement over the course of the academic term into account.

Extensions Policy: With the exception of the rewritten Descartes paper, you may hand each paper for this class up to 24 hours late without penalty to your grade. When I calculate final grades, I will simply ignore up to 24 hours of lateness for each paper. The rewritten Descartes paper must be handed in on time, otherwise I will assume you don't intend to submit one.

Aside from the automatic 24 hour extension, you may request an ordinary extension of a paper deadline so long as you make your request *before* the day it is due. Work that is late without an extension or beyond an extension will be discounted at the rate of one-third of a grade per day (A to A-, A- to B+, and so forth). Papers will not be accepted more than one week after the due date except under extraordinary circumstances. In such circumstances, please get in contact with your class dean so they can help me to determine a reasonable paper extension.

6 Continuity of Instruction in a Time of Crisis

We are living in a difficult time. COVID-19 is interfering with our ability to be at college in the normal way. Deeply disturbing racial injustices are taking place, and so is social and political unrest. In times like these, we will need to exhibit flexibility with each other throughout the term.

I have done my best to design the course so that everyone can be successful, even if illness or external factors beyond our control mean that some of us may have to be absent for some of the class. If your personal situation is affecting your ability to engage with the course, please contact the Dean of Students Office so we can work towards reasonable accommodations. If technological problems are limiting your ability to participate, please contact the ITS Helpdesk at 507-222-5999 or helpdesk@carleton.edu.

If I come down with COVID-19 or another serious illness without severe symptoms, I may need to teach one or more of our classes remotely using Zoom. Similarly, if students come down with COVID-19 or other serious illnesses without severe symptoms, they may need either to attend remotely (via Zoom) or to obtain recordings of class meetings.

7 Privacy

Audio or video recordings of our class may from time to time be made either by me or by students for purposes of study or review. Class members should not share, replicate, or publish the recordings, in whole or in part, or use the recordings for any other purpose than for class-related studying. Recordings of class sessions that include student participants should not be saved or used past the end of the term. I will delete any audio or video recordings that include students within one month after the academic term is over. In return, I ask that you not share videos created for purposes of this course.

8 The Writing Center

The Writing Center provides a space staffed with peer writing consultants who can work with you during any stage of the writing process (brainstorming to final proofreading). Hours and more information can be found on the writing center website (<https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/asc/writingcenter/>). You can reserve specific times for conferences by using their online appointment system (<https://writingcenter.carleton.edu/>).

9 Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Carleton College is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Office of Accessibility Resources (Henry House, 107 Union Street) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, autism spectrum disorders, chronic health, traumatic brain injury and concussions, vision, hearing, mobility, or speech impairments), please contact OAR@carleton.edu or call Sam Thayer ('10), Director of the Office of Accessibility Resources (x4464), to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

10 Academic Integrity

All work submitted by you is assumed to be your own original work that has not been submitted elsewhere. Any words or ideas borrowed from other sources must be properly attributed. Any cases of suspected dishonesty will be forwarded to the Academic Standing Committee, as required by Carleton's

policy on academic integrity. In confirmed cases of academic dishonesty, I will recommend a penalty ranging from a failing grade for the assignment to failure in the course. Carleton College may pursue further action.

For more information about academic integrity at Carleton and guidelines about how to avoid plagiarism in your work, please go to:

<https://www.carleton.edu/writing/plagiarism/>.

11 Course Description

This course offers an introduction to the major themes in European theories of being and knowledge during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Key issues to be examined include: the distinction between the mind and the body; the existence and nature of God; the relationship between cause and effect; the scope and nature of human knowledge. We will place a special emphasis on understanding the philosophical thought of René Descartes, Anne Conway, G. W. Leibniz, and David Hume.

This is not a survey course. (If it were, we would have to read the works of many more philosophers, notably those of John Locke, Benedict Spinoza, George Berkeley, and Thomas Hobbes.) Our goal will be to read several important early modern texts in their entirety and to learn the philosophical systems expressed in those works. The principal works we will read are: Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*; Conway's *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*; Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics*; and Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

A recurring theme in this course will be the relationship between philosophy and what we now call science. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are often considered the pivotal centuries of the scientific revolution, a period which begins with Scholastic Aristotelianism and culminates in Newtonian physics and astronomy. In brief, we will find that there is no precise distinction between the philosophy and the science of the period. Rather, what we call science is pursued as a part of doing philosophy. It is the philosophy of nature, also called "natural philosophy".

The second recurring theme in the course concerns the philosophical contributions of women in the early modern period. We will read the works of two women in particular: Elisabeth of Bohemia and Anne Conway. Many of the philosophical contributions of women are contained in correspondence, and Elisabeth's letters to Descartes provide an excellent example. Conway's *Principles* is one of the rare examples of an early modern philosophical treatise.

tise written by a women, and we will read it in its entirety.

12 Course Objectives

A. Start to master a philosophical worldview that isn't your own.

In this course we will learn systematic philosophical views concerning a broad range of questions concerning being and knowledge. We are not trying to mine the philosophical texts of the period for their most important ideas. Rather, we are trying to become masters of philosophical systems. One way to assess your own grasp of a philosophical system is to consider your ability to answer questions of the following sorts: (i) What was (*e.g.*) Descartes' view of (*e.g.*) the relationship between the mind and the body?; (ii) What would Descartes say about the relationship between the mind and the body—for instance, in light of more recent research in neuroscience?; (iii) What should Descartes say about the relationship between the mind and the body—for instance, in response to the criticisms of Elisabeth of Bohemia?

B. Learn how to write papers in the history of philosophy. Writing papers in the history of philosophy requires some special skills. Papers in history of philosophy constitute their very own genre. The work you do in your papers will be primarily interpretive, answering questions about what philosophers meant by what they wrote and exploring their philosophical systems. In order to write your papers successfully, you will need to draw on their texts as evidence for your claims, but you will also need to explain the texts on which your arguments rely. Many of the skills you learn will help you in other settings where source texts are a primary source of evidence. Some of the skills you learn are more general— for example, the skill of articulating a cogent argument in writing.

C. Be in a position to continue studying early modern philosophy after our course is over, either through more coursework at Carleton or on your own. Next year early modern scholar Hope Sample will join our philosophy department. Keep an eye out for her courses.