

Early Modern Philosophy  
Mike Griffin  
2 credits/4 ECTS credits  
Mandatory 2-year MA course  
Winter 2023

Introduction:

This course is a survey of 17th and 18th-century philosophy meant to fulfill a core requirement in the 2-year MA program. The main aim of the course is to acquire knowledge of the central issues and arguments of the early modern period. Topics will include knowledge and skepticism, the nature of substance, the relation of mind and body, the scope and limits of scientific explanation, personal identity and freedom and necessity. By the end of the course students will be able to read historical texts and interpret and evaluate their philosophical content.

Learning outcomes:

Upon completing this course, students will be able to present, with a minimum of jargon, the central claims of a historically significant philosopher so that it is clear to a thoughtful non-specialist what these claims mean; provide textual evidence that their interpretation is accurate; and evaluate the arguments for cogency and persuasiveness.

Course requirements and assessment:

Regular attendance is required. Students will also be asked to submit weekly questions for discussion of the reading. Participation and questions counts for 10% of the final grade. Students in the two-year MA program will be evaluated on the basis of a written exam administered at the end of the academic year. Students in the one-year MA program will be evaluated on the basis of a final 2000 word paper (60%) due at the end of the term and a proposal for the paper (30%), due at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> week of the term.

Schedule:

Week 1-2: Descartes on knowledge and skepticism  
Readings: Meditations 1-4

Week 3: Descartes on mind and body  
Readings: Meditations 5-6

Week 4: Objections to Descartes's dualism  
Readings: Selections from Descartes's correspondence with Elisabeth

Week 5: Spinoza's Substance Monism

Readings: Selections from Descartes's Principles of Philosophy; Spinoza's Ethics, Part I, Propositions 1-15; Leibniz's On the Ethics of Spinoza.

Week 6: Spinoza and Leibniz on Necessity and Contingency

Readings: Ethics, Part I, Propositions 16-18, 21-29, 33, 35; Selections from Leibniz's Philosophical Essays

Week 7: Locke on Primary and Secondary Qualities and Mechanical Explanation

Readings: Essay, Book II, ch. 8, Book IV, ch. 3 (selections)

Week 8: Locke on Personal Identity

Readings: Essay, Book II, ch. 27

Week 9: Leibniz and Locke on Thinking Matter

Readings: Selections from Leibniz's New Essays and selections from Locke's correspondence with Stillingfleet

Week 10: Berkeley on Material Substance: Phenomenalism

Readings: Principles of Human Knowledge, Part I, sections 1-33, 67-72

Week 11-12: Hume critique of causal inference

Readings: Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, sections 3-5