

Syllabus: Early Modern Philosophy (PHI 370)

Term: Fall 2013 — Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30 to 1:50 — Baldy 119

Instructor Information:

Instructor: Lewis Powell, Ph.D.
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Office: 113 Park Hall
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.
and by appointment

Course Summary:

We're all familiar with the claim that 'appearances can be deceiving,' or that 'things aren't always what they seem.' And we've all had experiences that exemplify those claims as well; we glance quickly from a distance and wind up mistaking a stranger for a close friend, or we get confused by an optical illusion. Since we make our judgments about the way things *are* on the basis of the way things *seem*, it makes sense to ask ourselves how we can tell the cases where appearances are deceiving from the cases where they are not.

What is reality like, and how can we figure that out from the way things seem or appear to be? This question was a major concern for philosophers in the early modern period, and in this course, we will study some of the most important/influential attempts to answer it offered by leading scholars of the day. We will also see how their answers to these questions relate to their views on freedom of the will, ethics, and personal identity.

Texts:

The primary text for our course will be Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources (Roger Ariew & Eric Watkins, eds.). Readings from our main reader will be supplemented with readings from the text Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period (Margaret Atherton, ed.). Both texts are required for the course, and are available in the campus bookstore.

Course Objectives:

- To gain familiarity with the views and insights of important figures from the history of early modern philosophy
- To learn how to employ the following philosophical tools
 - i) charitable interpretation and argument extraction
 - ii) validity, consistency, and argument analysis
 - iii) counterexamples and thought experiments
- To develop an understanding of the following philosophical notions
 - i) *dialectical reasoning*
 - ii) *philosophical motivation*
 - iii) *systematic philosophy*

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Assignments and Grading:

- Readings/Attendance/Participation: 30% (of total grade)
- Short Exercise 1 (*week 4*): 15%
- Short Exercise 2 (*week 8*): 15%
- Short Exercise 3 (*week 12*): 15%
- Final Exam (*12/12/13 @ 11:45 a.m.*): 25%

Course Work:

- Class attendance is required, and you are expected to come prepared to discuss the materials from the readings. Your participation grade is based on quality (not just quantity) of participation. Quality participation involves advancing the discussion with relevant contributions (including questions).
- You are to complete the assigned readings **prior** to class for the day they are assigned.
- There will be three short exercises for you to complete during the semester. The exercises are designed to help you develop the core philosophical skills that you should be getting out of the course. You will receive exercises one week before they are due. The first exercise will be due at the end of week 4. The second will be due at the end of week 8. The third exercise will be due at the end of week 12.
- The final exam will involve both factual questions about the figures we have studied and their views, as well as critical questions, in which you will need to assess and discuss the philosophical views of these figures. The final will be given on Thursday, December 12 from 11:45 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.

No extra-credit work will be given, so make your regular work count.

Late assignments will be penalized by 1/3 of a grade per day.

Other Course Work Policies:

- Students with sufficiently good reasons (as determined by me) may be given extensions on particular assignments. I am more sympathetic to the need for an extension the earlier I am contacted by a student (assuming the need was foreseeable). The worst time to ask for an extension is after the due date.
- I recognize that over the course of a semester, there may be times when even the most diligent students are unable to attend class. Students with legitimate excuses (as determined by me) may be given an option of making up for up to three absences by turning in some additional work. Again, I am much more sympathetic to student requests for accommodation the further in advance they are raised.
- Blindly and inflexibly sticking to a particular guideline is not a particularly sensible course of action. So, I reserve the right to alter the course plan, reading schedule, grading policies, and so on throughout the semester, if the need arises.

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Policies and Procedures:

Attendance and Readings: As already mentioned attendance is required. Class sessions will include some material that is not taken directly from the readings, and you are responsible for that material as well as the material in the readings. Not everything from the assigned readings will be covered in lecture. That does not mean that you will not be asked about that material later.

Participation: Learning is an active process, and so participation is crucial. You should come to class each day, prepared to ask questions about the material we have read, as well as to answer questions about the material. It is perfectly acceptable (and encouraged) to ask questions about passages which were confusing or unclear.

Office Hours: If you have questions about the material you are encouraged to come to my office hours and discuss them with me. That is the primary reason I hold office hours. If none of the regular times work for you, contact me to make an appointment.

Grading: I use the standard system of converting percentages to letter grades (90-100 is the A range, 80-89 is the B range, 70-79 is the C range, etc.), with pluses and minuses assigned proportionally (for example, 87-89 is a B+, 80-82 is a B-, 83-86 is a B).

A grade in the A range is a mark of excellence. A grade in the B range reflects above-average mastery of the course material. So, students who simply meet the minimum requirements set forth are not entitled to a grade of A or B. Don't despair, though: the exercises and exams are designed so that the path to earn good grades is clear. Students who care about earning good grades should be in a position to achieve them, if they are willing to put in the effort. Graded work will be returned promptly, and you should keep a copy of all graded work for your own records.

Blackboard/E-mail: All students are expected to maintain e-mail accounts that are regularly checked so that I can contact you in the event of a change to the course plans. All students are expected to check blackboard regularly for announcements or other information. Assignments will be distributed via blackboard.

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism, cheating, and other academic dishonesty, being unfair to other students, and disrespectful to me, will not be tolerated. I strictly follow the university's policies on academic integrity. The essence of academic honesty is to ensure that any work you submit is, in fact, your own work. If you have **any** doubts or concerns about what is acceptable (e.g. when and how to cite the work of others), you should ask me, or consult the university's academic integrity policy:

<http://academicintegrity.buffalo.edu>

Accessibility: If you have a disability and may require some type of instructional and/or examination accommodation, please inform me early in the semester so that we can coordinate the accommodations you may need.

If you have not already done so, please contact the Accessibility Resources office. The office is located at 25 Capen Hall and the telephone number is (716) 645-2608. It is my general recommendation that students familiarize themselves with the resources available, and ensure that they request any accommodations to which they are entitled. If you think you may need special accommodations, please consult with Accessibility Resources:

<http://www.ub-disability.buffalo.edu>

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Assessment of Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students should be able to ...	Method of assessment ...
Identify and define particular philosophical positions and the philosophers who held them.	Written exercises answering questions about readings, factual questions on final exam (80% answered with sufficient detail = outcome achieved)
Present and evaluate arguments from historical texts	Written exercises answering questions about readings, essay questions on final exam (80% answered with sufficient detail = outcome achieved)
Charitably interpret texts and draw conclusions about philosophical motivations	Written exercises answering questions about readings, essay questions on final exam (80% answered with sufficient detail = outcome achieved)
Engage with the arguments and debates of the early modern period.	In-class participation and discussion (frequent and productive participation in class discussion = outcome achieved)
Critically reflect on the rationality of one's own beliefs.	There is not currently any reliable way to test whether students have acquired this skill, so no assessment of this skill will form a part of student's grade.

Reading Schedule (subject to revision, if necessary)

Week 1: Introduction to Early Modern Philosophy — Aug 27, 29

Tuesday: No readings: Course Overview

Thursday: Descartes' Meditations (Synopsis through 2nd meditation) - p. 35-47

Week 2: Rene Descartes — Sep 3, 5

Tuesday: Descartes' Meditations (3rd and 4th meditations) - p. 47-58

Thursday: **No Class: Rosh Hashanah**

Week 3: Rene Descartes & Elisabeth of Bohemia — Sep 10, 12

Tuesday: Descartes' Meditations (5th and 6th meditations) - p. 58-68

Thursday: Descartes' correspondence with Elisabeth of Bohemia (*WPEMP*) - p. 9-21
FIRST EXERCISE DISTRIBUTED

Week 4: Rene Descartes (cont.) — Sep 17, 19

Tuesday: Descartes' Meditations (4th set of objections and replies) - p. 83-92

Thursday: Descartes' Meditations (Pascal's "The Wager") - p. 106-109
FIRST EXERCISE DUE

Week 5: Baruch Spinoza — Sep 24, 26

Tuesday: Spinoza's Ethics (Part I, through proposition 15) - p. 144-151

Thursday: Spinoza's Ethics (Part V) - p. 188-195

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Reading Schedule (cont.)

Week 6: Anne Conway — Oct 1, 3

Tuesday: Conway's Principles (*WPEMP*) - p. 46-76

Thursday: Leibniz's Primary Truths - p. 265-268

Week 7: Gottfried Leibniz — Oct 8, 10

Tuesday: Leibniz's Monadology - p. 275-283

Thursday: Leibniz's Letters to Clarke - p. 294-303

SECOND EXERCISE DISTRIBUTED

Week 8: Damaris Cudworth, Lady Masham — Oct 15, 17

Tuesday: Cudworth's Letters to Leibniz (*WPEMP*) - p. 77-98

Thursday: Locke's Essay (Book I, all chapters) - p. 316-322

SECOND EXERCISE DUE

Week 9: John Locke — Oct 22, 24

Tuesday: Locke's Essay (Book II, Chapters 1 through 12) - p. 322-342

Thursday: Locke's Essay (Book II, Chapters 21 and 23) - p. 348-357, 359-367

Week 10: John Locke (cont.) — Oct 29, 31

Tuesday: Locke's Essay (Book II, Chapter 27) - p. 367-377

Thursday: Locke's Essay (Book IV, Chapters 1, 3, 4, 10, 11), p. 386-389, 392-415

Week 11: George Berkeley — Nov 5, 7

Tuesday: Berkeley's Three Dialogues (1st dialogue) - p. 454-474

Thursday: Berkeley's Three Dialogues (2nd and 3rd dialogues) - p. 475-503

THIRD EXERCISE DISTRIBUTED

Week 12: Mary Shepherd — Nov 12, 14

Tuesday: Shepherd's Essays (*WPEMP*) - p. 147-159

Thursday: Hume's Enquiry (Sections 2 through 5) - p. 538-555

THIRD EXERCISE DUE

Week 13: David Hume — Nov 19, 21

Tuesday: Hume's Enquiry (Sections 6 through 10) - p. 555-586

Thursday: Hume's Enquiry (Sections 11 and 12) - p. 586-600

Week 14: No Classes: Thanksgiving Break (Nov 26-28)

Week 15: Thomas Reid — Dec 3, 5

Tuesday: Reid's Inquiry and Essays - p. 641-653

Thursday: Reid's Inquiry and Essays - p. 641-653

Final Exam:

12/12/12: FINAL EXAM from 11:45 AM to 2:45 PM in BALDY 119