

## PHIL 395: 17<sup>th</sup> Century Women Philosophers

Fall 2020  
Office Hours: 8:15–9:30 TR and by appointment

Ablondi  
B-2

**Note:** There will be synchronous activities for this class on both Tuesdays and Thursdays.

**Texts:** Atherton, *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period* (Hackett Publishing)  
Assorted Readings on Teams

**Course Description:** In this course, we will examine the writings of some of the women philosophers of the early modern period, focusing on metaphysical issues such as soul-body dualism, God, the nature of the corporeal world, the relationship between philosophy and religion, as well as matters related to women's education and equality.

**Course Goals:** Students will become acquainted with the writings and philosophical systems of several women philosophers from the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries; they will gain experience reading philosophical texts; they will learn to identify, explain, and evaluate arguments from the texts; and they will further their ability in writing philosophical papers.

**Grading:** Like the women that we will be studying this semester, you will be writing letters—12, in fact, one per week for weeks 2–13 of the course. These letters should be single-spaced, though with a space for paragraph breaks (see sample), Times New Roman 12-point font. They should be no longer than one page and no shorter than ½ a page. These letters will be graded on a scale of 0–10, and you will be able to drop the two lowest scores; the remaining 10 will count 40% toward the final grade. Prompts for the letters will be given via e-mail at approximately 9:45 a.m. on Tuesdays and they will be due to me (as Word files sent as e-mail attachments) by 11:00 that morning. When appropriate, short audio recordings will be made available Monday (if not earlier) to provide background to the readings.

There will also be a paper due at the time scheduled for the Final Exam. These should be not be research papers, but your analyses of some issue or issues in the text. They are expected to be 10–12 pages long (approximately 3,000 words), and they will count 45% toward the final grade. You will choose your own topic, though I will suggest ideas throughout the semester.

The remaining 15% will be determined by attendance, participation, and various in-class assignments. Know that I take the attendance portion of the grade seriously. In order to leave this class having strong knowledge of the women philosophers of the period, you will need to do more than keep up with readings and hand in writing that is merely acceptable; a good deal of information, some not in the readings, can only be learned from attending class lectures and participating as directed.

**Attendance Policy:** You are allowed one 'free' absence during the semester. After that, unexcused absences will result in a deduction of 5% per absence from your Attendance/Participation grade.

**Class Policies:** You should have your video on during class meetings. While I obviously cannot monitor your behavior as I could were we together in a classroom, it is still the case that you should be using electronic devices **only** for joining in on the meeting and taking notes—no texting, surfing the web, checking messages, listening to music, or doing work for other classes is permitted once class begins. Such activities are disrespectful to both me and your classmates. If you cannot abide by these restrictions, do not come to class. Failure to respect these rules will result in a failing grade for participation, and repeated offenses will result in your being excluded from our meetings. Also, repeated late arrivals to our meetings will cause a reduction of the attendance portion of the grade.

### Schedule of Class Meetings and Readings

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| Aug. 20        | Introduction   |
| Aug. 25        | Eileen O’Neill, “Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History”  |
| 27             | Descartes, Sixth Meditation; from Margaret Atherton, “Cartesian Reason and Gendered Reason” [pp. 19–21]  |
| Week 2 (9/1)   | Princess Elisabeth, <i>Correspondence with Descartes</i> I [Atherton pp. 9–15]   |
| Week 3 (9/8)   | Princess Elisabeth, <i>Correspondence with Descartes</i> II [Atherton pp. 15–21]   |
| Week 4 (9/15)  | Margaret Cavendish, <i>Philosophical Letters</i> , Section I, Letters XXX, XXXV, & XXXVI [Atherton pp. 22–26, 28–29*, 33–36]; Section II, Letters XVIII, XXI, XXV, XXXIII; Section III, Letters XIV, XXI [pp. 185–87, 194–96, 206–208, 230–31, 287–88, 320–23] |
| Week 5 (9/22)  | Margaret Cavendish, <i>Philosophical Letters</i> , Section I, from Letter XXIV; Section II, Letter VI; Section IV, Letters VI, XXX, from XXXIII [pp. 80–81, 148–50, 444–49, 516–19, 539–40]  |
| Week 6 (9/29)  | Anne Conway, <i>The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy</i> , Chapter VI, Chapter VIII [Atherton pp. 46–66]   |
| Week 7 (10/6)  | Anne Conway, <i>The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy</i> , Chapter VII, S.2–S.4 [pp. 44–55]  |
| Week 8 (10/13) | Mary Astell, Background [Atherton pp. 96–98]; Mary Astell and John Norris, <i>Letters Concerning the Love of God</i> , Letters I–IV, Appendix [pp. 69–87, 131–33]  |
| Week 9 (10/20) | Mary Astell, <i>A Serious Proposal to the Ladies</i> II, Chapter III, §IV; from Chapter IV [pp. 199–215]   |

- Week 10 (10/27) Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* II [Atherton pp. 99–125 (skim)]; *The Christian Religion* §259–§261, §267, §269 [pp. 249–52, 258–59, 261]
- Week 11 (11/3) Damaris Masham (Cudworth), Background [Atherton 77–79]; *A Discourse Concerning the Love of God* [pp. 18–19, 29–32, 75, 78, 102, 126]; *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Virtuous or Christian Life* [pp. 7–8, 161–66, 179–80]
- Week 12 (11/10) Damaris Masham, *Correspondence with Leibniz*, Letter III [pp. 204–207]; Letters IV, VI, XI [Atherton pp. 81–89, 91–95]
- Week 13 (11/17) Catherine Trotter Cockburn, *A Defense of Mr. Locke’s Essay* [Atherton pp. 126–46]; from “Letter of Advice to Her Son,” from “Letter to Burnet” [*Works II*, 117–19;189–90]
- Nov. 24 Last Day

**Paper Due: Wednesday, Dec. 2 by 11:30.**

Please Note: This schedule is an ideal. Changes in the material to be read for any given day may be changed due to our being behind, instructor illness, etc. **Note: if students return to campus during the semester, changes to both the schedule of readings and grading assignments will very likely be made.**

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