

Philosophy 3120: Early Modern Philosophy

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Class webpage: <http://usuphilosophy.com/course-webpages/phil-3120/>

Texts (both required): Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, volume IV (Image); Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, volume V (Image); plus various primary selections, to be distributed in class or available on the web.

General objectives of the course: At the end of the course, you will be asked to evaluate the course's success at meeting these objectives:

- Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories
- Developing skills in expressing oneself orally or in writing
- Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.

Specific objectives of the course: This course will strengthen your abilities to find, explain, and criticize an argument; to write accurate and objective 5-7 page papers on philosophical topics; to discuss conceptual problems intelligently; and to begin to see how scholars of philosophy examine great historical works. In terms of knowledge, this course will teach you about rationalism and empiricism, and fundamental questions in the philosophy of mind; the basic metaphysics of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz; Cartesian skepticism; the justificatory epistemology of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume; Spinoza's management of passions; Hume's critique of natural theology, and his general skepticism toward theoretical knowledge.

Work and expectations.

- 37 homework questions will be assigned, and graded on a 1-5 point scale. The lowest 3 will be dropped. (So, 170 points possible.)
- 3 5-7 page papers, each worth 100 points.
- 1 final exam, consisting of an essay question that will encourage you to draw together several themes presented throughout the course. (100 points)
- Class attendance and participation. (100 points)

Total points	Final grade	
616+	A	 The image shows the title page of René Descartes' 'Meditationes de Prima Philosophia' (Meditations on First Philosophy). The text is in Latin and includes the title 'OBIECTIONES QUINTAS & SEPTIMAE' (Objections 5th and 7th) and 'RENDATI DES-CARTES MEDITATIONES DE PRIMA PHILOSOPHIA'. It also mentions 'Amstelredami, Apud Ludovicum Elsevirium, 1641'. There is a small illustration of a tree at the bottom.
603-615	A-	
590-602	B+	
556-589	B	
536-555	B-	
523-535	C+	
489-522	C	
469-488	C-	
456-468	D+	
436-455	D	

On your written work, **everything counts**: style, substance, organization, grammar, spelling - *everything*. I assume that anything you turn in to me will be as good as you can make it. Anything late cannot possibly receive an "A".

As students, you should expect me to be to class on time and to be well-prepared each day. I have the same expectation for you. While you are in class, I expect you to be just as attentive to the discussion as I am. You may kick me out of class if I fall asleep, or if I use a phone or computer for non-class related purposes, or begin to read a newspaper, or start my reading for another class.



General policy regarding late work: Each reading question assignment is due at the beginning of class. Hard copies, please. Late reading question assignments will **not** be accepted. Papers are due at the beginning of class; late papers will be docked 5 points for every day (24 hrs.) they are late. Students are welcome to present any extenuating circumstances to me, which may or may not lead to exemptions from these policies.

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What I believe letter grades mean:

A or A- The essay is **excellent**. The writing is clear and concise, using proper sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. The essay stays firmly on topic. The writer has accurately described the relevant philosophical positions and arguments. The essay demonstrates that the student has engaged the topic with intellectual curiosity and seriousness, going beyond classroom discussions and readings, and demonstrating a thorough understanding of the material.

B+ The essay is **very good**. The writing is clear and concise, using proper sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. The essay stays firmly on topic. The writer has accurately described the relevant philosophical positions and arguments, except perhaps with a few very minor errors. The essay shows intellectual engagement with the topic, but there is little in the essay which goes beyond classroom discussions and readings.

B or B- The essay is **good**. The writing is clear and concise, using proper sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. The essay stays on topic. The writer has provided a broadly accurate account of the relevant philosophical positions and arguments. There are some errors, but they do not detract from the central aim of the essay. There is little in the essay which goes beyond classroom discussions and readings.

C+ or C or C- The essay is **adequate** in meeting the assignment's requirements. The writing, in terms of grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, is at an acceptable level, though there are errors. The writer has provided an adequate account of relevant philosophical positions and arguments, but with some important errors or omissions. Perhaps the essay wanders from the topic, introducing needless examples or pursuing tangents. There are obvious objections or points that should have been considered.

D+ or D This essay is **not adequate** in quality. There are serious problems in spelling, grammar, and sentence structure. It is not clear that the writer has grasped the relevant philosophical positions or arguments. The organization of the essay is unclear, or nonexistent. Nevertheless, it is clear that some attempt has been made to meet the assignment's requirements; but the result does not demonstrate an adequate mastery of the material.

F This essay is a **failure**. Writing errors abound, and there is no indication of an understanding of the material, or even that any serious effort has been made.

Syllabus

Date	Topic, and what to read for that day	What's due
8/27	Introduction to the course	none
8/29	Tensions within early modern philosophy. Copleston, volume IV: 1-62	question 1
9/3	Descartes's rationalism. IV: 63-115	questions 2 & 3
9/5	Methodological solipsism.	none
9/10	Descartes's metaphysics. IV: 116-138. Paper #1 assigned.	Two questions from among 4, 5, 6, and 7
9/12	Descartes's ethics and theology. Occasionalism. IV: 139-152, and 174-179.	question 8
9/17	Discussion and debate over Cartesian philosophy	none
9/19	Pascal and existential crisis. IV: 153-173	questions 9 & 10
9/24	Spinoza's substance monism. IV: 205-229.	questions 11 & 12. Paper #1 due
9/26	Spinoza's epistemology & political philosophy. IV: 230-263	questions 13 & 14
10/1	Descartes and Spinoza on managing the passions	none
10/3	Leibniz's panlogism. IV: 264-294	questions 15 & 16
10/8	Leibniz's metaphysics and account of freedom. IV: 295-332	questions 17, 18, & 19
10/10	Discussion and debate over human freedom. Paper #2 assigned.	none
10/15	Hobbes's materialism and political philosophy. Copleston, volume V: 1-51	questions 20 & 21
10/17	<i>Friday schedule (no class)</i>	
10/22	Locke's empiricism, primary vs. secondary qualities. V: 67-107	questions 22 & 23
10/24	Locke, cont.'d	questions 24 & 25.
10/29	Locke, religion, morals, and politics. V: 123-142, and 171-201	questions 26 & 27. Paper #2 due.
10/31	Locke, Newton, science, and religion. V: 108-122, and 143-170	questions 28 & 29
11/5	Berkeley's empirical idealism. V: 202-229. Paper #3 assigned.	question 30
11/7	<i>No class</i>	
11/12	Berkeley, cont.'d. V: 230-257	questions 31 & 32
11/14	Discussion and debate over our knowledge of the external world	none
11/19	Hume and causality. V: 258-292	question 33..
11/21	Hume and the self. V: 293-317	questions 34 & 35
11/26	Hume on natural religion, miracles	none . Paper #3 due
11/28	<i>Thanksgiving break</i>	
12/3	Hume's moral psychology and politics. V: 318-353	questions 36 & 37
12/5	Discussion of the limits of reason	none
12/10	Final exam (cumulative), 1:30-3:20	everything