

Early Modern Philosophy beyond the Canon

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Meeting Times: This course will meet *synchronously* on Zoom, Tuesday and Thursday, 11:20 am to 12:40 pm, Central Time.

Student Hours: Tuesday, 9:00 am to 11:00 am, Central Time, on Zoom.

Summary:

“Early modern philosophy” is a label widely used to refer to the philosophical tradition from Descartes to Kant. This framing, with its anchoring of the tradition in two named, white male philosophers, already points towards a conception of a *canon*, a canonical set of texts and figures. Such a canon, outlined chronologically from Descartes to Kant, is also easily conceived as consisting of a philosophical progress *from* Descartes *to* Kant. This picture of the history of philosophy is commonly taught in introductory survey courses in the history of philosophy.

The goal of this course is to look at philosophy in the 17th and 18th centuries from another perspective. We will focus on three women philosophers: Margaret Cavendish, Anne Conway, and Mary Shepherd. We will engage with these thinkers at two levels. Primarily, we will seek to understand their own, positive philosophical views. We will find that each develops their own distinctive and rich philosophy. Secondly, we will examine their criticisms of the “canonical” figures in early modern philosophy, particularly the views of Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Hume.

This course has no prerequisites. However, I request that students who have not taken PHIL 26000: History of Philosophy II, or the Philosophical Perspectives HUM sequence, contact me so we can discuss a few supplemental readings to help you engage with the thinkers in this course.

Texts: Note that you will need to purchase Conway; the rest we will read in their original printings which are available in the public domain.

- Margaret Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*. Available in the public domain at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A53049.0001.001?view=toc>.
- Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*. Available in the public domain at <http://digitalcavendish.org/complete-works/the-blazing-world-1668/>.
- Anne Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, ISBN: 978-0521479042. Available through the Seminary Co-Op.
- Mary Shepherd, *An Essay Upon the Relation of Cause and Effect*. Available in the public domain at <https://archive.org/details/anessayuponrela00feargoog>.
- Mary Shepherd, *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe*. Available in the public domain at <https://archive.org/details/essaysonpercept00shepgoog>.

Course Requirements:

1. 15%: Participation

2. 35%: Midterm Paper, 6–8 pages, due 10/23 at 5 pm. You are required to meet with me to discuss your plans for your paper.
3. 50%: Term Paper, 12–20 pages, due 12/11 at 5 pm. You are required to meet with me to discuss your plans for your paper.

Policy Statements:

1. Late Papers and Extensions: For each day that the final paper is late, it will be penalized 2/3rds of a letter grade. Late papers will only be accepted up to four days after the assignment is due. For reasons of fairness, extensions will only be granted in cases of clear need. Please contact me as soon as you think that you may need an extension so we can work out an appropriate plan.
2. Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: You must document all of your source material. If you take any text from somebody else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas, or other material. If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, ask! Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be treated according to university policy. It is also your responsibility to make sure you have turned in a readable pdf or docx for all paper assignments.
3. Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to email me by the end of the first week of class. All discussions will remain confidential.
4. Recording: Personal recordings of our Zoom discussions are prohibited.

Tentative Schedule:

1. 9/29: Course introduction; a whirlwind tour of Descartes
 - Descartes, *Meditations*, Synopsis, Meditation 6
2. 10/1: Henry More's Dualism
 - More, *Immortality of the Soul*, Book 1, Chapters 1–5, 7–8, 11
3. 10/6: Introduction to Cavendish
 - Boyle and Hooke, excerpts on experimental philosophy
 - Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, Preface, To the Reader, An Argumental Discourse
4. 10/8: Cavendish on providence, mereology, and knowledge
 - Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 1, 16, 25, 31, 35
5. 10/13: Cavendish and her unnamed critics
 - Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 37
6. 10/15: Cavendish, The Blazing World

- Cavendish, *The Blazing World* (complete—start early!)
7. 10/20: Cavendish’s Metaphysics
 - Detlefsen, “Atomism, Monism, and Causation in the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish”
 8. 10/22: Cavendish’s Metaphysics
 - Peterman, “Margaret Cavendish on Motion and Mereology”
 9. 10/27: Conway
 - Conway, *Principles*, Chapters 1–6
 10. 10/29: Conway
 - Conway, *Principles*, Chapters 7–9
 11. 11/3: Conway and Monism
 - Gordon-Roth, “What Kind of Monist is Anne Finch Conway?”
 - Thomas, “Anne Conway as a Priority Monist: A Reply to Gordon-Roth”
 12. 11/5: Conway’s Theory of Mind
 - Borcharding, “Nothing Is Simply One Thing: Conway on Multiplicity in Causation and Cognition”
 - Borcharding, “Loving the Body, Loving the Soul”
 13. 11/10: Conway and Kabbala
 - van Helmont, “Cabbalistical Dialogue”
 - Sarah Hutton, “Henry More, Anne Conway and the Kabbalah: A Cure for the Kabbalistic Nightmare?”
 14. 11/12: Shepherd on Cause and Effect
 - Shepherd, *Essay on the Relation Between Cause and Effect*, Chapter 2
 15. 11/17: Shepherd on Cause and Effect
 - LoLordo, “Mary Shepherd on Causation, Induction, and Natural Kinds”
 16. 12/19: Shepherd on Cause and Effect
 - Landy, “A Defense of Shepherd’s Account of Cause and Effect as Synchronous”
 17. 12/1: Shepherd on Berkeley
 - Shepherd, *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe*, Part 2, Essays 1–2 and 6
 18. 12/3: Shepherd on Berkeley
 - Rickless, “Is Shepherd’s Pen Mightier Than Berkeley’s Word?”