

# Medieval & Early Modern Philosophy

Professor Daniel Moerner ([moerner@uchicago.edu](mailto:moerner@uchicago.edu))

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**Course Assistant:** Hannah McKeown

**Student Hours:** Tuesday, 2–4 pm, Stuart 222 (on Zoom for now); Friday, 1–3pm, Zoom.

**Summary:** The (impossibly large) task of this course is to consider the history of philosophy from the end of the Roman Empire until the Scottish Enlightenment. This period can be divided chronologically into two rough groups: the medieval philosophers, and the early modern philosophers. The medieval philosophers can be seen as united around a concern to make philosophy in some (extremely broad) sense accountable to certain core elements of religious doctrine. The early modern philosophers add a concern with accountability to certain core discoveries of the scientific revolution, although they do not give up an interest in religious doctrine entirely. For the most part, the early moderns also orient themselves around rejecting a certain, scholastic strand in medieval philosophy. However, medieval philosophy is a much richer and more diverse field than the early modern caricature of it.

This course will study six thinkers: al-Ghazali, William Ockham, Rene Descartes, Benedict Spinoza, Anne Conway, and David Hume. Our themes will include philosophical method, the metaphysics of the world, the possibility of human knowledge, and causation.

**Texts:** The following three texts are available for purchase through the Seminary Co-op, or your preferred used or independent bookstore. Please use these translations and only these translations for the course.

1. Descartes, *Meditations*, trans. Cress (Hackett). Also acceptable is the translation by Cottingham (Cambridge) available through the library: <http://pm.nlx.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.02.xml;chunk.id=div.descartes.v2.3;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.descartes.v2.3;brand=default>.
2. Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Curley (Penguin). Curley's translation is also available in multiple editions from Princeton University Press, and available through the library: <http://pm.nlx.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/>

[xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.03.xml;chunk.id=div.spinoza.v1.109;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.spinoza.v1.109;brand=default](https://www.davidhume.org/texts/e/xtf/view?docId=rationalists/rationalists.03.xml;chunk.id=div.spinoza.v1.109;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.spinoza.v1.109;brand=default).

3. Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Millican (Oxford). Since the *Enquiry* was written in English, any edition is acceptable. However, I will refer to the *Enquiry* by paragraph number. If you own another edition without paragraph numbers (e.g., Hackett), you should write in your own paragraph numbers for each chapter. This is available online: <https://davidhume.org/texts/e/>

### **Course Requirements:**

1. 10%: Section Participation and Attendance: Participation is required in section. Good participation is a matter of both making positive contributions in class and serving as a good classroom citizen.
2. 30%: Eight weekly assignments, starting in week 1, and skipping midterm week. You will be asked to write 2-3 pages, due on Thursday night at 9 pm Central. All eight assignments are mandatory; however, your grade will be calculated from a random selection of three of them.
3. 25%: Take-home midterm exam, Week 5.
4. 35%: Take-home final exam.

### **Policy Statements:**

1. 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.
2. Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me or email me by the end of the first week of class. All discussions will remain confidential.
3. Extensions: Each student in the class gets two 24-hour extensions they can use, no questions asked, for their weekly assignments. You can use them both for a single assignment to get a 48-hour extension. If you use this extension, you will need to notify your CA and put it in the top of the document you submit for the assignment. Other than these, extensions will only be granted in cases of serious need.

### **Tentative Schedule:** (subject to change)

1. Course introduction

2. al-Ghazali, *The Rescuer from Error* (Canvas), complete (Canvas)
3. Ockham, *Summula philosophiae naturalis* (Canvas), Book 1, pp. 1–19 (through Chapter 14).
4. Ockham, *Summula philosophiae naturalis* (Canvas), Book 1, pp. 19–28.
5. Descartes, *Meditations*, Letter of Dedication, Preface, Synopsis, Meditation 1
6. Descartes, *Meditations*, 2–3
7. Descartes, *Meditations*, 4–5
8. Descartes, *Meditations*, 6; supplemental texts (Canvas)
9. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 1, through Proposition 14
10. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 1, Proposition 15 through Appendix
11. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 2, until Proposition 14 (stop after the Postulates)
12. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 2, Proposition 15 through Proposition 49
13. Conway, *Principles*, Chapters 1–6 (Canvas)
14. Conway, *Principles*, Chapters 7–9 (Canvas)
15. Hume, *Enquiry*, Chapters 1–3
16. Hume, *Enquiry*, Chapter 4
17. Hume, *Enquiry*, Chapters 5–7
18. Hume, *Enquiry*, Chapters 8 and 12