

PH-204: History of Philosophy: Early Modern

"Lend me your eyes; I can change what you see!" ~Mumford & Sons

The Scientific Revolution generated discoveries and inventions that went well beyond what the human eye had ever before seen—extending outward to distant planets and moons and downward to cellular structures and other microscopic entities, none of which had been previously observed. But these new discoveries, and the scientific methods that were evolving during this time, also demonstrated fundamental flaws in how we understood ourselves as humans and our relationship to the rest of the universe.

As a result of this (among other things), in the 17th and 18th century there were radical changes in the philosophical conceptions of the nature of reality, human freedom, the relationship between mind and body, and the extent and limits of our knowledge. Philosophers wrestled with these questions with a passion. These questions were not abstract intellectual pursuits—they reached to the heart of distinctively human concerns. We will survey the philosophical systems of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. We will see a variety of theories, some that will seem tame and quaint by contemporary standards, and others that will seem quite peculiar, and we will put each one to the philosophical test.

Instructor Information

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Office: Ladd Hall, room 212
Office Hours: Thursday, 3-5 p.m., and by appointment

Course Texts

The following texts are *required* for the course:

Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources, 2nd Ed., edited by Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins (Indianapolis: Hackett Publ., 2009; ISBN: 9780872209787).

Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period, edited by Margaret Atherton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publ., 1994; ISBN: 9780872202597).

Both texts should be available in the Skidmore Shop.

Course Requirements

- Citizenship in the Republic of Letters (25%).
- Paper One (25%).
- Paper Two (25%).
- Two sets of peer reviews of classmates' papers (calculated as part of paper grade).
- Cumulative final exam (25%).

ASSIGNMENTS: Citizenship in the Republic of Letters

The scholarly community of the 17th and 18th centuries depended on wide circulation of ideas through correspondence with other scholars. This correspondence generated (in its ideal form) a “Republic of Letters”: a republic that crossed national and theological boundaries, opened up dialogue and debate, and introduced new ideas to those who were otherwise remote from one another. (Think of it as the 17th century form of the Internet!)

In order to engage with the ideas of these philosophers ourselves and to put ourselves in their shoes a bit, we will all participate as citizens in our own little Republic of Letters. I will introduce this more fully in class, but here are the basic requirements:

- (a) **Partners:** You will engage in a philosophical correspondence with two of your classmates over the course of this semester. I will make assignments in the first week of class.
- (b) **Letters:** On the schedule outlined below, you will write a letter to one of your two correspondence partners each week. These letters should respond to questions or arguments raised in previous correspondence with this individual *as well as* raise new questions or arguments related to the texts we are reading for class that week. Try to be creative and take your questions or arguments deeper than those a quick, surface-level reading might generate. Try to come up with something that would challenge your correspondent to think harder about the philosophical issues we are discussing. Feel free to take positions on the philosophical topics of the class and defend them.
- (c) **Secretaries:** In addition to writing the letters, each of you will take a turn serving as a *secretary* of the Skidmore Society of Arts & Letters. There will typically be 2 or 3 secretaries per week. The secretary’s job is to collect the correspondence, read through it, and circulate it to the intended recipient. The secretaries will identify the *best* work from that week and pass it along to the President of the Society (me!). (The secretaries may select up to 20% of the letters submitted, but they may also decide that *none* of the letters are good enough to pass along to the President.)

The secretaries will also log the correspondence for the President and identify any correspondents that have not fulfilled their role as members of the Republic—those members who didn’t take the letter writing seriously or were insulting or abusive.

- (d) **Journal:** The Society will publish two issues of its journal this semester. Of the letters that the secretaries have passed along to the President, the President will select up to 20 letters at the midterm and up to 20 letters at the end of the semester to be included in the Journal published by the Society.
- (e) **Grading:** Grading for this assignment will be as follows:
 - 1. **Full credit** for each letter that is accepted by the secretaries.
 - 2. **Half credit** for a letter identified by the secretaries as unsatisfactory, provided I agree with their assessment.
 - 3. **No credit** for failing to hand the letter in at the beginning of class on the day assigned. (If a letter is *particularly* thin, off topic, or insulting in any way, it will receive no credit.)

Late letters will not be accepted.

Each letter will be worth 10 points, and you will earn up to another 10 points for diligently performing your services as secretary. 10 additional points will be earned for any letter selected for publication in the Journal.

Your grade will then be calculated by dividing the total points earned by 130, the total points possible. For example, if you fulfilled the assignment but none of your letters are selected for publication, your grade for this assignment will be 110/130=85%, a B.

Papers

There are two papers, 6-8 pages each, due on the following schedule:

Feb. 21: First Draft of Paper 1 due

Apr. 17: First Draft of Paper 2 due

Feb. 28: Final Draft of Paper 1 due

Apr. 24: Final Draft of Paper 2 due

Philosophical writing is different from other forms of writing you may have done. If you are new to philosophy, you should know it is *fairly common* to receive a grade of B- or lower on your first philosophy papers. But this isn't a bad thing—learning how to write well is a *process* that requires that you try things out, receive feedback, and try again. As you continue to write philosophy, you will develop a more critical eye for your own writing, and as a result your writing will improve (as will your grades).

Peer Reviews

For each of the two papers, you will be asked to provide constructive comments on two of your peers' first drafts, and you will also receive feedback on your drafts from two of your classmates. The aim of this is to engage in a collaborative effort to improve each person's argument. I will provide more details on the review procedure closer to the due date for the first draft of paper one.

Grading Policy

I will follow the evaluation rubric outlined in the course catalog when assigning grades:

A+, A	Distinguished work
A-, B+, B	Superior Work
B-, C+, C	Satisfactory Work
C-, D+, D	Passing, poor-quality work
F	Failure, no credit earned

Attendance & Participation

I expect you to attend class regularly, on time, having read the assigned readings, ready to discuss them. **After 3 absences, each additional absence will reduce your final grade by 3 percentage points, no matter what the reason for the absence; 6 or more absences will result in failure for the course.**

Honor Code

In keeping with the Honor Code, I must give you some sense of what constitutes "honesty and integrity" in your work for this class. The main things I would be concerned about in this class are:

- a. **Papers:** any sources that you use in your papers or letters must be properly quoted and cited. I don't expect you to do any outside research for the papers in this class—the only source that you will need is the course text. But if you do happen to consult other sources (whether formal research materials in the library or less formal research materials such as online write-ups), you *must* identify the source. If there is any uncertainty about what constitutes plagiarism or unauthorized aid on the papers, you should discuss it with me.

Of course, you are free to make use of peer reviews, visits to the Writing Center, meetings with me, etc., to sharpen your paper. In fact, I encourage *wide use* of such aids.

- b. **Exam:** you may study together (again, I encourage it!), but you may not make use of any notes or help from others (in any form) during the exam.

If you are in doubt about whether anything else constitutes a violation of the honor code, it is your responsibility to consult with me first. Any violation of the honor code will result in failure of the class.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Below is a tentative schedule. Each of the readings should be done prior to the classes that week. Please be sure to read/review the readings again before the Wednesday session. The readings are not long, and they reward multiple readings.

Please follow this schedule unless told otherwise. If we should get off schedule, I will provide a corrected schedule.

Week 1: Introduction

READINGS:

Syllabus (read in entirety)

Maarten Ultee, "The Republic of Letters: Learned Correspondence, 1680-1720" (handout);

Biographical Introduction to Descartes (MP 1-3);

Meditations, Letter, Synopsis (MP 35-47).

1/24: Philosophy, Science, and Religion at the Beginning of the 17th Century

1/26: The Strategy of the *Meditations*

Assignment: Letters of Introduction (bring 3 copies)

Week 2: Into the Abyss: Descartes's Method of Doubt

READINGS:

Meditations, First and Second Meditations (MP 35-47).

1/31: The Strategy of the *Meditations*

2/2: *Res Cogitans*

Assignment: First Letter (to partner 1)

Week 3: Emerging from the Abyss: Descartes's Way Out

READINGS:

Meditations, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Meditations (MP 47-61)

2/7: *Perception and Reality: Descartes's Proof for the Existence of God*

2/9: *The Cartesian Circle and the Clear and Distinct Conception of Matter*

Assignment: Second Letter (to partner 2)

Week 4: Bohemian Rhapsody: Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia on Mind & Body

READINGS:

Meditations, Sixth Meditation (MP 61-68)

Correspondence with Princess Elisabeth (MA 9-21)

Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters* (selections: MA 21-24, bottom of 33 through middle of 38)

2/14: *The Real Distinction Argument and Mind-Body Interaction*

2/16: *Debating Interaction*

Assignment: Third Letter (to partner 1)

Week 5: One Thing: Spinoza on Substance Monism

READINGS:

Biographical Introduction to Spinoza (MP 111-113)
Ethics, Part I (MP 144-164)

2/21: Substance Monism

Assignment: Paper 1, Draft 1 Due (bring 3 copies)

2/23: Determinism, Necessitarianism, and Parallelism

Assignment: Peer Reviews Due

Week 6: Really, ONE Thing: Spinoza on Mind-Body Identity and Freedom

READINGS:

Ethics Part II (MP 164-187)

2/28: Mind-Body Identity

Assignment: Paper 1, Final Draft Due

3/1: Bondage and Freedom

Assignment: 4th letter (to partner 2)

Week 7: On God and Evil: Leibniz on the Problem of Evil

READINGS:

Biographical introduction to Leibniz (197-199)
"Monadology" §§1-42 (MP 275-279)
Correspondence with Lady Masham (MA 77-89)
Theodicy (handout)

3/6: The Best Argument for the Existence of God

Assignment: 5th letter (to partner 1)

3/8: The Best Argument against the Existence of God

SPRING BREAK: March 7 - 11

Week 8: Empiricism: Locke on the Nature of Knowledge

READINGS:

Biographical introduction to Locke (305-307)
An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Chapters 1-8 (322-337) and Chapter 27 (367-377)

3/20: Empiricism

3/22: Primary/Secondary Qualities (Chapter 8)

Assignment: 6th letter (to partner 2)

Week 9: Locke on Personal Identity and Catherine Trotter Cockburn on the Persistence of Identity

READINGS:

An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Chapter 27 (367-377)
Catherine Trotter Cockburn (MA 126-146)

3/27: Personal Identity

3/29: Trotter Cockburn on Persistence and Death

Assignment: 7th letter (to partner 1)

Week 10: Returning to the Abyss: Hume on the Limits of Knowledge

READINGS:

Biographical introduction to Hume (509-511)

An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, sections 1-4 (533-548)

4/3: *The Origin of Ideas*

4/5: *The Skeptical Argument*

Assignment: 8th letter (to partner 2)

Week 11: Living with the Abyss: Hume's Skeptical Solution

READINGS:

An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, sections 5-7 (548-564)

4/10: *The Skeptical Solution*

4/12: *The Idea of Necessary Connection*

Assignment: 9th letter (to partner 1)

Week 12: Awakening from Dogmatic Slumbers: Kant's Copernican Revolution

READINGS:

Biographical introduction to Kant (MP 655-660)

Prolegomena Preface and Preamble (MP 661-672)

4/17: *The Aspirations of Metaphysics*

Assignment: Paper 2, First Draft Due (bring 3 copies)

4/19: *The Copernican Revolution*

Assignment: Peer Review Due

Week 13: Awakening from Dogmatic Slumbers: Kant's Copernican Revolution

READINGS:

Prolegomena, Parts 1-3 (MP 673-706)

4/24: *Math and Science*

Assignment: Paper 2, Final Draft Due

4/26: *Metaphysics*

Week 14: Kant and Beyond

READINGS:

Prolegomena, Conclusion (MP 706-716)

5/1: *Wrapping Things Up*

Assignment: 10th letter (to partner 2)

Cumulative final exam: Tuesday, May 8, 6 – 9 p.m.

Planning Calendar for PH-204 – Early Modern Philosophy

Spring 2012

Week	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Jan. 22		Jan. 23 Classes Begin	1 – Jan. 24		2 – Jan. 26 <i>Letters of Introduction</i>		
2 Jan. 29			3 – Jan. 31		4 – Feb. 2 <i>First Letter (to partner 1)</i>		
3 Feb. 5			5 – Feb. 7		6 – Feb. 9 <i>Second Letter (to partner 2)</i>		
4 Feb. 12			7 – Feb. 14		8 – Feb. 16 <i>Third Letter (to partner 1)</i>		
5 Feb. 19			9 – Feb. 21 First Draft of Paper One Due		10 – Feb. 23 Peer Reviews Due		
6 Feb. 26			11 – Feb. 28 Paper One Due		12 – Mar. 1 <i>Fourth Letter (to partner 2)</i>		
7 Mar. 4			13 – Mar. 6 <i>Fifth Letter (to partner 1)</i>		14 – Mar. 8		
Mar. 11	Spring Break						
8 Mar. 18			15 – Mar. 20		16 – Mar. 22 <i>Sixth Letter (to partner 2)</i>		
9 Mar. 25			17 – Mar. 27		18 – Mar. 29 <i>Seventh Letter (to partner 1)</i>		
10 Apr. 1			19 – Apr. 3		20 – Apr. 5 <i>Eighth Letter (to partner 2)</i>		
11 Apr. 8			21 – Apr. 10		22 – Apr. 12 <i>Ninth Letter (to partner 1)</i>		
12 Apr. 15			23 – Apr. 17 First Draft of Paper Two Due		24 – Apr. 19 Peer Reviews Due		
13 Apr. 22			25 – Apr. 24 Paper Two Due		26 – Apr. 26		
14 Apr. 29			27 – May 1 <i>Tenth Letter (to partner 2)</i>				
May 6			May 8 Final Exam 6-9 p.m.				



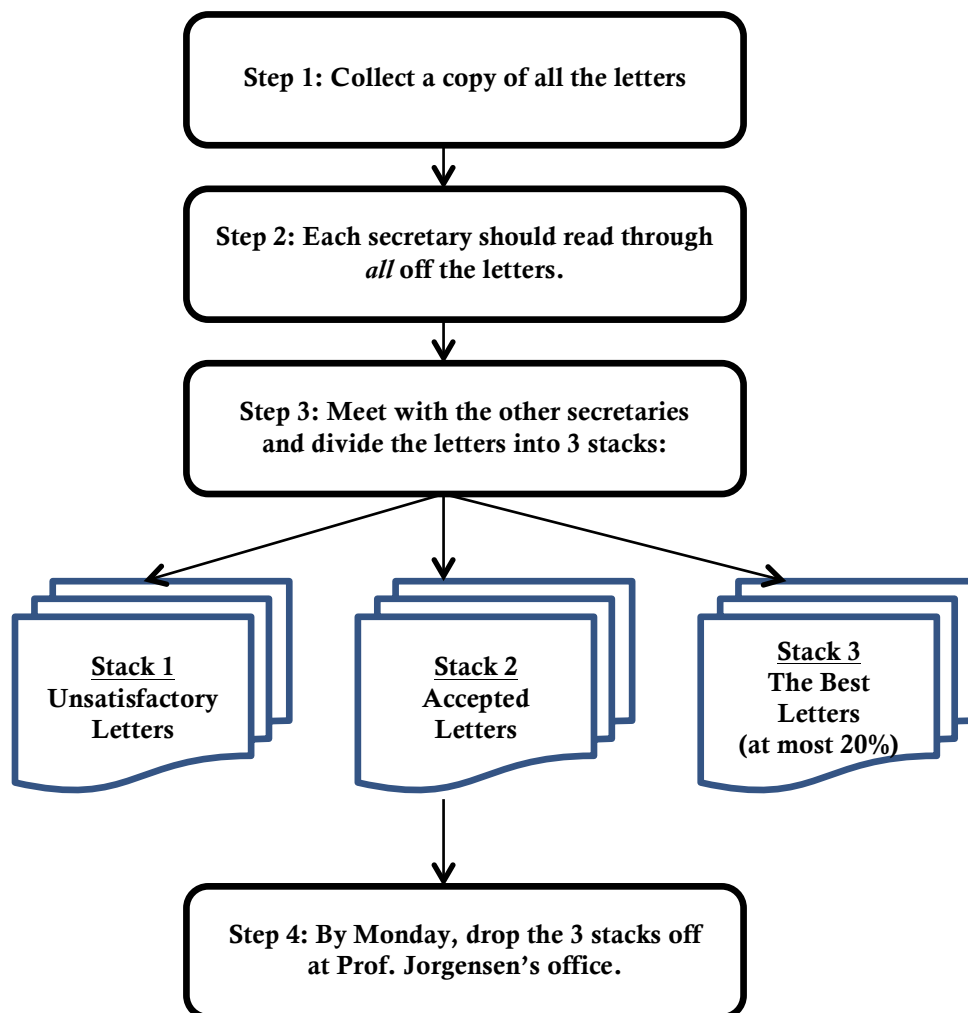
Guidelines for Secretaries of the Republic of Letters

PH-204: Early Modern Philosophy

As Secretary, your job is to identify the most promising letters and to bring them to the attention of the President (me!). I will first list the **procedures** I would like you to follow, and then I will say more about **what I'd like you to look for** in the letters.

PROCEDURES

You will be one of two or three secretaries for that week. Here is the flow of information I'd like to see you follow:



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

The syllabus gives the following description of what the letters should do:

[The] letters should respond to questions or arguments raised in previous correspondence with this individual *as well as* raise new questions or arguments related to the texts we are reading for class that week. Try to be creative and take your questions or arguments deeper than those a quick, surface-level reading might generate. Try to come up with something that would challenge your correspondent to think harder about the philosophical issues we are discussing. Feel free to take positions on the philosophical topics of the class and defend them.

With these goals in mind, there are three main criteria I'd like you to use as you review the letters your classmates have written:

- 1. Quality of Philosophical Engagement:** the author does not merely summarize the readings, but instead engages with the philosophical arguments, raising challenges or developing the arguments in interesting ways. The claims made by the author are supported with evidence and/or reasons.
- 2. Fairness and Integrity:** the author represents others' views accurately and fairly, whether the views expressed in the readings or those expressed by their letter-writing partner. Avoids straw-men and *ad hominem* responses and instead takes seriously the views offered by others.
- 3. General Clarity and Polish:** the author's writing is clear, free from distracting grammatical or stylistic errors. The letter is well structured (not rambling or unfocused) and is generally well polished.

There is no required *length* for the letters, although it would be difficult to do all of this well in a short letter. If a letter is particularly thin, off-topic, or insulting, or if the secretaries deem it generally falling short of the above criteria, you should submit it as "unsatisfactory."

GRADING

I will read through the letters after the secretaries have submitted them. If I agree with the secretaries' assessments, I will assign credit as described in the syllabus.

I will assume that you, as secretaries, will work together in making the decisions for the week. If I discover that you have not carried your weight, I will reduce your grade for this assignment. Also, if you—the secretaries as a group—fail to be sufficiently discerning (i.e., submitting many average letters as "best" or letting unsatisfactory letters receive full credit), your scores may also be reduced.