

# Modern Philosophy

Laura Wildemann Kane

Sample Syllabus

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Modern Philosophy focuses mostly on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy, including the works of René Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant. We will explore some of the most well-known texts from these thinkers, as well as the lesser-known but equally fundamental works of Elisabeth of Bohemia, Ann Viscountess Conway, and Catherine Trotter Cockburn to provide a comprehensive accounting of Modern philosophical thinkers. The common themes that dominate this period – questions that concern the existence of God, the Mind/Body problem, the idea of the self, the source of knowledge, the extent of knowledge, and the existence of objects in the world – have influenced many contemporary beliefs and attitudes. We will discuss these themes and touch upon several related themes throughout the semester.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Recognize and explain the key problems and ideas that shaped the Modern philosophy period
2. Know how to read a historical text thoroughly and critically
3. Bolster critical thinking skills as they are applied to reading and comparing philosophical arguments
4. Refine writing skills through course papers and written exams

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1	Introduction <b>René Descartes</b> , Discourse on Method, Part II
Week 2	<b>René Descartes</b> , Meditations on First Philosophy, Letter of Dedication <b>René Descartes</b> , Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation One
Week 3	<b>René Descartes</b> , Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation Two <b>René Descartes</b> , Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation Three
Week 4	<b>René Descartes</b> , Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation Four <b>René Descartes</b> , Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation Five

- Week 5     **René Descartes**, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation Six  
**Elisabeth of Bohemia**, Correspondence with Descartes
- Week 6     **Ann Viscountess Conway**, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (selections)
- Week 7     **Gottfried Leibniz**, *Monadology*, §1-47  
**Gottfried Leibniz**, *Monadology*, §48-90
- Week 8     **John Locke**, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chap. I, "Of Ideas in General, and their Original"  
**John Locke**, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chap. VIII, "Some Farther Considerations Concerning Our Simple Ideas"
- Week 9     **John Locke**, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chap. IX, "Of Perception"  
**John Locke**, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chap. XXVII, "Of Identity and Diversity"
- Week 10    **George Berkeley**, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part I, §1-33  
**Mary Shepherd**, "Consideration of the Erroneous Reasoning Contained in Bishop Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge*" (selection)
- Week 11    **David Hume**, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section II, "Of the Origin of Ideas" (Parts I & II)  
**David Hume**, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section IV, "Skeptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding" (Parts I & II)
- Week 12    **David Hume**, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section VII, "Of the Idea of Necessary Connection" (Part II only)  
**David Hume**, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section VIII, "Of Liberty and Necessity" (Parts I & II)
- Week 13    **Immanuel Kant**, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction, §IV "On the Distinction between Analytic and Synthetic Judgments"  
**Immanuel Kant**, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction, §V "All Theoretical Sciences of Reason Contain Synthetic a priori Judgments as Principles"

Week 14     **Immanuel Kant**, Critique of Pure Reason, Transcendental Doctrine of Elements, Part I “Transcendental Aesthetic” (incl. Space & Time)