

**PHIL 2330**  
**MODERN PHILOSOPHY**

**COURSE INFORMATION**

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**Class Meetings:** Monday, Wednesday, Thursday (1:35-2:40); 017 Snell Library

**Instructor:** Getty L. Lustila, Department of Philosophy and Religion  
Ph.D., Boston University, 2019  
[g.lustila@northeastern.edu](mailto:g.lustila@northeastern.edu)

**Office Hours:** Monday, Thursday (11:00am-1:00pm); 420S Renaissance Park (Humanities Center)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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Scholars use the term Modern Philosophy to refer to the period of philosophical development during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This period was one of great upheaval in the sciences, morals, and politics. We will touch on each throughout the course. There are two crisis that will frame our discussions: one of which occurred in the sciences and the other that happened in the realm of morals and politics.

With transcontinental travel and trade and the increase of cross-cultural exchange, people were forced to face that their deepest held beliefs about value, morality, and political organization were not shared by others, which lead to increased skepticism, cynicism, and alienation. In the sciences it became clear that the older, Aristotelian physics and biology, which placed human beings at the center of existence was simply untenable. The world was a machine and humans just so happened to be more complicated than many of their fellow components. This realization exacerbated the aforementioned alienation.

Modern Philosophy is an attempt to confront these two crises. In this course we will be reading works by René Descartes, Margaret Cavendish, John Locke, Mary Astell, Émilie du Châtelet, David Hume, Sor Juana, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Sophie de Grouchy, and others. A few questions we will tackle are: “Do we have a ‘Self?’”, “What sort of emotional dispositions should we cultivate?”, “How can we be happy?” “Is there a place for illusion in a well-balanced life?” “Can we ameliorate the injustices of the past?” Each of these questions we will consider are very live issues in philosophy, political science, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, theology, gender and race studies. This is simply the beginning.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

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The primary objectives of the course are to

- Give you familiarity with one of the most important periods in philosophical history.
- Refine your ability to carefully read and analyze texts.

- Develop your skills as a writer – learning to produce clear, coherent prose and craft well-structured arguments.
- Develop your skills as a communicator – learning to receive feedback on your ideas and writing from your peers and to give helpful feedback to others.
- Spark your natural curiosity for philosophical ideas and questions.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

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- All readings are available on Canvas

## ASSIGNMENTS

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1. Papers (2) – 40% of your final grade
  - Instructions for each paper on canvas.
  - Each paper will be 1000 words.
  - You will be assessed primarily on the structure and clarity of your paper. You will be assessed secondarily on how well you have engaged with the source material. Before finalizing your paper ask yourself: “have I answered the question(s) in the prompt?”, “does my paper exhibit a clear, line of thought?”, “do I make proper use of paragraph structure to advance this line of thought?”, “have I read my paper aloud to see whether it flows?”, “do I accurately characterize the views conveyed in the source material?”, and “does my discussion of this material show that I have engaged with it?”
2. Personal Reflections (3) – 45% of your final grade
  - Instructions for each reflection on canvas.
  - Each reflection will be 750 words.
  - You will be assessed primarily on completion. You will be assessed secondarily on the structure and clarity of your reflection. Before finalizing your reflection ask yourself: “have I answered the question(s) in the prompt?”, “does my reflection exhibit a clear, line of thought?”, “do I make proper use of paragraph structure to advance this line of thought?”, and “have I read my reflection aloud to see whether it flows?”
3. Participation – 15% of your final grade
  - Your participation grade **will be mostly determined by the discussion board**. The expectation is that you post **4x a week**. Each week has a discussionpost associated with it. In this post, you will find the reading questions for that weekposted at the top. **You are not expected to complete these questions** - the questions are there to **a) help guide your reading and b) test your comprehension of the material**. If after reading the text, browsing the board, and coming to class that you still cannotanswer these questions this is a **good sign you should reach out to me**.

- I open posts one week in advance and close them on **Saturday at midnight**. So, to count for credit, your posts must be completed before that time. An original post or a reply to one of your classmates, *equally count* for one of your weekly posts.
- **No posts are due on Week 1 or Week 9:** there are still reading questions for Week 1 so make sure to look there and feel free to engage with one another about the Homer, Hesoid, and Solon selections - it just isn't expected.

4. Attendance – 5% of your final grade

- You are allowed **two unexcused absences** ("unexcused" is defined as you not having emailed me prior to the start of class - exceptions to this rule are made in the case of emergencies). For every unexcused absence *after this second* you sacrifice 1/4 of your attendance grade. When it comes to having to miss class for any reason (job interview, work conflict, or feeling bogged down) **just shoot me an email before class**. Communication is key: it's important for me to know where you're all at so I can know how to best help you learn.

### Grade Scale

- A 93-100
- A- 90-92
- B+ 88-89
- B 83-87
- B- 80-82
- C+ 78-79
- C 73-77
- C- 70-72
- D+ 68-69
- D 63-67
- D- 60-62
- F 0-59

### EXPECTATIONS

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What you can expect from me:

- I will upload any course readings **at least a week** prior to when they will be covered in class – you can expect the same when it comes to the reflection and essay topics.
- I will grade any and all assignments **within 12 days** of them being turned in.
- I will respond to any and all emails **within 48 hours**.
- I will hold office hours **as scheduled**. If you are unable to attend office hours, you are more than welcome (even encouraged) to set up another time for us to meet.

- I will shift the class schedule as deemed necessary for *your learning*. If we need extra time on a topic or you're collectively interested in pursuing a topic further, I will make any necessary changes to the schedule. **These changes will be communicated via email.**
- I will begin each class by writing down 2-3 questions on the board to help frame our discussions. **These questions will be circulated in advance** (at the end of the prior class) so that you can keep them in mind when you're completing the reading.
- I will engage with you – in writing and in person – in a **thoughtful manner**. As I see it, this thoughtfulness has two components. I will be **respectful** of your ideas, and also dedicated to **your improvement** as a thinker and writer. At times, this dedication will require me to be critical in my feedback, which is I sign that I take you seriously.
- I will be **understanding and empathetic** regarding any challenges that you face, either in this class or in your personal lives (to the extent that they bear on your ability to turn work in on time, keep focus, maintain motivation, etc.).

What I can expect from you:

- You will **attend** each class, or notify me of your absence prior to class
- You will attend class having **read** and being prepared to **discuss** the material for that day. My advice is that you a) complete the reading twice and b) make a note of 2-3 questions and 2-3 comments you have. This exercise will cement your understanding of the material and give you a sense of which points you found interesting and/or confusing. Points of interest and/or confusion are the perfect material for discussion.
- You will **complete your work** on time or notify me of your inability to do so.
- You will engage with me and your classmates in a **thoughtful** manner. Show the same dedication to others (and to yourself) that I do to you. For this semester, for three hours a week, you and your classmates are on a bit of a journey. The journey will not always be easy, and we will all meet obstacles along the way. Lift each other up.
- You will **not give up on yourself**. At times, the readings and the assignments will be difficult. If you feel like you are slipping or things have stopped making sense, *reach out*. There is nothing honorable about suffering in silence. I am here to help with anything you may require along your journey, but you must always keep pushing.
- You will **stay curious** and **work to improve**. We have a lot to learn from each other. If you work to maintain your sense of curiosity and desire to improve throughout the course, you will come out of this experience as a better writer and a clearer thinker.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

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Week 1: The Limits of Human Knowledge

1/19 – Introduction

1/20 – Michel de Montaigne, “Apology for Raymond Sebond,” selection

Week 2: The Search for New Foundations

1/24 – Montaigne, “Of Cannibals”

1/26 – René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Parts 1-2

1/27 – Descartes, *Discourse*, Part 3

Week 3: Mind and Nature

1/31 – Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, “First Meditation”

2/2 – Descartes, *Meditations*, “Second Meditation”

2/3 – Descartes, *Meditations*, “Sixth Meditation,” selection

**Reflection 1 Due: 2/6**

Week 4: Humans, Animals, and Other Living Beings

2/7 – Descartes, *Discourse*, Part 5, selection; Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters* I. 35-6

2/9 – Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Man Machine*, selection

2/10 – Cavendish, “A Dialogue Between an Oak and a Man Cutting Him Down”

Week 5: Personal Identity

2/14 – John Locke, “Of Identity and Diversity,” selection

2/16 – Continued Discussion of Locke

2/17 – David Hume, “Of Personal Identity,” and “Appendix”

**Paper 1 Due: 2/20**

Week 6: Self-Knowledge

2/21 – **No Class**

2/23 – Madeleine de Scudéry, “Of the Knowledge of Others and of Ourselves”

2/24 – Continued discussion of Scudéry

Week 7: Attaining Happiness

2/28 – Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, “Let Us Pretend I am Happy”

3/2 – Émilie du Châtelet, “Discourse on Happiness”

3/3 – Continued Discussion of Sor Juana and Du Châtelet

**Reflection 2 Due: 3/6**

Week 8: The Promise of Education

3/7 – John Locke, *Some Thoughts on Education*, selection

3/9 – Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, selection

3/10 – Continued discussion of Astell's *A Serious Proposal*

Week 9: Spring Break

3/14 – **No Class**

3/16 – **No Class**

3/17 – **No Class**

Week 10: Losing Ourselves in Others

3/21 – Étienne de La Boétie, *On Voluntary Servitude*, selection

3/23 – Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, selection

3/24 – Continued discussion of Rousseau's *Second Discourse*

Week 11: The Hope of Freedom

3/28 – Continued discussion of Rousseau's *Second Discourse*

3/30 – Continued discussion of Rousseau's *Second Discourse*

3/31 – Abbé Sieyès, Marquis de Lafayette, "Declaration of the Rights of Man"

Olympe de Gouges, "Declaration of the Rights of Women"

Jean-Jacques Dessalines, "Haitian Declaration of Independence"

Week 12: Inequality and Inhumanity

4/4 – Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, selection

4/6 – Continued Discussion of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication*

4/7 – Continued Discussion of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication*

**Paper 2 Due: 4/10**

Week 13: Moral Progress

4/11 – Sophie de Grouchy, *Letters on Sympathy*, "Letter I-II"

4/13 – Grouchy, "Letter V-VI"

4/14 – Grouchy, "Letter VII-VIII"

Week 14: A Better Tomorrow?

4/18 – **No Class**

4/20 – Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, selection

4/21 – Continued discussion of Condorcet's *Sketch*

Week 15: Journey's End

4/25 – Condorcet, "Advice to His Daughter"

4/27 – Final Discussion

**Reflection 3 Due: 4/25**

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## **RESOURCES / FURTHER INFORMATION**

**Canvas:** This course is going to be run on Canvas. Course materials, discussion boards, assignments, communications, and everything else will be done through Canvas. Canvas training, support and help for students can be found here - <https://canvas.northeastern.edu/student-resources/>

**Academic Honesty:** Failing to indicate when material is taken from someone else is academically dishonest and intolerable. All work you hand in must be your own and the proper attribution of ideas and language must be done with care. A copy of Northeastern University's Academic Honesty and Integrity Policy can be found at <http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academic-integrity-policy>. Any instance of plagiarism, cheating, or the like could result in the perpetrator's receiving a failing grade for the course and will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. I will make use of the plagiarism detection service available through Canvas, and your papers will be archived in that database. If you have any questions about this policy, please come talk to me.

**NU Writing Center:** For assistance with your writing, please access services at the NU Writing Center: <http://www.northeastern.edu/writingcenter/>

**Disabilities / Special Needs:** The university's Disability Resource Center works with students and faculty to provide students who qualify under the Americans With Disabilities Act with accommodations that allow them to participate fully in the activities at the university. Ordinarily, students receiving such accommodations will deliver teacher notification letters at the beginning of the semester. Students have the right to choose whether to disclose their specific disabilities to instructors but must provide a letter to receive accommodations. Please view the Northeastern University Disability Center's website for information regarding requests for academic accommodations: <http://www.northeastern.edu/drc/>

**A Note About FACT (Faculty Advisor Communication Tool):** I will be using this tool to alert advisors of any students who are having difficulty meeting the expectations for the course. This is intended to help students who may benefit from additional support. A fact report is not punitive in any way. It does not affect your grade and does not go on your transcript. It only alerts you and your advisor that you might need some additional support. If you think you might need extra academic support, please talk to me and/or your advisor.

**Support Services:** If you or someone you know would like to discuss confidential information about health or mental health care, please contact Northeastern University Health and Counseling Services (<http://www.northeastern.edu/uhcs/counseling-services/>). Health and Counseling Services also provides 24/7 mental health support. If you need support and are not sure who to contact, We Care (<http://www.northeastern.edu/wecare/>) can connect you with the appropriate supports, services and resources on campus.

**Peer Tutoring:** <https://undergraduate.northeastern.edu/peer-tutoring/> offers a wide range of tutoring services to meet the academic needs of undergraduate students. Peer tutoring services are free and open to all NU undergraduate students.

**International Tutoring Center:** <https://international.northeastern.edu/gss/> provides international students with free, comprehensive English language and academic support. The ITC includes English as a Second Language Tutoring (ESL), Language and Culture Workshops, and Reading Workshops

**Title IX:** Northeastern's Title IX Policy prohibits Prohibited Offenses, which are defined as sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship or domestic violence, and stalking. The Title IX Policy applies to the entire community, including male, female, transgender students, and faculty and staff. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, *confidential* support and guidance can be found through *University Health and Counseling Services* staff (<http://www.northeastern.edu/uhcs/>) and the *Center for Spiritual Dialogue and Service* clergy (<http://www.northeastern.edu/spirituallife/>). Alleged violations can be reported *non-confidentially* to the Title IX Coordinator within The Office for Gender Equity and Compliance ([titleix@northeastern.edu](mailto:titleix@northeastern.edu)) and/or through NUPD (Emergency 617.373.3333 Non-Emergency 617.373.2121). Reporting Prohibited Offenses to NUPD does *not* commit the victim/affected party to future legal action. Faculty members are considered "responsible employees" at Northeastern University, meaning they are required to report all allegations of sex or gender-based discrimination to the Title IX Coordinator. A complete list of reporting options and resources both on- and off-campus can be found at [www.northeastern.edu/titleix](http://www.northeastern.edu/titleix).

**Religious Observance:** Students unable to attend classes, participate in required course activities, or take a scheduled examination because of religious observance will be provided with reasonable opportunity to make up the course work without adverse effects. The university policy on religious

observance:

[http://www.northeastern.edu/policies/pdfs/Policy\\_on\\_Instructional\\_Accommodations\\_for\\_Student\\_Religious\\_Observance\\_rsa1.pdf](http://www.northeastern.edu/policies/pdfs/Policy_on_Instructional_Accommodations_for_Student_Religious_Observance_rsa1.pdf).

**Concerns Regarding the Course:** Students are encouraged to discuss concerns regarding the course with me. If students wish to pursue a concern with someone else, they can contact Ronald Sandler, Chairperson, Department of Philosophy and Religion ([r.sandler@northeastern.edu](mailto:r.sandler@northeastern.edu)). Information on academic appeals policies and procedures can be found in the Student Handbook at <http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-2017-UG-Handbook.pdf>