

# **Philosophy in the 17th Century**

*Instructor: Dr Kraal*

*Latest update: April 17, 2025*

## ***1 Course Description***

This course is a study of 17th Century Philosophy, with a focus on the philosopher widely considered the fountainhead of Modern Philosophy: Descartes.

We pursue a close reading of some of Descartes's central writings, and then look at the influence of Descartes on virtually all subsequent 17th Century philosophers, including Pascal, Spinoza, Leibniz, Newton, Locke, and Bayle.

## ***2 Teaching style***

This course is run a bit like a large book club, in that we read sections of the books before each class and then I give a lecture on those sections. The lectures aim to be “conversational” in the sense that I will mostly sit and talk to you about the book, reading specific passages out loud, providing commentary on those passages, and using the projector to write down some key terms and ideas that I encourage you to include in your notes.

I will not be using power point slides in this course, nor will I be posting recordings. *Students who strongly rely on power point slides and recordings should carefully consider, before taking the course, whether they are willing to take a course with no power points or recordings.*

**3 Lectures.** MW 1:00-4:00pm

## ***4 Policy on missed lectures***

Students can request the Instructor to make a posting on their behalf on Canvas Announcements asking for notes. Please note that Instructors or TA's cannot repeat the contents of missed lectures, or summaries of missed lectures, in emails; that is not considered a reasonable request.

**5 Instructor.** Dr. Anders Kraal (anders.kraal@ubc.ca)

**6 Instructor Office Hours.** TBA on Canvas Announcements

**7 Instructor Email Policy.** Instructor will reply to emails weekdays, typically within 48h.

**8 How to address me:** “Dr Kraal” or “Professor Kraal” are okay. Out of respect for academic tradition you should avoid calling me by my first name.

**9 Teaching Assistants.** TBA on Canvas.

**10 Marking.** The TA's will be marking all the exams in this course.

**11 Required Texts.**

Descartes's *Meditations and Discourse on Method*. (Dover edition.)

Available in bookstore and also free online here:

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Author:René\\_Descartes](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Author:René_Descartes)

**12 Course Requirements**

Your mark is determined by your results on 3 midterms and a final exam (worth 25% of your final grade each). You will need a computer and internet connection to write the exams.

*Midterms (x3).* Midterms are worth 25% each. They are written via Canvas using Respondus Lockdown Browser. Questions occur in random order, and in different order for different students, and you will not be able to see all the questions at once, and you cannot go back and revise an answer to a question which has been submitted. These exams are open book (you can have course materials and written notes with you while writing). In these exams, you will be asked to provide answers to a few questions dealing with matters brought up in class prior to the date of the exam. If you miss one or more of these exams, for any reason, the weight will automatically be transferred to your final. There is no need to apply for academic concession. There will be no alternate arrangements to make up for missed exams (no makeup exams, no special arrangements).

*Final Exam:* The final exam is worth 25% and will be held during UBC's final examinations period. It is written via Canvas using Respondus Lockdown Browser. Questions occur in random order, and in different order for different students, and you will not be able to see all the questions at once, and you cannot go back and revise an answer to a question which has been submitted. These exams are open book (you can have course materials and written notes with you while writing). In these exams, you will be asked to provide answers to a few questions dealing with matters brought up in class prior to the date of the exam. A missed final exam will be assigned 0p unless an explanation is provided that is acceptable by the standards of the UBC Academic Calendar (in which case there will be a standing deferred final exam after the course is over and administered by UBC Student Advising, not by the Philosophy Department).

Note: if you have an internet glitch during an exam, that will not be accommodated, so whatever you were able to write during the time you had internet connection is what will be marked. (If we were to seek to accommodate claims as to glitches it would be impossible to ensure the integrity of the exam, as it would be impossible to distinguish actual glitches from made-up glitches.) The only exception to this is if Student Advising writes to the instructor supporting an exemption. It is the student's responsibility and not UBC's to ensure a reliable internet connection.

### ***13 Learning Outcomes***

At the end of the course the student will be expected to be familiar with some main ideas in the writings to be discussed in this course. The student will be expected to be able to provide critical reflection on the aforementioned ideas on written exams.

### ***14 Marking Parameters***

Your mark in this course will be a function of three main factors i) your performance on the examinable momenta *relative to your peers*, ii) your comprehension of the course material, iii) demonstration of skill in assessing and evaluating philosophical ideas.

### ***15 Marking Scale***

**A+** 90-100% / **A** 85-89% / **A-** 80-84% / **B+** 76-79% / **B** 72-75% / **B-** 68-71%

**C+** 64-67% / **C** 60-63% / **C-** 55-59% / **D** 50-54% / **F** 0-49%

The degree of difficulty on the examinable momenta will be set so as to *aim* at a class average outcome that by and large conforms to the department average for this course down the years. Scaling may be used to this effect.

### ***16 Policy on Exam Feedback***

Marks on exams and papers will be posted on canvas.

*Generic feedback* on expected outcomes of exams and papers will be provided (typically by the Instructor) in so-called Feedback Sessions during class time.

Additional *specific feedback* on your exam may be provided at the discretion of the TA who marks your exam. Note that TA's are working under substantial time restrictions (often they are allotted no more than 20min by the University for the marking of each exam), and students cannot expect as a matter of principle specific feedback beyond what the TA has or has not already provided. Any concerns about the marking of an exam should be submitted to the marker via email, and will be responded to via email. Unresolved issues can be emailed to the Instructor during the final exam period towards the end of the course.

### ***17 Plagiarism***

Plagiarism is intellectual theft, and occurs where a student submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others, but when another person's words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the

work submitted is the student's own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments.

See also <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,959>

### ***18 UBC Values and Policies***

UBC values respect for the person and ideas of *all members* of the academic community. This includes students, graduate students, instructors, and staff.

Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated.

Suppression of academic freedom is not tolerated.

UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural observances.

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence.

UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available here: <https://senate.ubc.ca/policiesresources-support-student-success>.

Students are expected to conduct themselves respectfully towards each other as well as towards their TA's and their course instructor.

### ***19 Schedule (a more detailed schedule will be published on canvas)***

May 12: Introductory remarks / Descartes' early writings

May 14: Descartes' *Discourse on Method*

May 19: Descartes' *Discourse on Method*

May 21: **[Exam1 at 1:00-1:50pm]** Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*

May 26: Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*

May 28: **[Exam2 at 1:00-1:50pm]** Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*

June 2: Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*

June 4: Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*

June 9: Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* [selections to be posted on Canvas]

June 11: [**Exam3 at 1:00-1:50pm**] Final remarks on Descartes

June 16: Scientific inheritance of Descartes: Newton, Leibniz, etc

June 18: Philosophical responses to Descartes: the Locke/Leibniz and Hume/Kant controversies, skeptical responses (Pascal, Bayle, Hume), etc.

[**Final exam** at some point between June 23-27]