Syllabus for Phil314, Fall term 2026

Philosophy in the 17th Century:

Descartes and Hobbes

Instructor: Dr Anders Kraal

Last updated: Aug, 2026

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, namely the French philosopher Descartes.

We will pursue a close reading of some of Descartes's central writings, including *Regulae*, *Discourse in the Method*, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and *Principles of Philosophy*. In these writings Descartes seeks to arrive at unshakable mathematical certainty with regard to his knowledge of his own Self, God, immortality, and indeed the basic structure of the whole Universe.

As an interesting contrast to Descartes, we will also look at the philosopher who was arguably Descartes' chief philosophical rival, namely the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. We read pertinent sections from Hobbes' *Leviathan* to get the contrasting picture, seeking to understand why Hobbes believes that Descartes' project fails.

2. Lecture dates and times

See Canvas/Home, as well as the schedule in section 20.

3. *Instructor*

Dr. Anders Kraal (anders.kraal@ubc.ca)

4. *Instructor Office Hours*

The instructor will hold weekly office hours over Zoom at a time specified on Canvas/Home (where the Zoom link will also be found).

Students should email one day in advance if they plan to attend an office hour.

When several students plan to attend the same office hour, the available time will be divided into equally large time slots so that each student has an equal amount of time to ask questions as the next student.

5. *Instructor Email Policy*

The instructor will read and reply to emails on weekdays.

Students should use emails for course logistics questions, not substantive philosophical questions about the course content. The place for philosophical questions is in the Q&A immediately following lectures, or in office hours.

6. *Teaching Assistant*

See Canvas Home.

7. *Required Texts*

Some PDFs with readings will be uploaded on Canvas.

Additionally, the following course book will be used:

R. Descartes, *Meditations and Discourse on Method*. (Dover edition.)

T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford edition.)

8. Lecture style

8.1 *Texts:* A lecture is typically associated with a text, and is aimed at elucidating or explaining or explicating or contextualizing the text. Information about which text is associated with which lecture is typically posted in advance either on Canvas Announcements or on Canvas Home.

8.2 *Asking questions*: Classes often learn better when questions about lecture content are saved for the Q&A at the end of the lecture, rather than interspersed throughout the lecture itself. If you have questions about the course content, save them for the Q&A at the end.

8.3 *Notes:* Students are responsible for taking lecture notes; the instructor will not provide students with lecture notes.

8.4 *Slides:* In line with some recent research*, slides are not made use of in this course. (*Hyeyoun Kim, "Impact of slide-based lectures on undergraduate students' learning," *Computers & Education* vol. 123 (2018).)

8.5 *Recordings:* For student privacy reasons, lecture recordings are not permitted. Exceptions are granted only for students with disabilities who have written permission from UBC's Access and Diversity unit, which must be emailed to the instructor in advance.

8.6 *For the online section of the class:* An online section has been added to this course to make it possible for those students who are unable to be physically present in the classroom to be able to still take the course. These students should however be aware that the statistically optimal way of taking a class is by being physically present in the classroom. In particular, online students should know the following:

i) the Zoom camera will be directed at a screen in the classroom on which is displayed what is being written by the instructor on the classroom projector (students are accordingly not able to see the instructor's face during the lecture);

ii) the Instructor will look at the Zoom chat for student questions only during the Q&A period at the very end of the lecture;

iii) the Zoom live-stream is not recorded;

iv) online students must still be physically present in the classroom to take exams.

9. Classroom etiquette

9.1 *Late arrival and early departure*: it is often disruptive when students arrive late or leave early. To minimize disruption, students who arrive late should sit in the back and along the sides of a classroom.

9.2 *No eating in classroom*: it is often disruptive when students bring meals or snacks to classroom. This is not permitted in this class.

10. ***Exam Requirements***

10.1 There will be four in-class exams worth 15% each, and one end-term exam worth 40%.

10.2 *The in-term essay exam (15%):* One of the four in-class exams is an essay exam. The exam will consist of 2 questions which you are to answer in maximum 500 words each. This exam should be written on Canvas using Respondus Lockdown Browser (UBC's usual system for online exams). You must come to the classroom with your computer to write the exam. Any

student who takes the exam without being physically present in the classroom will be deemed to have committed academic misconduct.

10.3 *The multiple choice exams (15% + 15% + 15%):* The remaining in-class exams are multiple choice exams, where 7 questions are posed and the correct answer(s) selected from a list of options.

10.4 *The end-of-term exam (40%)*: The end-of-erm, or final, exam will be held during UBC's final examinations period. The time and date of the final exam is fixed by the UBC admin, not the instructor. As soon as the instructor knows the time and date, it will be posted on Canvas Announcements. A missed final exam will be assigned Zero 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 typically several months after the term ends. Finals are not handed back to students, as per UBC policy. Final exam scores are not posted or handed back to students, rather it is added directly to the scores earned from the midterms and uploaded directly to UBC Workday's grade database. The student will see the final grade as soon as UBC Workday provides them with this information.

10.4 *Evaluation parameters:* Your answer will be evaluated according to the parameters of i) factual accuracy, ii) clarity, iii) relevance, and iv) cogency. There will be no makeup exams for students who performs poorly on exams.

10.5 *Concession for writing exams on paper:* As a concession the opportunity to write exams on paper will also be provided. If you write on paper, you will receive a sheet of paper when you arrive in class and you will get to use a maximum of one page per question. You must also sit on the two front rows in class. But note the following four conditionals:

—If you are to be granted the concession of writing on paper, you need to notify the instructor about this no less than 24 hours prior to the exam.

—If you are to be granted the concession of writing on paper, you need to bring your own pen to the exam. If you do not bring your own pen, you are not permitted to start asking random students to borrow a pen once the exam has already started; this sort of disruption is unfair and disrespectful to students who are focusing on writing their exam.

—If you write on paper but the TA finds it difficult to read your handwriting, the TA will have the liberty to assign your answer a Zero, or else to detract points, or else ask you to type it out. It will be up to the discretion of the TA to make this call.

—If you write on paper you are not entitled to feedback and will not receive your paper exam back once marked. All marked material will be retained by the University.

10.6 *Scope of exams:* Unless otherwise announced, exam 2 will not deal with the subject-matter of exam 1, exam 3 will not deal with the subject-matter of exams 1 or 2, and exam 4 will not deal with the subject-matter of exams 1 or 2 or 3. The final exam however is cumulative.

10.7 *Closed book policy:* All exams are closed book. You must put all notes, cellphones, and books away before you enter the classroom to write the exam.

10.8 *Display Student ID card:* You must display your UBC student ID card during exams.

11. ***Missed exam policy***

11.1 If a student misses one in-class exam, for whatever reason, the weight of that exam will be transferred to their final exam.

11.2 If a student misses two in-class exams, for whatever reason, the weight of that exam will be transferred to their final, but they will not be able to score more than 80% in the course.

11.3 If a student misses three in-class exams, for whatever reason, the weight of that exam will be transferred to their final, but they will not be able to score more than 75% in the course.

11.4 If a student misses four in-class exams, for whatever reason, then the weight of none of these exams will transfer to their final, and their final mark will be wholly determined by their final

12. ***Exam feedback policy***

12.1 All exams are marked by TA's, unless otherwise stated.

12.2 TA's are entitled to judge from case to case if, and if so how much, written feedback is to be given to a student beyond the mark itself.

12.3 Students asking TA's for additional feedback should be aware that each TA has limited time allotted for each exam, and may not be able to provide as much feedback as they ask for.

12.4 A student who misses an in-class exam cannot ask to receive the exam questions after the missed exam.

13. Learning Outcomes

The course will provide the student with many occasions to refine their ability and skill in

i) retaining and processing the verbal information presented in the lectures; and

ii) retaining and processing the written information found in the course readings; and

iii) reasoning about this information by using established canons of logic such as seeing what claim follows from what claim; and

iv) evaluating this information by using established canons of epistemology such as the distinctions between hypothesis, justified belief, and knowledge.

14. Missed Lectures

Students who miss class are encouraged to ask classmates for notes.

If asking classmates for notes fails, students may post an announcement on Canvas/Discussion with a request for notes. Note that the instructor is not responsible for ensuring that their request is answered.

15. Marking Parameters

The multiple choice exams, which are worth altogether 45% of your grade, are marked on grounds of factual accuracy.

The essay exams, which are worth altogether 55% of your grade, are, as noted in section 10.4, marked not only on grounds of factual accuracy but also on grounds of clarity, relevance, and cogency.

In determining the degree of clarity, relevance, and cogency your essay exams display, the marker will be taking into account your performance relative to your peers. If one student's answers are clearer, or more cogent, or more relevant to the question asked than those of another student, the TA will seek to have this element of relative performance reflected in the grading.

16. Marking Scale

This course employs the standard marking scale at use at UBC's Philosophy Department:

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 class average will conform to the department average for this course. Scaling may be used to this effect. (Hitherto a class has never been scaled down, but it often happens that it is scaled up.)

17. Policy on Review of Marked Work

Marks on in-class exams are posted on canvas.

Feedback on marking of in-class exams falls to the marker.

Concerns about the marking of an exam should be submitted to the marker via email, and will be responded to via email.

Answer keys are not posted or emailed as part of any feedback.

18. Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

i) Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a commitment to upholding the values of honesty, respect, integrity, and accountability in academic work. It is foundational to teaching and learning and is a shared value and commitment of all members of the UBC community.

Students are responsible for informing themselves about and meeting academic integrity expectations, and for developing their understanding of academic integrity concepts and skills.

At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required.

This also means you should not attempt to gain an unfair academic advantage or benefit, nor should you help others do the same.

Do not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. For assessed work, any assistance from others (or AI tools) should be clearly acknowledged and done only where permitted by your instructor on the course syllabus or assessment instructions.

Academic misconduct is further defined in the Academic Calendar with examples. Students should seek clarification from their instructors if they have any questions about academic integrity expectations.

Violations of academic integrity (i.e., academic misconduct) may lead to serious consequences and harsh sanctions. As outlined in the Academic Calendar, students engaged in academic misconduct may be issued a Warning Letter, referred to the Diversionary Process, or formally disciplined by the President's Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Academic misconduct must be reported pursuant to UBC's academic misconduct regulations.

A more detailed description of academic integrity and academic misconduct, including the University's policies and procedures, may be found in the Academic Calendar statement on Academic Misconduct. UBC's academic integrity website contains information for students about academic integrity and the academic misconduct process.

ii) Plagiarism

Plagiarism occurs when an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person or source as their own.

Plagiarism occurs when words, phrases or ideas from another person or source are used without this being 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 by quotation marks or indentions. Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism.

Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works.

Plagiarism occurs when a student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aid does not 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 doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments.

iii) Use of AI not permitted during exams

This exam is designed to assess your individual understanding of course material under supervised conditions. Use of GenAI tools during this exam is not permitted. GenAI tools may not be used to:

i) Answer, draft, or check any exam or quiz questions during the assessment

ii) Access AI tools of any kind during the exam period, including on personal devices

20. Schedule

A continuously updated schedule will be posted on Canvas.

10/9 Introductory remarks

15/9 Descartes' life in outline
17/9 Descartes' Regulae

22/9 Descartes' Regulae
24/9 Descartes' Discourse on Method

29/9 cont'd
1/10 Exam 1 (15%)

6/10 Descartes' Meditations
8/10 cont'd

13/10 No class
15/10 Exam 2 (15%)

19/10 cont'd
21/10 cont'd

27/10 cont'd
29/10 Exam 3 (15%)

3/11 cont'd
5/11 Hobbes' Leviathan

10/11 No class
12/11 No class

17/11 cont'd

19/11 Exam 4 (15%)

24/11 Hobbes' Objections and Descartes' Replies
26/11 cont'd

1/12 The Cartesian Movement: Rise and Fall
3/12 cont'd

8/12 cont'd

?/12 Final exam of term (40%)