

PHIL 4150 – Early Modern Women Philosophers

Fall 2021

R 2:00–4:50 ACE 211

Christopher P. Noble, Ph.D.

Office: PME 125

cnoble@ncf.edu

Office Hours: TBD and by appointment

It is my expectation that masks will be worn in class. If you are sick, don't come to class, and if you have any covid symptoms (fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, fatigue, congestion or runny nose, headache, muscle or body aches, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, or loss of taste or smell) immediately contact Student Health or Wellness@cf.edu

Course Description:

Recent scholarship in the history of philosophy has sought to challenge the traditional male-centric historical canon by foregrounding the contributions of women philosophers on philosophical topics including metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and politics. In this course, we will study the philosophical visions and political programs proposed by women philosophers including (but not limited to) Elisabeth of Bohemia, Margaret Cavendish, Anne Conway, Damaris Masham, Mary Astell, Emilie du Châtelet, and Mary Wollstonecraft, as well as their correspondences and controversies with male peers. In so doing, the course will address methodological and historiographical questions related to the place of women in the history of philosophy and the project of building a more inclusive philosophical canon. Some background in this history of philosophy (for instance a course in Modern Philosophy) is advised for participation in this course but is not an absolute prerequisite. This course satisfies one of the history of philosophy requirements for the Philosophy AOC.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

Develop an understanding of the views proposed by Early Modern Women Philosophers
Develop an understanding of the context, methods, and modes of argumentation relevant for understanding the work of women philosophers in the Modern period.
Hone ability to analyze philosophical arguments and conduct original research in the history of philosophy/history of Modern Philosophy
Students may use any existing language skills in Latin/French to read primary sources and conduct research.

Course Evaluation Criteria

Expectations for a “satisfactory” evaluation include regular attendance (no more than 3 absences during the semester), exhibition of an understanding of course material, participation in class discussion, and on-time completion of assignments.

Assignments:

Short written reflections upon reading material (one per week).

Students are expected to lead a brief class discussion on a topic of their choice from the reading once during the semester.

1 short paper (5-6 pages) thoroughly analyzing an argument or textual passage

1 longer research paper (roughly 3,000 words) that engages secondary literature and defends an interpretation of a particular philosopher or text. Students will develop their projects on the basis of feedback from both peers and the instructor.

Disability Services:

New College of Florida is committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its student body. Students are welcome to privately discuss any concerns related to barriers to both fully participating and learning in this course. I highly encourage students with accommodations to meet with me as soon as possible.

If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, you may contact the office of Student Disability Services (SDS) in order to request official accommodation(s). Students may contact SDS in-person (HCL3), at 941-487-4496 OR disabilityservices@ncf.edu. Additional information regarding SDS can be accessed here: <https://www.ncf.edu/student-disability-services/>

Academic Dishonesty Policy:

Students are expected to be familiar with the college's academic dishonesty policy, as described in the General Catalog. Any violation of this policy may result in academic sanctions, up to and including dismissal from the college.

Required Books:

The Correspondence Between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes, ISBN: 978-0226204420

Margaret Cavendish: Essential Writings, ISBN: 978-0190664060

Emilie Du Châtelet: Selected Philosophical and Scientific Writings, ISBN: 978-0226168074

Women Philosophers of Seventeenth-Century England: Selected Correspondence, ISBN: 978-0190673338

Women Philosophers of Eighteenth-Century England: Selected Correspondence, ISBN: 978-0197506998

Additional course materials will be posted in PDF form on the course Canvas page.

Schedule of Readings (Tentative)

Thursday 8/26 Introductions, Syllabus Review. What is Natural Philosophy?

Thursday 9/2 Anna Maria van Schurman: "Whether the Study of Letters is Fitting for a Christian Woman" (posted on Canvas); René Descartes *Meditations* 1–2 (posted on Canvas); Optional: Sarah Hutton, "Women, Philosophy, and the History of Philosophy" (posted on Canvas)

Thursday 9/9 The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and Descartes pp. 61–181

Thursday 9/16 Thomas Hobbes: Selections from *Leviathan* (posted on Canvas); Lady Margaret Cavendish: “World’s Olio” (*Essential Writings*, pp. 23–39) and “Philosophical Letters” (*Essential Writings* pp. 59–98).

Thursday 9/23 Lady Margaret Cavendish: “Observations on Experimental Philosophy” (*Essential Writings* pp. 99–129) and “The Blazing World” (*Essential Writings* 171–199).

Thursday 9/30 Correspondence between Lady Anne Conway and Henry More (17th Century Correspondence, pp. 80–113): *Principles of Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* Chs. 1–3 (posted on Canvas)

Thursday 10/7 Lady Anne Conway *Principles of Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* Chs. 4–9 (posted on Canvas)

End of First Mod, First paper due Friday 10/8

Fall Break Week of Monday 10/11

Thursday 10/21 Correspondence between Mary Astell and John Norris (*Eighteenth-Century Correspondence*, pp. 10–43); Lady Damaris Masham: “A Discourse Concerning the Love of God” (posted on Canvas).

Thursday 10/28 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: “A New System of the Nature and Communication of Substances” (posted on Canvas); Correspondence between Leibniz and Lady Damaris Masham (Seventeenth Century correspondence, pp. 192–230)

Thursday 11/4 Selections from Correspondence between Leibniz and Samuel Clarke (posted on Canvas); Emilie Du Chatelet: “Foundations of Physics” (*Selected Writings*, pp. 115–155)

Thursday 11/11 Emilie Du Chatelet: “Foundations of Physics” (*Selected Writings*, pp. 155–200) Emilie Du Chatelet: “Discourse on Happiness” (*Selected Writings*, pp. 345–365)

Thursday 11/18 Mary Wollstonecraft: Selections from *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (posted on Canvas)

Thursday 11/25 Thanksgiving Holiday, no class

Thursday 12/2 – Optional Final Project Workshop

Friday 12/10 – Final Project due