

# Philosophical Perspectives – 2

HUMA 11600-4

University of Chicago, Winter 2015

TR 1:30–2:50pm, Wiebolt 408

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Office Hours: Wednesday 9–11am and by appointment, Rosenwald 218D

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Office Hours: by appointment

## Course Description

This course provides an introduction to the intellectual—in particular the philosophical—problems posed by the scientific revolution. As we will see, the challenges our authors face are twofold: first, to articulate and defend a completely new style of inquiry, distinguishing it and separating it from the old; and, second, to find a place, within the modern scientific paradigm, for our understanding of ourselves as knowers and actors, as beings that live *in* the world that science studies, so to speak, from without. We, along with our authors, will grapple with such questions as “What—if anything—do we know, and how do we know it?” and “How should we understand the nature of the human mind and its place in the natural world?” More generally, we will consider the differences and relations between the forms of explanation employed in “everyday” life—arguably, the only forms of explanation available in the pre-modern world—and the forms of explanation employed in modern scientific inquiry. How, in other words, does our non- or pre-scientific understanding of the world and our place in it relate to the new, modern scientific, understanding of the world and our place in it?

## Course Goals

My central aim in this course, as your instructor, is to guide you through your own reactions to the texts we’ll read over the course of the quarter. The goal is for you to learn how to take your initial reactions to something you read and work them up into a reasoned and articulate take on the text—a take that is no longer merely a reaction, but is, instead, an interpretation of a text and of its broader intellectual significance. Much of our discussion, then, will consist in sifting through our initial reactions to what we read and trying to decide which of those reactions are most worth pursuing, i.e., which of them are most likely, if pursued, to lead to a deeper understanding of the text. A secondary goal, then, is to familiarize you with a distinctive feature of humanistic inquiry: namely, the fact that such inquiry often involves spending significant amounts of time wandering down paths that prove to be, in a sense, dead ends—but that nonetheless deepen your understanding of the issues at hand, and so are, in another sense, fruitful detours on the way to understanding.

## Course Requirements

### Required Texts

The following four texts are required, and are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-op. All other readings will be made available on the course Chalk site.

- René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press)
- Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writings* (Penguin)
- David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Hackett)
- Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Life is a Dream* (Dover Thrift)

### Participation

Class discussion will be a central component of our work together this quarter. Good discussions are the fruit of careful reading: if you put in the work to read and digest the material (which might require re-reading), our discussions will be rewarding. If you fail to do such work, our discussions will be much less rewarding. So everyone should come to class ready with questions, concerns, objections, and new ideas. The harder we all work on our own outside of class, the more we'll all learn together in class. Because participation in class is so important, attendance at all classes is required, and will be a factor in determining your final grade.

### Chalk posts

Since the goal of this course is to guide you in working out your reactions to our readings, it is essential that we be able to structure each class session around those reactions themselves. To that end, you will be expected to submit one or two questions to Chalk **by 11:00am** the day of each meeting (i.e., every Tuesday and Thursday). I will then read your questions before class, and begin each class session by outlining the day's discussion topics. Most of these will be drawn from your questions, though occasionally they will be supplemented by topics chosen either by me or by Dawn. I will also try to order the topics in a way that will allow for a natural progression from one topic to another, while ensuring that we cover the topics that strike you all as important, and while leaving enough time for discussion of each of them.

### Writing Seminars

You will also be required to attend three sets of writing seminars, led by Dawn. Your attendance at and participation in the writing seminars will affect your participation grade in this course. More importantly, though, the writing seminars are an integral part of this course, and of your education. So take them as seriously as you take all of your other work.

## Papers

Finally, you will be asked to write four papers over the course of the quarter. Topics will be distributed one week in advance for the first two papers, and two weeks in advance for the third and the fourth.

First paper:	2 pages	due January 19
Second paper:	3 pages	due February 4
Third paper:	5 pages	due February 23
Fourth paper:	7 pages	due March 16

With the exception of the second, all papers are due on Mondays, at 5:00pm. Papers are to be submitted electronically through the course Chalk site (I will send instructions before the first paper is due). And they must be in standard formatting: Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins.

## Grading Policies

The overall breakdown of your course grade will be as follows:

First paper:	5%
Second paper:	15%
Third paper:	30%
Fourth paper:	35%
Participation:	15%

Papers will be graded blindly, and according to the criteria distributed with the essay prompts. I recommend consulting these grading criteria before you begin writing, and then again before you begin any process of revision.

Late papers will be docked three percentage points for each day they are late. Extensions will usually be granted if requested at least 5 days in advance for the first and second papers and 7 days in advance for the third and fourth papers. Extensions requested later than that will typically not be granted (except in case of illness, etc.).

Participation covers in-class participation, Chalk posts, and participation in writing seminars. Unexcused absences (either at class or at a writing seminar), unsatisfactory in-class participation, and missed Chalk posts will all result in the loss of participation points.

Letter grades will be determined as follows: 97–100 is an A+, 93–96 is an A, 90–92 is an A-, 87–89 is a B+, and so on.

## Accommodations

The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the University's programs or services, you are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. To receive reasonable accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with Student Disability Services. Please contact the office at 773-834-4469/TTY 773-795-1186 or gmoorehead@uchicago.edu, or visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu. Student Disability Services is located in Room 233 in the Administration Building located at 5801 S. Ellis Avenue.

If you require any accommodations for this course, please—as soon as possible—provide me with a copy of your Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) so that we can discuss how to implement your accommodations.

## Schedule

### Introduction

January 6 Introduction to the themes of the course (no reading)

### The Modern Scientific Worldview

January 8 Francis Bacon, *New Organon*, selections  
 January 13 Galileo Galilei, "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina"  
 January 15 Isaac Newton, *Principia*, selections

### Descartes: New Foundations

January 19 **First paper due** – must be submitted on Chalk by 5:00pm  
 January 20 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation 1  
 January 22 Descartes, *Meditations*, Meditation 2  
 January 27 Descartes, *Meditations*, Meditation 3  
 January 29 Descartes, *Meditations*, Meditation 4  
 February 3 Descartes, *Meditations*, Meditation 6  
 February 4 **Second paper due** – must be submitted on Chalk by 12:00pm

### Cavendish: The Tangling of the New and the Old

February 5 Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, pp. 119–167

February 10 Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, pp. 167–225

### **Hume: Naturalism, Empiricism, and Skepticism**

February 12 David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sections I–III

February 17 Hume, *Enquiry*, Section IV

February 19 Hume, *Enquiry*, Section V

February 23 **Third paper due** – must be submitted on Chalk by 5:00pm

February 24 Hume, *Enquiry*, Section VII

February 26 Hume, *Enquiry*, Section VIII

### **Calderón: Skepticism in Literature**

March 3 Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Life is a Dream*, Acts I and II

March 5 Calderón, *Life is a Dream*, Act III

### **Kant: Beyond Hume's Skepticism**

March 10 Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, Preface, Preamble, and General Question

March 16 **Fourth paper due** – must be submitted on Chalk by 5:00pm