

PHIL 203 MODERN PHILOSOPHY

Spring 2026
Augustana College

General Information:

- Instructor: Dr. Deke Gould
- Meetings: TuTh 12:20pm - 2:00pm in Old Main 223
- Office Hours: WTh 2:00pm - 3:00pm, or by appointment in Old Main 224
- email: dekegould@augustana.edu

Required Texts:

- Russell. *The History of Western Philosophy*. ISBN: 978-0671201586
- Descartes. *Meditations, Objections, Replies*. Hackett. ISBN: 978-0872207981
- Spinoza. *Ethics*. Hackett. ISBN: 978-0872201309
- Leibniz. *Discourses on Metaphysics and Other Essays*. Hackett. ISBN: 978-0872201323
- Locke. *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Hackett. ISBN: 978-0872202160
- Berkeley. *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonus*. Hackett. ISBN: 978-0915144617
- Hume. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Hackett. ISBN: 978-0872202290
- Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Hackett. ISBN: 978-0872202573
- Occasionally, additional required and optional materials will be made available on Moodle.
 - Recommended but OPTIONAL: Grayling. *The History of Philosophy*. ISBN: 978-1984878762

Course Description:

This course presents studies in the Rationalist philosophical tradition of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and the Empiricist tradition of Locke, Berkeley, Hume. The course culminates in a brief introduction to the transcendental idealism of Kant. Topics will include perception, knowledge and skepticism, mind and matter, the nature and existence of God, and the character of reality. We will use the significant 20th century analytic philosopher Russell and his *The History of Western Philosophy* (for which he won the 1950 Nobel Prize in Literature) as our guide. While this guide is flawed and we will note some of those imperfections along the way, it would be an illusion to presume that any guide is without shortcomings. However, given Russell's engaging and snarky style, and given his prominent place in the history of philosophy, we will find much of value in his insights about the development of early modern philosophy.

Course Objectives:

The primary objective of this class is *to do* as much philosophy as possible. In this course, we will go beyond a mere introductory-level history of ideas. Rather, we will aim to hone our abilities as dedicated students of philosophy, by mastering the use of relevant technical terms of art, appreciation of important conceptual distinctions, and grasping the subtleties of classic scholarly arguments. Through this study, we will improve the quality of our own thinking on these difficult topics, as well as our ability to articulate and rigorously defend our own views.

Grading:

This is the breakdown by weight for the overall grade:

- In-class Discussion Participation: 20%
- Reading Quizzes: 15%
- Writing Exercises: 15%
- First Short Essay: 10%
- Midterm Exam: 10%
- Second Short Essay: 15%
- Final Exam: 15%

○ Each portion is explained in more detail below.

In general, grades in this class reflect the following scale:

- 100-98%: A+, 97-93%: A, 92-90%: A-
- 89-87%: B+, 86-83%: B, 82-80%: B-
- 79-77%: C+, 76-73%: C, 72-70%: C-
- 69-60%: D
- 59-0%: F

General NO GADGETS Policy:

The only technology you are permitted to use (with some rare exceptions; see below) are physical books, physical paper, and a physical writing utensil. We will use each meeting in this class as an opportunity to exercise and strengthen our attention and focus; both of these are skills that are desperately needed in our world today, and can help to improve the quality of our lives. I have much, much more to say about this, but for now, you are aware that no electronic devices should be used in class. Thus, all of your texts need to be physical print copies, and you will need to print all documents I share on Moodle and bring them with you to class. Students who violate this policy will be ejected from the classroom, and will earn no participation credit for that day.

In-Class Participation:

Classroom participation and discussion are essential to the proper function of any decent philosophy course. Thus, everyone in the class is responsible for all class meetings and students will be graded on their classroom participation. For most class meetings, I will record a point score for each student, ranging from zero to two points. If a student misses a class meeting (for any reason), the student will receive zero (out of two) points for that day. If the student attends a class meeting but contributes nothing to the discussion, the student will receive one (out of two) points for the day. If the student attends and positively contributes to class discussion, the student will receive two (out of two) points for that day.

Mature and respectful dialogue is crucial for any philosophy course to be successful. Thus, any student who engages in disrespectful behavior will be ejected from the classroom and will earn zero points for that day. To be clear, talking while others are talking, texting in class, or habitual tardiness (more than twice) count as disrespectful behavior.

Attendance:

You shouldn't miss class, since a significant portion of your grade depends on your active daily contributions to the dialogue. For more details regarding attendance, please consult the official

attendance policy and guidelines for Augustana College here:
<https://www.augustana.edu/information-students/attendance-guidance> .

Reading Quizzes:

You are expected to complete the readings at least once ***before*** the first meeting, and then re-visit and re-read the texts throughout the rest of the week before the Wednesday and Friday meetings. The proper function of each class meeting will presuppose this regular preparation. In order to help you hold yourself accountable to this responsibility, I will administer a brief reading quiz about some central concepts from the readings assigned that week. Each quiz will be “open book/open note”, but students will only have a very short (about 5 minute) amount of time to complete their answer. Each quiz will be worth 5 potential points: a complete demonstration of proper preparation will earn 5 points, an adequate but incomplete demonstration will earn 4 points, and inadequate demonstrations will earn either 3, 2, or 1 point. Late or missing quizzes will not be accepted for credit; however, I will drop the two lowest quiz scores, in case of unavoidable absences.

Writing Exercises:

Throughout the semester, there will be frequent, spontaneous in-class writing assignments. Some assignments will involve summarizing core arguments from assigned readings; other assignments will concern brainstorming and drafting your own unique arguments. Almost all assignments will involve mastery of the core concepts of logic covered in the Week 1 lecture. Each assignment will be graded on a scale from 0 to 10 potential points: an excellent piece will earn 9 or 10 points, a good one will earn 8 points, a satisfactory one will earn 7 points, and an unsatisfactory piece will earn 6 or fewer points. More details will be given in class. Late or missing writing exercises will not be accepted for credit; however, I will drop the two lowest exercise scores, in case of unavoidable absences.

Short Essays:

You will write essays defending your own arguments in response to the ideas we are studying in this class. Given the importance of using our own brains when exercising these central skills, we will host AI-free writing workshops in-class. Details will be given in class at least one week before these workshops. If the student misses class during scheduled essay writing days for a legitimate excusable reason, it is the student’s responsibility to arrange a make-up writing session with the instructor within a week of the absence.

Midterm & Final Exams:

The exam for this class are in-class essay exams, which will cover the concepts and core arguments from the assigned readings and class discussions. More details (and a brief study guide) will be given in class at least one week before each exam. If the student misses class during scheduled exam for a legitimate excusable reason, it is the student’s responsibility to arrange a make-up exam with the instructor within a week of the absence.

Statement on Academic Dishonesty:

Everyone is expected to be familiar with the college’s policy on academic dishonesty. I have no tolerance for cheating in my classes: **if someone is caught cheating in my class, that student will receive an F for the course, and a message will be sent to the Honor Council.**

Generic statement on the use of AI in this class: unless your instructor notes otherwise, all written work submitted in your classes is assumed to be your work, and not the product of an AI system. Suspicious cases will result in a one-on-one meeting between the student and the instructor, in which the student will demonstrate their understanding of the content or an explanation of the generation of the work. Cases of blatant use of AI in order to pass off its products as one's own **will count as plagiarism**, and the penalties listed above will apply. Further details will be discussed in class.

Statement on Accommodations:

If you have any need for any accommodations, please let me know by the end of the first week of the semester. Below is a common syllabus statement provided by the Office of Disability Services:

If you are a student who has a documented disability, or had academic accommodations in high school or at another institution of higher learning, you may be eligible for services. Services are coordinated through the ODS (office of disability services). Augustana College in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is committed to equity, access, and inclusion for all students. Please visit the ODS website <https://www.augustana.edu/student-life/residential-life/disability-services> for more information.

PHIL 203 COURSE SCHEDULE

All readings scheduled below are required for the week listed, so students are expected to read the assigned texts before we meet, preferably more than once.¹ Students are expected to read all of the assigned texts at least once quickly by Tuesday, and the remainder more carefully by Thursday. For additional perspective, read the corresponding chapters in Grayling (recommended but optional). There are about 64 average pages of reading each of the 9 reading weeks: please budget your time accordingly.

Week 1 (Thu 5 Feb): Introduction to Philosophy and Logic

- logic and essay writing handouts (on Moodle)
- podcast: [Think \(KERA 12 November 2025\), "Everybody Can Read, But Nobody Does"](#)
- podcast: [On Point \(WBUR 11 August 2025\), "Does Using AI Dumb You Down?"](#)

Week 2 (Tue 10 Feb & Thu 12 Feb): Introduction to Modern Philosophy

- Russell, *History*, Book Three, Part I “From the Renaissance to Hume”, Chapter I “General Characteristics (p491-495)
- Russell, B3P1, ChII “The Italian Renaissance” (p495-503)
- Russell, B3P1, ChV “The Reformation and Counter-Reformation” (p522-525)
- Russell, B3P1, ChVI “The Rise of Science” (p525-540)
 - about 30 pages

¹ In general, you are expected to work for approximately 2 to 3 hours outside of class per week for each hour spent in class with your instructor. Thus, you should expect to devote approximately 7.5 to 11.25 hours per week outside of our class meeting time on work and preparation for PHIL 203.

Week 3 (Tue 17 Feb & Thu 19 Feb): Descartes

- Russell, B3, P1, ChIX “Descartes” (p557-p568)
- Descartes, *Meditations*, “Meditations on First Philosophy” (p1-41)
- Descartes, *Meditations*, “Third Set of Objections and Replies” (p100-115)
 - about 66 pages

Week 4 (Tue 24 Feb & Thu 26 Feb): Spinoza

- Russell, B3P1, ChX “Spinoza” (p569-580)
- Spinoza, *Ethics*, “Part I: Concerning God” (p31-62)
- Spinoza, *Ethics*, “Part II: Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind” (p63-101)
 - about 80 pages

Week 5 (Tue 3 Mar & Thu 5 Mar): Review and Writing Workshop

- first short essay due on Thursday 5 March

Week 6 (Tue 10 Mar & Thu 12 Mar): Leibniz

- Russell, B3P1, ChXI “Leibniz” (p581-596)
- Leibniz, *Discourse*, “Discourse on Metaphysics” (p1-41)
- Leibniz, *Discourse*, “The Monadology” (p68-81)
 - about 68 pages

Week 7 (Tue 17 Mar & Thu 19 Mar): Review and Midterm Exam

- midterm exam on Thursday 19 March; a study guide for the midterm exam will be available by Tuesday 17 March

SPRING BREAK: no class Monday, 23 March - Friday, 27 March

Week 8 (Tue 31 Mar & Thu 2 Apr): Locke

- Russell, B3P1, ChXIII “Locke’s Theory of Knowledge” (p604-p617)
- Russell, B3P1, ChXV “Locke’s Influence” (p641-647)
- Locke, *Essay*, Book I, ChI “Introduction” (p4-7)
- Locke, *Essay*, Book I, ChII “No Innate Principles in the Mind” (p7-14)
- Locke, *Essay*, Book II, ChI “Of Ideas in General and their Original” (p33-39)
- Locke, *Essay*, Book II, ChII “Of Simple Ideas” (p40-41)
- Locke, *Essay*, Book II, ChVII “Of Simple Ideas of Both Sensation and Reflection” (p45-46)
- Locke, *Essay*, Book II, ChXII “Of Complex Ideas” (p66-68)
- Locke, *Essay*, Book II, ChXVI “Of Number” (p84-85)
- Locke, *Essay*, Book II, ChXXIII “Of Our Complex Ideas of Substances” (p117-129)
- Locke, *Essay*, Book II, ChXXVI “Of Cause and Effect, and Other Relations” (p132-133)
- Locke, *Essay*, Book IV, ChI “Of Knowledge in General” (p224-228)
- Locke, *Essay*, Book IV, ChIX “Of Our Knowledge of Existence” (p274)
- Locke, *Essay*, Book IV, ChX “Of Our Knowledge of the Existence of a God” (p275-284)
 - about 73 pages

Week 9 (Tue 7 Apr & Thu 9 Apr): Berkeley

- Russell, B3P1, ChXVI “Berkeley” (p647-659)
- Berkeley, *Dialogues*, “First Dialogue” (p7-42)
- Berkeley, *Dialogues*, “Second Dialogue” (p43-60)
 - about 64 pages

Week 10 (Tue 14 Apr & Thu 16 Apr): Hume

- Russell, B3P1, ChXVII “Hume” (p659-674)
- Hume, *Enquiry*, Sections 1 - 7 (p1-53)
 - about 68 pages

Week 11 (Tue 21 Apr & Thu 23 Apr): Review and Writing Workshop

- second short essay due Thursday 23 April

Week 12 (Tue 28 Apr & Thu 30 Apr): Kant

- Russell, B3P1, ChXX “Kant” (p701-718)
- Kant, *Critique*, “Introduction [Second Edition]” (p43-68)
 - about 42 pages

Week 13 (Tue 5 May & Thu 7 May): Kant

- Kant, *Critique*, Part I “Transcendental Aesthetic” (p71-104)
- Kant, *Critique*, Part II Chapter II “On the Deduction..” Section II [Second Edition] (p175-203)
 - about 88 pages

Week 14 (Tue 12 May & Thu 14 May): Review

- a study guide for the final exam will be available by Tuesday, 12 May

Week 15 (Finals Week)

- Final Exam Date and Time: Monday 18 May 12:00pm - 2:00pm in our usual classroom. Please double-check the registrar’s final exam schedule page to make sure this is accurate.