PHIL 389: Modern Philosophy: Reason, Freedom and Tolerance
Spring 2017
Online

Course Description
Most of us take for granted that freedom and tolerance are important social values. When we disagree, it is generally over their grounds and limits. In this course, we look to the early modern origins of our notions of political and religious freedom in order to explore the range of ways these values have been conceived and defended. More specifically, this course explores the hypothesis that how one conceives of tolerance depends on how one understands the operations and limits of human reason. In short, we explore the possibility that epistemology shapes political and social theory in major (if underappreciated) ways.

Our focus will be on writings from the 17th and 18th centuries. In this period, philosophers were simultaneously dealing with changes in their understanding of science and reason, on the one hand, and changes in the relationship between the state and religious authorities, on the other, a confluence which makes the period nearly perfect for unpacking the connections between reason, freedom, and tolerance. Our goal is both to understand the lessons of the 17th and 18th centuries in their native context, and to use these lessons to better understand how reason, freedom, and tolerance interrelate in our own time.

Course Learning Objectives
Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:
1. Explain the major philosophical approaches to epistemology and toleration in the 17th and 18th centuries
2. Analyze complex philosophical arguments and texts
3. Evaluate and adjudicate philosophical disputes in clear and concise writing
4. Apply philosophical concepts and analysis to contemporary arguments germane to the course themes
5. Present research findings in an appropriate digital medium

Texts
Readings will be drawn from the following texts¹. All are available online.

Hobbes  
Leviathan

Spinoza  
Theological-Political Treatise
Ethics

Mendelssohn  
Jerusalem, or Religious Power and Judaism

Locke  
Essay Concerning Human Understanding
A Letter Concerning Toleration

Bayle  
Philosophical Commentary

Rousseau  
Discourse on the Arts and Sciences
The Social Contract

¹ Note: As of submitting this draft, I am still determining the exact section/chapters to be used from each of these works. They will appear on the final syllabus.
Notes on Learning in an Online Environment

*Online environments are different. This is exciting, but may require patience and an open mind*

Online environments open new possibilities for teaching and learning. I encourage you—especially if this is your first online class—to begin the class with an open mind about the possibilities of online learning. Neither online nor face-to-face classes are inherently better than the other (we can no more generalize about all online classes than we can about all traditional lecture-courses); I hope we can all approach the class with a desire to discover and to take advantage of the unique possibilities the online environment affords for interaction with both academic resources and one another.

In a spirit of full disclosure, this is my first time offering an online class. I am doing so as part of a national study on online classes in the humanities. I have received resources and training to help me design this course, but know that this is a learning experience for me as well as for many of you. Do not hesitate, especially in the first few weeks, to ask questions about technical or pedagogical aspects of online learning—let’s help each other out! As long as we are all giving sincere effort, I hope there is a general climate of patience and comradery as we get our digital footing.

*Technology Requirements*

The course will be managed through Carroll’s Moodle page, with most assignments found directly on the course page. We will also make use of certain Google apps (like Google Hangouts and Docs) and of the videoconferencing application Zoom, all of which are available to students through [Carroll’s single sign-on](#). We will use a web-based platform, [Classroom Salon](#), to collectively annotate texts. Students will be sent a link to the course’s Salon and will be required to create a free account.

To complete the course, you will need a reliable computer or mobile device with a high-speed internet connection and good web browser. If you do not own such a device, Carroll’s computer labs have the requisite technology available (subject, of course, to the hours the labs are open).

*Common Misconceptions*

This course will be conducted mostly *asynchronously*, meaning that we will not be required to be online accessing the course materials at the same time. It is sometimes assumed that asynchronous means “work at your own pace.” Resist this assumption. This course has a regular rhythm for when work must be completed and assignments submitted (see the [Course Structure](#), below). The asynchronous format affords you some flexibility in determining when to complete assignments (and great flexibility in determining “where”), but we will be working through the course material at a common pace.

It is likewise sometimes assumed that online courses are easier or less demanding. Again, resist such generalizing assumptions. This is a 300-level philosophy course. You should expect to spend significant time reading, analyzing, writing, and discussing, as you would in any other 300-level humanities course. The course’s medium does not determine its rigor.

*Netiquette*

Please consult and adhere to the basic standards of “netiquette” or “net etiquette” as helpfully [outlined by the good folks at Colorado State University](#).

*How do I…?*

Please consult the course Moodle site for tutorials on navigating the course page and completing the course activities. Let me know if there are further questions and I will address them.
Course Structure

The course is organized into eight units: a one-week introductory unit, a two-week unit for each of the six thinkers we study, and a two-week unit centered on the final project.

The six main units will open at noon on a Saturday and close at noon two weeks later (see Schedule, below). These units will follow this general pattern (all times are Mountain):

**Saturday, noon:** Unit opens. Introductory materials are posted (usually a brief biographical video from the web, along with a set of guiding questions for the reading). Salon opens.

**Monday, 11:55 PM:** Annotations due

**Tuesday morning:** Peer annotations opened for review. Instructor begins commenting.

**Wednesday, noon:** Self-assessments due

**Thursday morning:** Brief video (~20 min) posted commenting on trends in the week’s salon and addressing major questions.

Discussion Forum opens

**Friday, noon:** First postings to Forum due

**Saturday, noon:** Discussion Forum closes

The above due dates will repeat for the second week of the unit. At the end of each unit, however, a writing assignment will be due.

End of Units 2, 4 Gallery Entry

End of Units 3, 5, 7 Paper

End of Unit 6 Project Progress Report

Course Requirements and Grading

a. **Text Annotations (15%):** Sustained, critical engagement with philosophical texts is of paramount importance in any course in the history of philosophy. You will be expected to annotate each week’s text using Classroom Salon. In your annotations, you will be asked to highlight and comment on the main points in the author’s argument, key presuppositions the author makes, material related to our course themes (reason, freedom, tolerance), and passages you find especially challenging/interesting. For specific expectations on annotations and for information on the grading criteria, see the Moodle site.

Note: You are not required to annotate the entire text in one sitting. In fact, I think you would be ill-advised to do so. Many of the readings will be lengthy (as there is only one reading per week), so be sure to give yourself time to read and critically annotate them.

b. **Self-Assessments (5%):** Once everyone has submitted their annotations, I will make the collected annotations available to the class. That is, you will be able to revisit the text with your peers’ annotations. In
reengaging with the text, consider what points of interpretation you got right, what points you may have overlooked; what points are now clearer and what points more obscure. Think about what you can learn from your peers to become a more astute philosophical reader. You will be asked to write a weekly self-assessment (300-400 words) in which you address these questions and also raise any lingering questions you have about the text.

c. **Discussion Forum (25%)**: Each week, I will post two questions to a discussion board. Discussion questions will be a means to unpack the implications of the week’s text and to introduce you to scholarly debates and/or more contemporary writings on the issues it raises. One student will be assigned each week to post a question as well. Students are required to post an initial response (200-300 words) to each question. Students will then be required to post at least four additional comments before the forum closes.

Each week’s posts will be evaluated based on the rubric provided on the course site.

d. **Gallery “exhibits” and “walks” (10%)**: On two occasions, students will be asked to contribute to what I am calling our gallery (essentially, an internal course blog). In your gallery “exhibits,” you will be asked to write an essay introducing material relating to our course themes (such as an article on current events; a book you’re studying in another class; an episode from history) and consider it in light of our course: what would the thinkers we’ve covered have to say about the material? What questions emerge from your exhibit item that we have not yet addressed? What does the material teach us about freedom and tolerance?

Once each gallery opens, students will have two weeks to “walk” through it—that is, to read other students’ essays—and to make comments/raise questions. I use the metaphor of a gallery walk, because I expect the gallery comments to be less polished than those on the discussion forum. This is your chance to chat with your peers about current events and other material relating to our course. Be thoughtful and use netiquette, but feel free to be more spontaneous than you might be in the weekly forum. You will be expected to log into each gallery 5 times over the course of the two weeks it is open. Aim to leave at least 1-2 comments each time. Your grade for each gallery will be based 80% on your exhibit and 20% on your gallery.

To sum up to this point: **Engagement with the texts through the Salon and the self-assessments is one pillar of the course.**

**Engagement with one another through the discussion forum and gallery is the second pillar of the course.**

e. **Papers (25%)**: Three short papers (2-3pp. each) will be assigned throughout the semester asking you to analyze and evaluate a philosophical dispute. The papers will follow a similar pattern, roughly: 1) Explain the argument of Philosopher A on a given issue. 2) State how Philosopher B critiques/could critique Philosopher A’s argument. 3) Critically evaluate whether or not Philosopher A survives the critique and why. The purpose of these papers is to hone your capacity for clear, controlled, and concise philosophical writing and to develop your skill in adjudicating philosophical disputes. Further details forthcoming. The first paper is worth 5% of the final grade; the second two papers are worth 10% each.

f. **Final Project (20%)**: Students will engage in a research project comparing early modern arguments on tolerance to arguments advanced in the present, or near present, day. The target, timeline, and scope of the project will be developed in consultations between the class and the instructor. Students will present their findings and analysis in an appropriate digital format (a website, podcast, video, etc). More details forthcoming.

g. **Synchronous Sessions**: We will meet synchronously via Zoom on four occasions throughout the semester (during units one, three, six, and eight). We will meet for an hour. Synchronous sessions will be used to discuss course expectations, progress, broad themes, and—most importantly—to set the expectations for the final project. Exact dates for the synchronous sessions are to be determined in consultation with one another.
**Schedule**

**Unit One,** January 17 – 21  
Course Introduction and Overview  
*Synchronous Session #1*

**Unit Two,** January 21-February 4  
Hobbes: Modern Mechanics and Modern Politics

**Unit Three,** February 4-February 18  
Spinoza: Rationalism, Determinism, and *Libertas Philosophandi*  
*Synchronous Session #2*

**Unit Four,** February 18-March 4  
Mendelssohn: Rationalist Morality and Enlightened Religion

**Spring Break,** March 4-March 11

**Unit Five,** March 11-March 25  
Locke: Empiricism, Toleration, and “True Christianity”

**Unit Six,** March 25-April 8  
Bayle: Skepticism, Toleration’s Friend or Enemy?  
*Synchronous Session #3*

**Unit Seven,** April 8-April 22  
Rousseau: Toleration and the Idea of Civil Religion

**Unit Eight,** April 22-May 6  
Final Projects  
*Synchronous Session #4*

**Accommodations**
If you believe that you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, please contact Kevin Hadduck, in order to discuss your specific needs and to determine an appropriate accommodation plan. You may contact Kevin Hadduck in the Academic Success and Disability Services Office, Borromeo Hall, Room 115 (phone: x4504; email: khadduck@carroll.edu).

**Academic Integrity**
All students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with and must abide by the Academic Integrity Policy as detailed in the Carroll College Academic Catalogue.

**Grading Scale**

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<td>90 ≤ ≤ 92.9</td>
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<td>87 ≤ ≤ 89.9</td>
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