

PHL 210Y1Y: 17th and 18th Century Philosophy

Summer 2020

Course description

Welcome to *17th and 18th Century Philosophy!*

This course will offer a survey of some of the major philosophical figures working in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. In the first half of the course we will read René Descartes, Elisabeth of Bohemia, Baruch Spinoza, Anne Conway, Nicolas Malebranche, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and Damaris Masham. In the second half of the course, we will read John Locke, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant.

While discussing the philosophers from the first half of the course, we will focus on the following questions: What are the fundamental entities in the world and how do they relate to each other? Are there only bodies, or are there also minds or souls, or perhaps only souls? What is the nature of God, and how does God relate to the world we live in? In addition, we will explore questions about causation: How can minds and bodies act on each other, and how does causation really work? Are we capable of action in the first place or does God do everything?

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to demonstrate:

- an awareness of key philosophical issues and figures in the early modern period;
- the ability to interpret historical texts in context;
- an understanding of basic argument assessment;
- the ability to engage respectfully in debates and discussions about controversial topics, such as the complex relationship between religion and philosophy;
- and the ability to demonstrate philosophical and interpretive points in clear and concise prose.

Assignments and exams

- 6 assignments (10% each, 60% total)
350-500 words each.
See schedule for due dates. Topics and instructions will be posted to Quercus.
- Term test (15%)
Online. Length: 2hrs maximum. Available 20-25 June on Quercus.
- Final test (15%)
Date TBA.
- Participation (10%)
See course website for details.

Schedule

F-term

Week 1

5 May Introduction, background, and context

Reading:

- Synopsis, Preface, and Dedications of the *Meditations*

7 May Descartes: Methodological skepticism and the Cogito

Reading:

- Meditation I & II
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Week 2

12 May Descartes: Error and the argument from the idea of God

Reading:

- Meditations III & IV

14 May Descartes: The ontological argument

Reading:

- Meditation V

First assignment questions distributed

Week 3

19 May Cartesian dualism

Reading:

- Meditation VI
- Elisabeth's correspondence with Descartes (selection)

21 May Malebranche: Occasionalism

Reading:

- *Search* 6.2.3

First assignment due

Week 4

26 May Spinoza: Monism; Introduction to the structure of the *Ethics*

Reading:

- Letter 32 (selection)
- *Ethics* I, up to and including proposition 5

28 May Spinoza: Substance

Reading:

- *Ethics* I, up to and including proposition 16
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Week 5

2 June Spinoza: God, nature, and necessitarianism; Psycho-physical parallelism

Reading:

- *Ethics* I, propositions 18, 25 corollary, 29, 33 and 35
- *Ethics* II, propositions 1-3, and 7

Second assignment questions distributed

4 June Conway: Vitalism

- *Principles*, chapters III and VI
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Week 6

9 June Leibniz: Substance; Mind-body union

Reading:

- “Primary Truths”
- “Letters to Arnauld” (selection)
- “New System”

Second assignment due

Third assignment questions distributed

11 June Leibniz: The theory of monads; Masham: Issues with monads

Reading:

- *Monadology*, sections 1-18 & 53-60
 - Masham’s correspondence with Leibniz (selections)
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Week 7

16 June

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Third assignment due

Exam period

20-25 June

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Term test available.
