

PHL 313H1F: Topics in 17th and 18th Century Philosophy

Instructor: Robbie Matyasi

Summer 2021

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Course description

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

This course will be about 17th and 18th century theories of the self and its relationship to the natural world. In particular, we will focus on the following historical controversies: What is a person? How can we relate the self to human minds and bodies? In general, are there only material things, or are there also minds or souls, or perhaps only souls? How can minds and bodies interact with each other? In addition, we will look at the relevant implications of these questions concerning the wider issue of human difference. In particular, we will discuss the status of women philosophers and conceptions of race in the period.

The historical figures we will read include René Descartes, Elisabeth of Bohemia, Benedictus de Spinoza, Thomas Hobbes, Margaret Cavendish, Anne Conway, John Locke, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Damaris Masham, and Anton Wilhelm Amo.

Learning outcomes

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

- an awareness of key philosophical issues concerning the self in the early modern period;
- the ability to interpret historical philosophical texts;
- the ability to engage respectfully in debates and discussions about controversial topics, such as the complex relationships between identity, religion, gender, race, science, and philosophy;
- and the ability to demonstrate philosophical and interpretive points in clear and concise prose.

Assignments and exams

- Two paper assignments (25% each, 50% total)
1500-1800 words each. See schedule for due dates. Topics and instructions will be on Quercus.
Not handing in any of papers will automatically result in a failing mark for the course.
- Midterm assignment (20%)
Online, 4 short essay questions. Due: 17 May.
- Quizzes (20%)
There will be 5 quizzes, due weekly on Mondays, starting week 2. Each quiz will consist of 15 questions. Their main purpose is to help you keep up with the readings.
For your mark for this portion of the work I will drop your weakest score. This may be a quiz you missed. So, you can miss a single quiz without penalty. If you miss more than 2 quizzes, you will get a failing mark for the whole quiz portion of your work.
- Active participation (10%)

Readings

The course has no textbook: all readings will be available on Quercus.

Schedule

Subject to minor changes.

Week 1

4 May Introduction; Descartes's project as a catalyst

Reading:

- *Synopsis of the Meditations*
- *Meditations* II, VI
- *Treatise on Man*

6 May Cartesian dualism

Reading:

- *Second Replies* (selection AT VII 160-162)
- *Principles* I.1-12, 51-54, 60-65, II 21-35, 64
- *Passions of the Soul*, I. part 1, 1-3, 6, 30-35

Week 2

11 May Women in early modern philosophy; Elisabeth of Bohemia

- Eileen O'Neill, "Disappearing ink"
- Elisabeth of Bohemia's correspondence with Descartes (selection)

13 May Hobbes on materialism

Reading:

- *Leviathan*, part 1, chapters 1-6
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Week 3

Midterm assignment due on 17 May

18 May Cavendish on non-mechanical materialism

Reading:

- *Observations on Experimental Philosophy*, chapters I, XXXI, XXXV; "Argumental Discourse"; "Further Observations", sections III, VI, XV, XVI

20 May Spinoza: substance monism and parallelism

Reading:

- Letter 32
 - *Ethics* II, up to and including proposition 17 scholium
 - *Ethics* III, up to and incl. prop. 11 scholium
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Week 4

25 May Conway: vitalism

Reading:

- *Principles* chapters 3, 6, and 7

27 May Locke: the forensic account of personal identity

Reading:

- *Essay*, Book II, chapter 27
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Week 5

Paper 1 due on 31 May

1 June Leibniz: against material substance

Reading:

- “Primary Truths”
- “Letters to Arnauld” (selection)
- “On Nature Itself” (selection)
- “New System”, pp. 138-142

3 June Leibniz and Masham: mind-body union, and the theory of monads

Reading:

- “New System”, pp. 142-145
 - *Monadology*, sections 1-18, 53-60
 - Masham’s correspondence with Leibniz (selection)
 - Preface to *New Essays*
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Week 6

8 June Race in early modern philosophy

Reading:

- Justin E.H. Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference*, chapter 2

10 June Anton Wilhelm Amo: Minds without sensation

Reading:

- *Inaugural Dissertation on the Impassivity of the Human Mind*

Paper 2 due on June 14