

Department of Philosophy
Seventeenth-century Philosophy
PHIL 360; 2017

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Office hours: W 10-11:30

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to important texts and issues of seventeenth-century philosophy. We will focus on the development of early modern metaphysics and epistemology through the works of René Descartes (1596-1650), Elisabeth of Bohemia (1618-1680), Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715), Margaret Lucas Cavendish (1623-1673), Anne Conway (1631-1679), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), and John Locke (1632-1704).

The early modern period in philosophy can be characterized by a shift away from Scholastic Aristotelianism towards a conception of the world compatible with the new mechanistic science. The interplay between science and philosophy is hinted at in a comment from Descartes to Mersenne: “These six Meditations contain all the foundations of my physics. But please do not tell people this, for that might make it harder for supporters of Aristotle to approve the *Meditations*. I hope that readers will gradually get used to my principles, and recognise their truth, before noticing that they destroy the principles of Aristotle.” We will begin by considering various ways in which the ‘new science’ forces a reconsideration of basic metaphysical and epistemological questions. This will take us to topics ranging from materialism, dualism, mind-body interaction, causation, to the possibility and limits of knowledge about the nature of the world.

Texts: Descartes’ *Meditations*, Leibniz’s *Philosophical Essays* and Locke’s *Essay concerning human understanding* are available at The Word bookstore on Milton Street. The other readings will be made available online.

Requirements: The requirements for the course are

- (i) two critical responses (maximum 500 words) worth 15% and 20%;
- (ii) one short papers: 1500 words plus peer-review component, worth 35%;
- (iii) in-class final exam worth 30% of the final mark.

Extensions: Extensions to deadlines set will be granted only in **exceptional** circumstances, appropriately documented. Late work will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 of a letter grade per day.

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/students/ for more information).

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

(Very) tentative schedule of primary readings

Week 1: 6 September Introduction

Week 2: 11, 13 September Aristotelianism; Descartes: Dedicatory Letter to the Sorbonne, Preface, Synopsis, First Meditation, Objections and Replies

Week 3: 18, 20 September Descartes: Second, Third, Fourth Meditations, Objections and Replies

Week 4: 25, 27 September Descartes: Fifth and Sixth Meditations, Objections and Replies
Second critical response due September 29

Week 5: 2,4 October Elisabeth of Bohemia: Correspondence with Descartes; Malebranche: *Search after truth*, Elucidation 15, Malebranche: *Dialogues on Metaphysics* 7

Week 6: 11 October Cavendish: Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy, An Argumental Discourse, pp. 23-42, Letter 35, Letter 37, Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy, pp. 137-94

Week 7: 16,18 October Conway: The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy; Leibniz: Discourse on Metaphysics (pp.35-68), On the Ultimate Origination of Things (pp.149-55)
Second critical response due October 16

Week 8: 23,25 October Leibniz: A New System of Nature (pp.138-45), Postscript of a Letter to Basnage de Beauval (pp.147-9)

Week 9: 30 October, 1 November Leibniz: Letters to Arnauld (pp. 77-90), Note on Foucher's Objection (pp. 145-147), Monadology (pp. 213-225)
First draft of paper due on November 3

Week 10: 6,8 November Locke: Book I, Chapters 1-2; Book I, Chapter 4, Sections 1-11; Book I, Chapter 4, Sections 18-19; Book II, Chapter 10, Section 2; Book II, Chapter 1, Sections 1-8; Book II, Chapter 1, Sections 20-25; Book II, Chapters 2-3; Book II, Chapters 5-7; Book II, Chapter 9; Book II, Chapter 11
Reviews of papers due November 10

Week 11: 13,15 November Book II, Chapter 12; Book II, Chapter 15, Section 9; Book II, Chapter 22; Book II, Chapter 23, Sections 1-10; Book II, Chapter 23, Sections 33-37; Book III, Chapter 3, Sections 6-11; Book IV, Chapter 7, Section 9

Final draft of paper due November 17

Week 12: 20,22 November Book II, Chapter 8; Book II, Chapter 30, Section 2; Book II, Chapter 31, Section 12; Book II, Chapter 12, Section 6; Book II, Chapter 13, Sections 17-20; Book II, Chapter 23; Book III, Chapter 6, Sections 1-13; Book III, Chapter 10, Sections 17-21

Week 13: 27,29 November Book IV, Chapter 1, Sections 1-7; Book IV, Chapter 2, Sections 1-7; Book IV, Chapter 2, Section 14; Book IV, Chapter 3, Sections 1-21; Book IV, Chapter 9; Book IV, Chapter 10, Sections 1-6; Book IV, Chapter 11, Sections 1-9; Book IV, Chapter 15; Book IV, Chapter 16, Sections 1-9

Week 14: 4,6 December Review and final exam
In-class final exam December 6