

17th-Century Metaphysics:
Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Leibniz
Fall 2005

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Course Description

We will examine some topics in metaphysics as discussed by four important philosophers from the 17th century: Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, and Leibniz. By examining these four philosophers, we will be in a good position to address the question, “Just what is so modern about the so-called ‘modern philosophy?’” We will see how the ‘new’ mechanical philosophers of the 17th century addressed traditional problems in metaphysics both by embracing and rejecting certain features of late medieval philosophy. We will also see how new metaphysical problems arise for proponents of the mechanical philosophy.

The course will be organized by topic, and the topics are: Substance and Ontology, Causation, Modality, and Theodicy.

Note: In this course, we will treat these philosophers neither as contemporary colleagues (i.e., we will pay close attention to their historical and intellectual context), nor as smart but silly people who unfortunately don’t know as much as we do now. I will explain how we will manage to do this and *why* we should do this.

Required Texts

I have ordered the best (affordable and available) translations. You *must* use the translations I have ordered. Trust me, it is for your own good; there are some pretty horrible translations out there. Of course, you should feel free to read the original language texts if you are able.

- (1) Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings* (CUP) (If you want to throw down a bit more money, feel free to get all three volumes of *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (CUP))
- (2) Spinoza, *Ethics* (OUP)
- (3) Malebranche, *Philosophical Selections* (Hackett)
- (4) Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays* (Hackett)
- (5) Leibniz, *Theodicy* (Open Court)

Other readings will be available in the Reading Room ('copy'), on reserve ('reserve'), or on-line ('jstor', 'on-line').

Course Requirements

For everyone: Attendance and (informed) participation. I will explain what informed participation is.

For undergrads: 2 ten-page papers

For grads: 1 ten-page paper; 1 twenty-page paper. The twenty-pager should demonstrate familiarity with the relevant secondary literature on your topic.

First paper will be due in early October; second will be due during finals week.

Course Policies

- If your cell phone goes off during class, you will be asked to leave and I will probably scowl at you. The scowl, however, is not the punishment. If you are asked to leave, you will receive an unexcused absence for that day (doesn't matter if you leave at the beginning, middle, or end of class), and any assignments assigned or collected that day will not be accepted. PLEASE remember to turn them off when you enter class.
- If you are caught plagiarizing, you're doomed. I can't say this enough: plagiarism is the greatest sin you can commit as a student. I will seek the most severe punishment available for plagiarists/cheaters. Please don't make me do this. It makes things unpleasant for you and for me, and nobody wants that.
- If you have special circumstances that interfere with your ability to get assignments done on time, talk to me *before* the due date. I will have very little sympathy if you talk to me on the day that papers are due or afterward. When I was in school, the following was used a lot by students: "I don't have my paper because my printer was messed up." Technology is a wonderful thing. For instance, it allows us to eliminate such excuses. If your printer is messed up, just email the paper as an attachment.
- Be polite to me and especially to the other students in class. Rudeness and hostility are disruptive and are grounds for asking you to leave (result: unexcused absence). Persistent hostility and rudeness are persistently disruptive and are grounds for your permanent removal from class. Of course, we are going to argue with each other, disagree with each other and so on. But there is a constructive way to do this, and a way that will get you an invitation to leave class. I have absolute confidence that we all know the difference.

YOU HAVE RECEIVED AND READ THIS LIST OF POLICIES AND CANNOT PLEAD IGNORANCE CONCERNING ANY OF THEM.

The Plea: I don't like enforcing these policies, and I wish I didn't need to have them. However, without exception, I have found that I do need them. So, I really hope that you and I will both do what we ought to do, and everything will be awesome.

Schedule

(*Please read the entirety of Descartes' *Meditations* and the first part of his *Principles of Philosophy* as soon as possible.*)

Ontology (Substance!)

Descartes:

Synopsis of the Meditations

Meditations II, III, VI

First Replies [copy]

Second Replies [copy]

Fourth Replies [copy]

Sixth Replies [copy]

Correspondence: Oct. 1640 to Mersenne; August 1641 to Hyperaspistes; 19

January 1642 to Gibieuf [copy]

Principles I.48-I.64; II.1-35; IV.189

Comments on a Certain Broadsheet [copy]

Correspondence: December 1641 to Regius; January 1642 to Regius; 21 May 1646 to Elisabeth; 28 June 1643 to Elisabeth; 9 February 1645 to Mesland; July 1645 to Regius; 1645 or 1646 to ?; 29 July 1648 to Arnauld [copy]

*Recommended:

Matt Stuart. 1999. "Descartes's Extended Substances." In *New Essays on the Rationalists* (OUP).

Paul Hoffman. 1999. "Cartesian Composites." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.

Marleen Rozemond. 1998. *Descartes's Dualism* (especially chapters 1&4) (Harvard UP)

Spinoza:

Ethics Part 1 through Proposition 25; Part 2 through Proposition 31

*Recommended:

Ed Curley. 1998. *Behind the Geometrical Method* (chapter 1) (Princeton UP)

Michael Della Rocca. 2002. "Spinoza's Substance Monism." In *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes* (OUP)

Leibniz:

AG 35-68, 77-90, 103105, 138-145, 155-186, 197-225

*Recommended:

Robert Adams. 1994. *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (chapter 10) (OUP)

Robert Sleigh. 1990. *Leibniz and Arnauld: A Commentary on Their Correspondence* (chapter 5) (Yale UP)

Don Rutherford. 1990. "Leibniz's Analysis of Multitude and Phenomena into Unities and Reality." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.

Dan Garber. 1985. "Leibniz and the Foundations of Physics: The Middle Years." In *The Natural Philosophy of Leibniz* (D. Reidel).

Causation

Descartes:

Meditations III and VI

Selections from First through Fifth Replies [copy]

The World [copy]

Principles I.17-24; II.36-43

Correspondence: 31 December 1640 to Mersenne; August 1641 to

Hyperaspistes; 6 October 1645 to Elisabeth [copy]

Conversation with Burman [copy]

*Recommended:

Eileen O'Neill. 1987. "Mind-Body Interaction and Metaphysical Consistency: A Defense of Descartes." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.

Dan Kaufman. 2000. "Descartes on the Objective Reality of Materially False Ideas." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*.

Dan Garber. 1987. "How God Causes Motion: Descartes, Divine Sustenance, and Occasionalism." *Journal of Philosophy*.

Spinoza:

Ethics Part 1, especially Proposition 16 – end

*Recommended: TBA

Malebranche:

Nadler p. 92-113, 222-238, 263-68

*Recommended:

Steve Nadler. 1993. "Occasionalism and General Will in Malebranche." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.

Nadler. 2000. "Malebranche on Causation." In *Cambridge Companion to Malebranche*.

Sukjae Lee. "Malebranche's Arguments for Occasionalism" (unpublished; if interested I'll send you a copy)

Leibniz:

AG 33, 46-9, 63-65, 81-85, 138-145, 147-149

Theodicy § 27-31

*Recommended:

Nick Jolley. 2005. "Leibniz and Occasionalism." In *Leibniz: Nature and Freedom* (OUP).

Don Rutherford. 2005. "Leibniz on Spontaneity." In *Leibniz: Nature and Freedom* (OUP).

Modality

Descartes:

1630 Letters to Mersenne [copy]

Fifth Meditation

Fifth and Sixth Replies [copy]

Principles I.48-50

2 May 1644 to Mesland [copy]

*Recommended:

Dan Kaufman. 2002. "Descartes' Creation Doctrine and Modality." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.

Dan Kaufman. 2005. "God's Immutability and the Necessity of Descartes' Eternal Truths." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.

Jonathan Bennett. 1994. "Descartes' Theory of Modality." *Philosophical Review*.

Marleen Rozemond, "Descartes' Ontology of the Eternal Truths" (forthcoming in *Early Modern Metaphysics*. If interested, I'll send you a copy.)

Spinoza:

Ethics Part 1, especially Proposition 33

*Recommended:

Don Garrett. 1991. "Spinoza's Necessitarianism." In *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics* (Brill)

Leibniz:

AG 19-23, 28-30, 30-77

Theodicy p. 243-, 343-7, 371, 386-88

*Recommended:

Robert Adams, *Leibniz* (Ch. 1)★

Theodicy

Descartes:

Meditation IV

Malebranche:

Nadler 243-53, 257-263

*Recommended:

Don Rutherford. 2000. "Malebranche's Theodicy." In *Cambridge Companion to Malebranche*.

Andrew Black. 1997. "Malebranche's Theodicy." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.

Andy Pessin. 2000. "Malebranche's Natural Theodicy and the Incompleteness of God's Volitions." *Religious Studies*.

Leibniz :

AG 60-3, 96-8, 100-1, 111-117, 149-55, 170-1, 210-11, 218

Confessio [copy]

Causa Dei [copy]

Author of Sin [copy]

Theodicy: p. 123 – 153, 224 – 226, 233 – 40, 248-9, 252-7, 267-9, 272-3, 377-86

*Recommended:

Robert Sleigh. 2001. "Remarks on Leibniz's Treatment of the Problem of Evil." In *The Problem of Evil in Early Modern Philosophy*. (U. Toronto)

Robert Adams. 2005. "Moral Necessity." In *Leibniz: Freedom and Nature* (OUP)