

Topics in Early Modern Philosophy: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz

Philosophy 509
Prof. Brandon C. Look
Fall 2007

TR 11:00am-12:15pm

BE 309

Office Hours: TR 9:00am-10:00am

Office Phone: 257-3071

E-mail: look@uky.edu

Course Website: <http://www.uky.edu/~look/509Ratmain.htm>

Course Description:

The focus of this course will be the philosophy of the three central figures of 17th-century continental thought: Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz. We shall explore the works of these philosophers both systematically and diachronically and focus on the central themes common to the three: the relation of the self to the world; the relation of God to the world; the possibility and extent of one's knowledge of the world; the philosophical underpinnings of the emerging 'new science'; and the practice of philosophy.

Course Requirements:

Students are required to write three essays of approximately 5-7 pages. While I shall provide topics for these essays, students may, after having consulted with me, write on some other relevant topic that they find more interesting. All graduate students, however, have the option of writing one longer paper of approximately 18-20 pages in length. Due-dates for these papers can be found in the schedule below.

Format and Participation:

This course will be a mixture of lecture and discussion. I expect all students to have read the assigned material prior to class, to have thought about it, and to come to class prepared to discuss it. In cases where a student's grade may be on the borderline, I will reward those students who contributed to the class.

Grades:

Papers will be given letter grades (A, A-, B+, etc.), which have the usual numerical value (A = 4.0, A- = 3.7, B+ = 3.3, etc.). Each paper will count equally to the final grade, which will be an average of the three papers. Final grades will be the following: A = 3.50-4.0; B = 2.50-3.49; C = 1.50-2.49; etc. (There are no +/- final grades for this course.)

Incompletes:

No incompletes will be given in this course.

Attendance:

While I shall not take attendance, I do *expect* students to attend all classes. I reserve the right to lower a student's final grade if he or she does not attend classes regularly.

Plagiarism:

DON'T DO IT! Be a philosopher: think for yourself. If you are found to have plagiarized, you will be punished according to UK's rules.

Required Texts:

- The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. and ed. by Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), vols. I & II. (=CSM)
- A Spinoza Reader*, ed. and trans. by E. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). (=SR)
- G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. Ariew and Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989). (=AG)

Recommended Texts:

- *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. and ed. by Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch, and Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), vol. III. (=CSMK)
- The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. by E. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), vol. I.

Schedule:

Date Topic

8/23 **Class Mechanics, Introduction**

I. DESCARTES

8/28 **Doubt**

Reading: Preface to the Reader of the *Meditations*, Synopsis, *Meditation I* (CSM II, 6-15)
From the Objections and Replies (CSM II, 110-13, 121)

8/30 **The Certainty of the Self and Knowledge of the Mind**

Reading: *Meditation II* (CSM II, 16-23)
From the Objections and Replies (CSM II, 100)
Principles of Philosophy I, 7-12 (CSM I, 194-197)

9/4 **God I**

Reading: *Meditation III* (CSM II, 24-36)
From the Objections and Replies (CSM II, 74-86)

9/6 **God II**

Reading: *Meditation III* (CSM II, 24-36)
Letters concerning the “eternal truths” (to Mersenne 15 April, 6 May and 27 May 1630 (CSMK III, 20-26)

9/11 **Error**

Reading: *Meditation IV* (CSM II, 37-43)
Principles of Philosophy I, 43-46,

9/13 **The ‘Cartesian Circle’ (or God III) and the Material World**

Reading: *Meditation V* (CSM II, 44-49)
From the *Objections and Replies*, (CSM II, 100-04, 171)

- 9/18 **The Material World and the Mind-Body Problem**
 Reading: *Meditations V-VI* (CSM II, 44-62)
Principles of Philosophy I, 48-65
 Letters to Princess Elizabeth (CSMK III, 217-20, 226-29)
- 9/20 **The Material World and the Mind-Body Problem II**
 Reading: *Meditations V-VI* (CSM II, 44-62)
Principles of Philosophy I, 48-65
 Letters to Princess Elizabeth (CSMK III, 217-20, 226-29)
- 9/25 **Building a Mechanistic Physics I**
 Reading: *Principles of Philosophy* II-IV, especially II, 23-45 (CSM I, 223-91)
The World (Le Monde) (CSM I, 81-98)
- 9/27 **Building a Mechanistic Physics II**
 Reading: *Principles of Philosophy* II-IV (CSM I, 223-91)
The World (Le Monde) (CSM I, 81-98)
- 10/2 **The Mechanistic Moralist I**
 Reading: *Passions of the Soul* (CSM I, 328-404)
- 10/4 **The Mechanistic Moralist II**
 Reading: *Passions of the Soul* (CSM I, 328-404)

Descartes Paper Due

II. SPINOZA

- 10/9 **Substance, Mode, God**
 Reading: *Ethics* I, definitions, axioms, P 1-15 (SR, 85-97)
- 10/11 **God and Creation**
 Reading: *Ethics* I, P 16-36, appendix (SR, 97-115)
- 10/23 **Mind and Body**
 Reading: *Ethics* II, definitions, axioms, P 1-13 (SR, 115-28)
- 10/25 **Knowledge, Will, and Error**
 Reading: *Ethics* II, P 14-49 (SR, 128-52)
- 10/30 **The Affects I**
 Reading: *Ethics* III (SR, 152-97)
- 11/1 **The Affects II**
 Reading: *Ethics* III (SR, 152-97)
- 11/6 **The Metaphysical Moralist**
 Reading: *Ethics* IV-V (SR, 197-265)

11/8 **Freedom and Immortality**
 Reading: *Ethics* IV-V (SR, 197-265)

Spinoza Paper Due

III. LEIBNIZ

11/13 **Critique of Extended Substance and the Nature of an Individual**
 Reading: *Primary Truths* (AG, 30-34)
Discourse on Metaphysics (AG, 35-68)
Correspondence with Arnauld (AG, 69-90)

11/15 **Abstract Metaphysics**
 Reading: *Discourse on Metaphysics* (AG, 35-68)
Correspondence with Arnauld (AG, 69-90)
Specimen Dynamicum (AG, 117-38)

11/20 **Contingency and Freedom**
 Reading: *Discourse on Metaphysics* (AG, 35-68)
On Freedom and Possibility (AG, 19-23)
On Contingency (AG, 28-30)
On Freedom (AG, 94-98)
The Source of Contingent Truths (AG, 98-101)

11/22 **Thanksgiving**

11/27 **Pre-established Harmony**
 Reading: *New System of Nature* (AG, 138-49)
 Debate with Tournemine (AG, 196-97)

11/29 **Mature Metaphysics I**
 Reading: *On Nature Itself* (AG, 155-67)
Correspondence with De Volder (AG, 171-86)
Correspondence with Des Bosses (AG, 197-206)

12/4 **Mature Metaphysics II**
 Reading: *Correspondence with Des Bosses* (AG, 197-206)
Principles of Nature and Grace (AG, 206-13)
Monadology (AG, 213-25)

12/6 **Mature Metaphysics III**
 Reading: *Correspondence with Clarke* (AG, 320-46)

Leibniz Papers Due

12/12 **Term-Papers Due**