

Phil. 306
The Rationalists
 Spring Semester, 2022

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 Office Hours: Mondays 10:40-11:40 and Thursdays 1:15-2:15, and by appointment

The purpose of this course is to acquaint the student with the works of intellectually important and representative philosophers of the 17th century. Their works will be set in historical perspective, and lines of influence will be explored. An attempt will be made to relate their speculations to contemporary philosophical issues.

Texts:

There are some good older translations of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz which may be read with benefit by the students, as these older translations frequently contain excellent commentaries. They are:

- Descartes: Veitch transl. (available at <http://www.wright.edu/cola/cartes/mede.html>)
- Malebranche, *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion*, available on-line at <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/malebranche1688.pdf>
- Spinoza: Elwes transl. (available at <http://capone.mtsu.edu/rbombard/RB/Spinoza/ethica-front.html>)
- Leibniz: Latta transl. (available at <http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/rutherford/Leibniz/translations/Monadology.pdf>

Optional newer translations are

- Descartes, *Meditations* (transl. Cottingham), available at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/cartes/1639/meditations.htm>
- Ariew R. *Rene Descartes: Philosophical Essays and Correspondence* (Hackett: Indianapolis, 2000) ISBN 0-87022-502-9
- Edwin M. Curley. *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works* (Princeton University Press) ISBN 0-691-00067-0
- Woolhouse and Ranks ed. *G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Texts* (Oxford U Press) ISBN 0-19-875153-2

Formal Course Requirements and Grading Procedures

There will be two examinations—a mid-term examination and a final examination—and a term paper (not to exceed 10 pages with references, to be handed in electronically, MS-Word format preferred). The mid-term and the final examinations will be cumulative in that each will cover everything that has been studied in the course up to the date of the examination. The mid-term will count for 30%, the term paper for 20% and the final examination 50% of the course grade. Students who have taken the mid-term examination may ask that the mid-term examination

grade to be disregarded and the final examination count for 80% of their course grade. Exceptions to the course requirements, adjustments for taking examinations at set examination dates, etc. will only be made in accordance with UVic regulations as published in the Calendar. It is the responsibility of the students to acquaint themselves and significant others with this fact so that vacations, family reunions, weddings etc. can be planned accordingly. The mid-term examination will be returned as soon as it is graded. Final examinations are the property of the University and will not be returned. They are available for viewing at the Records Office at a time designated by the University. Term papers will be available from the instructor one week after they have been handed in.

Inappropriate behaviour and contraventions of academic integrity

Inappropriate behaviour and violations of standards of academic integrity as defined in the University Calendar will be dealt with in accordance with University Regulations. Please note the following link which gives detailed information about university policies in this regard:

<https://www.uvic.ca/registrar/students/policies/index.php>

Important dates

- *mid-term examination*: Approximately February 17. No more precise a date can be given because it depends on when we will be finished with the study of Descartes and Malebranche
- *term paper*: April 7 (midnight)
- *final examination*: scheduled by the University

Grading:

Marks will be assigned on a letter basis and may be converted to a percentile grade as follows: F=0-49; D=50-59; C=60-64; C+=65-69; B-=70-72; B=73-76; B+=77-79; A-=80-84; A=85-89; A+=90-100. The criteria for assigning grades may be found in the University Calendar. Students are encouraged to discuss their examinations with the instructor.

Study aids

Study questions will be made available as the course progresses. The instructor's class notes may also be made available on Brightspace.

TENTATIVE OUTLINE OF LECTURES

I. Introduction and historical background

- A. Aristotelianism
- B. Skepticism both secular and religious
- C. Astronomical and cosmological theories
- D. The rationalisation of the infinite

II. Descartes

- A. *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*
- B. *Meditations on First Philosophy*

III. Malebranche

- *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion* available on-line at
<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/malebranche1688.pdf>

Midterm Examination: app. February 17

III. . Leibniz

- A. *Monadology*
- B. *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*

IV. Spinoza

- A. *On the Improvement of the Understanding*
- B. *Ethics*

Since class participation is encouraged, and since every effort will be made to relate the philosophical problems that were addressed by the various philosophers that are studied in this course to issues that are dealt with by contemporary thinkers, it is impossible to give a precise time-table for lectures in this course.