

**Phil. 306**  
***The Rationalists***  
 Fall Semester, 2025

Instructor: E-H.W. Kluge  
 Office: Cle B313  
 e-mail: ekluge@uvic.ca  
 Office Hours: TBA

The purpose of this course is to acquaint the student with the works of intellectually important and representative European philosophers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Their works will be set in historical perspective, and lines of influence will be explored. The focus will be on Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz and Spinoza. Not all of their works will be considered since, with the exception of Malebranche, this would exceed by far the time available in one semester; therefore only those works that are representative of the relevant philosopher's position will form the subject matter of the various lectures. An attempt will be made to relate their speculations to contemporary philosophical issues.

**Texts:**

**Descartes:** *Meditations* (transl. Cottingham), available at

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/descartes/1639/meditations.htm>

- Ariew R. *Rene Descartes: Philosophical Essays and Correspondence* (Hackett: Indianapolis, 2000) ISBN 0-87022-502-9.

**Malebranche:** *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion* available at

<https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/malebranche1688.pdf>

**Leibniz:** Woolhouse and Ranks ed. *G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Texts* (Oxford U Press, 1998) ISBN 0-19-875153-2

**Spinoza:** Edwin M. Curley. *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works* (Princeton University Press) ISBN 0-691-00067-0

There are some good older translations of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz that are free and may be used by the students. These older translations frequently contain excellent commentaries. They are:

- Descartes: Veitch transl. (available at

<https://dn790005.ca.archive.org/0/items/RMCG0002/Descartes-Meditations-a1.pdf>

- 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. of *Monadology* (available at <http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/rutherford/Leibniz/translations/Monadology.pdf>)

### **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 (single spaced, Times Roman 12 pt.) 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. The topics of term paper should preferably be decided by the student in consultation with the instructor. Graded term papers will be returned electronically by the instructor one week after they have been handed in.

The following link may provide students with resources that may help them in their studies: [https://www.uvic.ca/vpacademic/\\_assets/docs/initiatives/course-outline-senate-memo-2023.pdf](https://www.uvic.ca/vpacademic/_assets/docs/initiatives/course-outline-senate-memo-2023.pdf)

### **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>

### **Significant dates**

- *Mid-term examination*: Approximately October 16. 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*: December 3, 2025 (midnight)

- *Final examination*: scheduled by the University

- Last day of dropping the course without having to pay: Sept. 16
- Last day of dropping the course with 50% fee reduction: October 7, 2025
- Last day of dropping the course without penalty of failure: October 31, 2025

Exceptions for 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 with these and with the relevant dates. The mid-term examinations will be returned as soon as they are 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.

### **Grading:**

Marks will be assigned on a percentile basis and may be converted to a latter 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 on Brightspace as the course progresses. The instructor's class notes may also be made available on Brightspace.

## **TENTATIVE OUTLINE OF LECTURES**

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. What follows is the sequence in which the positions of the various philosophers will be presented in 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*

**Midterm Examination: app. Oct 16****III. . Leibniz**

A. *Monadology*

B. *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*

**IV. Spinoza**

A. *On the Improvement of the Understanding*

B. *Ethics*

We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.