

# Philosophy in the 17th Century (PHIL 314)

University of British Columbia

Term 1 – Winter 2021

## Course Instructor:

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Office Hours: By appointment

## Course TA:

TBA

email: TBA

## Course Description

We will examine central themes in the philosophical systems of some 17th Century ‘rationalist’ philosophers: René Descartes, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, Nicolas Malebranche, Benedict de Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz, and Émilie du Châtelet. The issues taken up by these philosophers, and how they came to grip with them, helped define modern conceptions of the world and our place in it. We will focus on what these philosophers wrote about metaphysics and epistemology. Topics to be discussed include: scepticism about the external world; free will; the mind-body problem; the existence of God; causality and substance; the nature of philosophical explanation.

## Course Readings

Readings will be made available on Canvas. Students who wish to purchase hard copies are welcome to do so. The following translations will be used:

1. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, edited and translated by John Cottingham, Cambridge University Press
2. Benedict de Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, edited and translated by Edwin Curley, Princeton University Press
3. G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Hackett

## Evaluation

1. Paper 1: 20%. Due: October 7th by 11:59 p.m. (Pacific Time)
  - Paper 1 should be no longer than **1000 words**. Essay topics will be assigned in advance.
2. In-class Midterm Test: 25%. Date: November 4th.
  - The midterm test will consist in short-answer questions.

3. Paper 2: 25%. Due: November 25th by 11:59 p.m. (Pacific Time)
  - Paper 3 should be no longer than **1200 words**. Essay topics will be assigned in advance.
4. Final Exam: 30%. Date: TBA (Final exam will be held during official exam period)
  - The final exam will consist in short-answer questions, and will be cumulative.

## Tentative Course Schedule

### 1. Week of September 7

*Primary Reading:* Descartes: overview and First Meditation

*Secondary Reading:* Bernard Williams, “Descartes” and “The Project” from *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*

### 2. Week of September 14

*Primary Reading:* Descartes: Second and Third Meditations

*Secondary Reading:* Michael Della Rocca, “Descartes, the Cartesian Circle, and epistemology without God”

### 3. Week of September 21

*Primary Reading:* Descartes: Fourth and Fifth Meditations

*Secondary Reading:* Michael Della Rocca, “Judgment and Will”; Anat Schechtman, “Descartes’ Argument for the Existence of the Idea of an Infinite Being”

### 4. Week of September 28

*Primary Reading:* Descartes: Sixth Meditation and correspondence with Princess Elizabeth; Malebranche, *The Search After Truth*, Book 6, Part 2, Chap. 3

*Secondary Reading:* Dan Garber, “Understanding Interaction: What Descartes Should Have Told Elisabeth”; Margaret Wilson, *Descartes*, pp. 185-201; Marleen Rozemond, *Descartes’ Dualism*, chapter 1

### 5. Week of October 5

*Primary Reading:* Spinoza: *Ethics* Part I (selections)

*Secondary Reading:* Michael Della Rocca, chapters 1 and 2 from *Spinoza*

### 6. Week of October 12

*Primary Reading:* Spinoza: *Ethics* Part II (selections)

*Secondary Reading:* Michael Della Rocca, chapter 3 from *Spinoza*

### 7. Week of October 19

*Primary Reading:* Spinoza: *Ethics* Part III (selections)

*Secondary Reading:* Michael Della Rocca, chapters 4 and 5 from *Spinoza*

### 8. Week of October 26

*Primary Reading:* Leibniz: “On Contingency”; “On Freedom”; “The Origin of Contingent Truths”

*Secondary Reading:* Robert Adams, chapter 1 from *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*

9. Week of November 2

*Primary Reading:* Leibniz: “Primary Truths”; “Discourse on Metaphysics”, sections 1-14

*Secondary Reading:* Robert Adams, chapter 2 from *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*

10. Week of November 9

*Primary Reading:* Leibniz: selections from the *Monadology*

*Secondary Reading:* Julia Jorati, “Jorati, “The Contingency of Leibniz’s Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles”; Michael Della Rocca, “Two Spheres, Twenty Spheres and the Identity of Indiscernibles”.

11. Week of November 16

*Primary Reading:* Leibniz: “New System of Nature”; “On Nature Itself”; “On Body and Force Against the Cartesians”

*Secondary Reading:* Julia Jorati, “Leibniz on Causation—Part I”; Donald Rutherford, “Natures, Laws, and Miracles: The Roots of Leibniz’s Critique of Occasionalism”

12. Week of November 23

*Primary Reading:* du Châtelet, *Foundations of Physics*, chapters 1, 2 and 3

*Secondary Reading:* Karen Detlefsen, “Émilie du Châtelet”; Katherine Brading, chapters 1 and 2 of *Émilie du Châtelet and the Foundations of Physical Science*

13. Week of November 30

*Primary Reading:* du Châtelet, *Foundations of Physics*, chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7

*Secondary Reading:* Katherine Brading, chapters 3 and 4 of *Émilie du Châtelet and the Foundations of Physical Science*

## Course Business

1. *Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct.* Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person’s words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else’s work as one’s own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student’s own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments. Please see this link for more information on academic misconduct: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,959>
2. *How to Avoid Plagiarising:* Most students plagiarise because they believe themselves to be without options. But no student will ever be without options in this course. If you find yourself in trouble, and tempted to cheat, contact your professor or your TA *immediately*. If you haven’t *yet* cheated, a solution can always be found.
3. *Late Penalties.* This will be a challenging and fast-paced course. It is highly recommended that you attend every class meeting and get your work in on time. The late penalty on the papers is set at 1/3 of a letter grade per day, to a maximum of three days (this includes weekends/holidays). Any work outstanding beyond this point will receive a grade of 0.

4. *Concessions.* If you need a extension on an assignment (due to a medical or family emergency, for example) please contact Arts Advising. All concession requests must go through Arts Advising or the equivalent.
5. *Your Course Contact.* Your professor and your TA are your primary contacts. We will respond to all emails within 48 hours. If you have substantive philosophical questions, I encourage you to come and see us in office hours or set up an appointment.
6. *Special Accommodations.* Students requesting special accommodation should contact UBC's Centre for Accessibility and talk to the professor.
7. UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available here (<https://senate.ubc.ca/policiesresources-support-student-success> )