

DESCARTES, LOCKE AND THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
SPRING SEMESTER, 2020
01:730:307

SYLLABUS

INSTRUCTOR: Martha Bolton

Office: 106 Somerset Street, Rm 538

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Office hours: W 6:00-7:00 pm; appointment only M 6:00-7:00 pm and Th 2:00-3:00 pm

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Rene Descartes, *Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, v. 2, trans. Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch (CSM)

John Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch

G. W. Leibniz, assignments on course Sakai site

REQUIREMENTS: Students are expected to come to all meetings of the class. (If you expect to miss one or two classes, you may use the electronic absence reporting form:

<https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>. An email will automatically be sent to me.)

You are expected to complete all reading assignments thoroughly and promptly. Each assignment should be read at least once for the class meeting on the date by which it is listed. I will sometimes send an outline or notes before class. Read them over before coming to class. They are intended to facilitate *class discussion*. Questions, comments, and participation in class are strongly encouraged.

There will be two take-home midterm exams and a final paper (10-12 pages).

LEARNING GOALS: The course is intended to provide basic understanding of main philosophers of the early modern period, their philosophical systems, topical issues, positions, and arguments. It is also meant to develop skill in analyzing and evaluating arguments and writing in a well-reasoned way.

SCHEDULE

Jan. 22 Introduction

27 Descartes, 'Synopsis' and *Meditations* I (the senses)

29 *Meditation* II (*cogito*, intellect and body)

Feb. 3 *Meditation* III (deceiving God? cosmological argument for God's existence)

5 Caterus, 'First Objections' and Descartes, 'Replies', CSM, 66-69, 74-82 (theory of ideas)

10 *Meditation* IV (error and free will)

Feb. 12 *Meditation V*; Caterus, "First Objections" and Descartes, 'Replies', CSM, 69-73, 82-86 (ontological argument)

17 Mersenne, 'Second Objections' and 'Replies', CSM, 98, 100-104; Arnauld, 'Fourth Objections' and 'Replies', CSM, 150-171 (circular reasoning, or not?)

19 University closed for weather

24 **First midterm exam posted on Sakai site.** No class meeting.

26 *Meditation VI*, mpp 71-79; Arnauld, 'Fourth Objections' and 'Replies', CSM, 139-44, 154-62 (mind-body dualism)

Mar. 2 *Meditation VI*, mpp 79-end; Letters exchanged between Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia and Descartes; sakai site (existence of body, sense perception, mind-body union)

4 **First midterm exam due.** Locke, *Essay*, Preface to Reader, Bk 1, chs. 1-4 (against innate knowledge)

9 *Essay*, Bk II, chs. 1-7, 12 (origin of ideas, against Cartesian essences)

11 *Essay*, Bk II, ch. 8; suggested, A. D. Smith, 'On Primary and Secondary Qualities', *Philosophical Review* (1990), 221-54 (link to journal in University Library on-line catalog)

14-22 Spring recess

23 *Essay*, Bk II, chs. 22, 23, and 30-32 (ideas of substances and mixed modes—reality and adequacy)

25 *Essay*, Bk II, ch. 27 (trans-temporal identity, personal identity)

30 **Second midterm exam distributed.** *Essay*, Bk IV, chs. 1-3 (knowledge, its limits, thinking matter)

Apr. 1 same

6 *Essay*, Bk IV, chs. 11 and 13 (sensitive knowledge of external existence; probable belief. other degrees of assent)

8 **Second Midterm exam due.** Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, secs. 1-17. (rational creation theory, complete concept definition of substance and its implications)

All Leibniz readings are available on course Sakai site

13 no class

15 same

Apr. 20 _____, 'New Theory of Substance, etc.' (pre-supposition argument, substantial forces, pre-established harmony) **Submit brief description of paper.**

Apr. 22 same

27 *New Essays concerning Human Understanding*, Preface, Bk 1, chs. 1 and 2 (defense of innate knowledge)

29 same

May 4 TBA

Paper due on May 13 at 4:00 pm. Submit paper at the Philosophy Department Office, 5th floor, 106 Somerset St.

ACADEMIC POLICY:

Academic integrity is taken very seriously in this course. Violations include: cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, denying others access to facilities or information, and facilitating violations of academic integrity. For the current University academic integrity policy, go to <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/> Ask the instructor if you have questions about how this policy affects your work for this course.

Constructive discussion:

Productive intellectual inquiry—the basic purpose of colleges and universities—requires respectful and constructive discussion that enables all parties to participate fully. Philosophy has an especially vital role to play in facilitating such inquiry, because philosophers have been developing and honing practices of critical discussion over many centuries: techniques for uncovering, justifying, and assessing assumptions behind any claim, from the most obvious to the most controversial.

Philosophy is thus a valuable tool for self-reflection and for communal debate. But like any tool, in order to work, it must be used well. In class, online, and at talks or meetings, we expect all participants to observe basic norms of civility and respect. This means stating your own views directly and substantively: focusing on reasons, assumptions and consequences rather than on who is offering them, or how. And it means engaging others' views in the same terms. No topic or claim is too obvious or controversial to be discussed; but claims and opinions have a place in the discussion only when they are presented in a respectful, collegial, and constructive way.

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.