

# Philosophy in the 17th Century (PHIL 314)

University of British Columbia

Term 1 – Winter 2020

## Course Instructor:

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Office Hours and Location: Wednesdays 2-4pm over Zoom

## Course TA:

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## 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: September 30th by 11:59 p.m. (Pacific Time)
  - Paper 1 should be no longer than **750 words**. Essay topics will be assigned in advance.
2. Paper 2: 25%. Due: October 28th by 11:59 p.m. (Pacific Time)
  - Paper 2 should be no longer than **750 words**. Essay topics will be assigned in advance.

3. Paper 3: 25%. Due: November 18th by 11:59 p.m. (Pacific Time)
  - Paper 3 should be no longer than **750 words**. Essay topics will be assigned in advance.
4. Take-Home Final: 30%. Due: December 4th at 11:59pm (Pacific Time)
  - The Take-Home Final will be distributed 48 hours before it is due.

## 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

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

### 6. Week of October 12

*Primary Reading:* Spinoza: *Ethics* Part II

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

### 7. Week of October 19

*Primary Reading:* Spinoza: *Ethics* Part III

*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 and the take-home exam is set at 1/3 of a letter grade per day, to a maximum of three days (this includes weekends/holidays), unless accompanied by a documented medical explanation or due to a family emergency. Any work outstanding beyond this point will receive a grade of 0.
4. *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.
5. *Special Accommodations.* Students requesting special accommodation should contact UBC's Centre for Accessibility and talk to the professor.
6. During this pandemic, the shift to online learning has greatly altered teaching and studying at UBC, including changes to health and safety considerations. Keep in mind that some UBC courses might cover topics that are censored or considered illegal by non-Canadian governments. This may include, but is not limited to, human rights, representative government, defamation, obscenity, gender or sexuality, and historical or current geopolitical controversies. If you are a student living abroad, you will be subject to the laws of your local jurisdiction, and your local authorities might limit your access to course material or take punitive action against you. UBC is strongly committed to academic freedom, but has no control over foreign authorities (please visit <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,33,86,0> for an articulation of the values of the University conveyed in the Senate Statement on Academic Freedom). Thus, we recognize that students will have legitimate reason to exercise caution in studying certain subjects. If you have concerns regarding your personal situation, consider postponing taking a course with manifest risks, until you are back on campus or reach out to your academic advisor to find substitute courses. For further information and support, please visit: <http://academic.ubc.ca/support-resources/freedom-expression>.