

PHIL 360: Modern Rationalism

Fall Term 2016-17

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Office Hours: Tue. 10:30-12:00, or by appointment
Class Time: Mondays, 14:45-17:30
Class Location: SGW FG-B080

ABOUT THIS COURSE

Calendar Description

This course is a study of central aspects of the work of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, covering metaphysical, ethical and epistemological issues.

Prerequisite: 12 credits in Philosophy including PHIL 260 and 261, or permission of the Department.

Expanded Course Description

The modern Western worldview began to come into its own in the 17th century. Both the Aristotelian scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages and the humanism of the Renaissance were in need of modification due to rapid advances in the sciences, which raised new metaphysical and epistemological problems.

The most influential thinker to highlight these problems was René Descartes, who tried to find a certain or indubitable epistemological basis for a new metaphysical system drawn from new scientific discoveries. This epistemological basis was a form of “rationalism”, i.e., the view that all knowledge—even the knowledge provided by the empirical sciences—is ultimately founded upon reason independently from any particular experience. This course will examine Descartes’ rationalism, reactions to it, and modifications to it by prominent philosophers such as Benedict de Spinoza and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.

To understand the revolutionary thought of the rationalists, we shall begin with a brief survey of the philosophical thought that it attempted to supplant, whose exemplars are Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. We then will examine Descartes’ version of rationalism as expressed in his *Meditations* and *Principles of Philosophy*. Descartes’ philosophy immediately met with many objections, particularly insofar as it advanced the metaphysical view of “dualism” (the view that mind and matter are distinct but equally fundamental elements of reality). We shall focus on the responses to Descartes by two women philosophers: Elisabeth of Bohemia (with whom Descartes corresponded) and Margaret Cavendish.

We will then examine much of Spinoza's book *The Ethics*. Some have viewed this work as presenting a more consistent and thoroughgoing rationalism than what Descartes had previously developed. Some have viewed it as a danger to society. This was particularly because it rejected Cartesian dualism in favor of a "monism" that was understood to be a version of "materialism" (view that all that exists is one type of material or physical substance). We will consider and evaluate such reactions, and we will also see how Spinoza himself thought his philosophy was one to be lived by.

Whereas Spinoza's rationalism was a thoroughgoing materialism, new forms of rationalism developed that went in other directions. Like Spinoza, Anne Conway embraced monism. But instead of seeing everything reducible to matter, she saw matter and mind as intermingled. Hence, she embraced what is called "vitalism". On the other hand, Leibniz came to endorse a monist view according to which what ultimately exists is mental rather than material (what is called "idealism"). Our course will end by examining Leibniz's case for this perhaps shocking view, and we will take stock of the rationalist program in philosophy in several of its variants.

Required Texts (Available in the Concordia Bookstore and on reserve at the Concordia Library)

- [RD] Descartes, René. *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*. Edited by Roger Ariew. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000. ISBN: 0-87220-502-9.
- [WP] *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period*. Edited by Margaret Atherton. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994. ISBN: 0-87220-259-7.
- [BS] Spinoza, Benedict de. *The Essential Spinoza*. Edited by Michael L. Morgan. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006. ISBN: 0-87220-803-2.
- [GWL] Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Philosophical Essays*. Edited and Translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989. ISBN: 0-87220-062-3.

Any readings (required or recommended) not found in these books will be provided as PDFs through Course Reserves (which can be found through the course's Moodle page).

Course Objectives

By the end of the semester, a successful student will:

- (a) understand the basic problems dealt with by the early-modern rationalist philosophers, e.g., the mind-body relationship, the definition of substance, the problem of understanding causation, etc.;
- (b) be able to sympathetically outline and present the ideas and arguments of the early-modern rationalists; and,
- (c) be able to critically evaluate the early-modern rationalists' arguments, i.e., by raising objections to arguments and recognizing whether/how someone could defend/modify the original argument.

Organization of Classroom Hours & Readings

Class sessions will combine lecture and discussion.

The aim of the lecture is to clarify key issues, theses, and arguments in the readings. Hence, my

lectures are aimed at helping you achieve aim (a) above. But this requires work from you. For each class session, I expect you to have **already done the reading assigned for that day** and to **have the reading in class**. This is crucially important since the lectures will presume familiarity with the readings and since your comprehension of the lectures and the texts is evaluated by course assignments. You should allot 3-4 hours/week for reading. Online summaries are not substitutes for the actual texts. If you want additional resources for understanding the texts, you should contact me.

The aim of classroom discussion is to have you critically engage with the texts, e.g., by attempting to interpret difficult passages or by evaluating the strength of an author's arguments. Hence, classroom discussion is practice for achieving aims (b) and (c) above, both of which aims are evaluated on assignments. Thus, active participation in classroom discussion is crucial for doing well in the course.

Note on Attendance

It is your responsibility to be active and engaged in your education. As mentioned above, in-class lectures and discussions are crucial to achieving aims (a)-(c) of the course, especially given the course's difficult texts. Accordingly, students who skip class tend to do more poorly.

Students who do poorly on assignments and who miss class often should not expect extensive comments on their assignments, since it wastes my time to repeat my lessons.

Requirements & Grading Scheme

Assignment	Description	Weighting for Grade
Participation	I will keep a record of classroom participation, which will be facilitated with in-class worksheets, group work, etc. If you have any reservations about being graded on the basis of in-class participation, please consult with me early in the semester for accommodations.	20%
Reading Exercises	There will be 6 reading exercises due on the days listed on the schedule below. Each reading exercise will consist of 4 questions , weighted at 1 point each , for a total of 24 possible points. Each point is equivalent to one percent of the final course grade. But since the reading exercises count for 20% of the course grade, this means that you can miss 4 questions without any penalty .	20%
Paper #1	A roughly 2000-word paper that critically discusses and evaluates one of Descartes' arguments DUE OCT. 17	25%
Paper #2	A paper of roughly 2,500-3,000 words, evaluating a debate between at least two figures covered so far (Descartes, Princess Elisabeth, Cavendish, and Spinoza) DUE NOV. 21	35%

Description of Reading-Exercises Requirement

These are designed to help you identify important points in the readings. Each can be found on Moodle and will be due at the start of class on the day of the assigned readings. The reading exercises are set up using Moodle's quiz functionality, but they shouldn't be understood as quizzes: they are not timed and you can resubmit answers for any questions. Questions will be in the format of short answer, true/false, etc.

Note on Changes to the Course

IN THE EVENT OF EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY'S CONTROL, THE CONTENT AND/OR EVALUATION SCHEME IN THIS COURSE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

POLICIES AND SERVICES

Academic Integrity

You ought to be familiar with Concordia's policies regarding academic integrity, found here: <https://www.concordia.ca/students/academic-integrity.html>. Of particular note is the following:

The most common offense under the Academic Code of Conduct is plagiarism, which the Code defines as **"the presentation of the work of another person as one's own or without proper acknowledgement"** (Article 16a).

This could be material copied word for word from books, journals, internet sites, professor's course notes, etc. It could be material that is paraphrased but closely resembles the original source. It could be the work of a fellow student, for example, an answer on a quiz, data for a lab report, a paper or assignment completed by another student. It might be a paper purchased through one of the many available sources. Plagiarism does not refer to words alone - it can also refer to copying images, graphs, tables, and ideas. "Presentation" is not limited to written work. It also includes oral presentations, computer assignments and artistic works. If you translate the work of another person into French or English and do not cite the source, this is also plagiarism. If you cite your own work without the correct citation, this too is plagiarism.

In Simple Words: **DO NOT COPY, PARAPHRASE OR TRANSLATE ANYTHING FROM ANYWHERE WITHOUT SAYING FROM WHERE YOU GOT IT! DON'T FORGET TO USE QUOTATION MARKS!**

For more information, see here: <https://www.concordia.ca/students/academic-integrity/plagiarism.html> or consult with me. For this course, my policy for any detected academic dishonesty will be to report it directly to the Vice-Dean of Academic Affairs.

Gender-Neutral Language & Human Diversity

In support of both diversity and good philosophical thinking, it is advised that you use gender-neutral language. In this class, there are no strict rules enforced regarding gender-neutral language, but I advise consulting the American Philosophical Association's [Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language](#).

Students with Disabilities

Please contact the Access Centre for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) if you have a documented physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability (or if you have questions regarding your status regarding disabilities). Students with disabilities are entitled to accommodations, and if you need accommodations for this course, please contact ACSD as soon as possible:

- Address: 1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. W., H-580
- Telephone: 514-848-2424 ex.3525
- E-mail: acsinfo@alcor.concordia.ca
- Website: <http://www.concordia.ca/students/accessibility.html>

Accommodations will not be granted retrospectively or by the instructor personally. Please contact this office immediately for assistance.

Religious Holidays and Observances

Please advise me in early in the term if you plan to take religious holidays. This will ensure that I can accommodate appropriately.

Right to Write Assignment in French

All students have the right to write assignments in French. I highly prefer that assignments be written in English, but if you would prefer to write an assignment in French, please notify me in advance so that we can work out the details.

Student Services

Program Director for Philosophy: Emilia Angelova	Concordia Library Citation & Style Guides (I prefer Chicago Style)
Counselling & Psychological Services	Dean of Students Office
Financial Aid and Awards	Health Services
International Students Office	New Student Program
Student Advocacy Office	Student Hub
Student Resources	Student Success Centre

SUBMISSION AND GRADING OF ASSIGNMENTS

Philosophy Department Statement Regarding Grades and Grade Distribution

- 1) The Undergraduate Calendar 16.3 specifies that As, Bs, and Cs are for “outstanding,” “very good” and “satisfactory” work, respectively. The Philosophy Department interprets this to mean that: Cs are awarded for work that is adequate, yet in some way fails to completely meet all expectations and requirements; Bs are awarded for work that fully meets all expectations and requirements; As are reserved for outstanding work that exceeds expectations and requirements by, e.g., demonstrating outstanding rigour, clarity, or insight.
- 2) In 200 & 300 level courses with over 30 students, it is **normally** expected that: the grade average will be in the C+ to B- range; there will be no more than 25% As.

Note: This is **not** a “bell curve” or a quota system, but rather a guideline clarifying at the outset the **expectations** for graded assignments in this course. Your grade will not be “reduced” or “inflated,” but rather will always be given its appropriate grade based on the descriptions below.

Letter-Grade Conversion Chart:

Outstanding		Very Good		Satisfactory		Marginal Pass		Poor/Fail	
Grade	%	Grade	%	Grade	%	Grade	%	Grade	%
A+	90-100	B+	77-79.9	C+	67-69.9	D+	57-59.9	F	0-49.9
A	85-89.9	B	73-76.9	C	63-66.9	D	53-56.9		
A-	80-84.9	B-	70-72.9	C-	60-62.9	D-	50-52.9		

My Interpretation of the Department and University Policy on Grades

Drawing upon the interpretation and formulation of these policies used by the current Chairperson of the Philosophy Department, here is my understanding of these policies. **The key point for you to note in the above policy is that assignments and papers that fully meet expectations and requirements will be awarded a grade in the B-range if they do not go above and beyond the requirements and expectations.** An assignment must **significantly exceed** the requirements and expectations to receive a grade in **the A-range**.

- **An “A” paper is outstanding.** It meets all expectations and requirements, but exceeds them in significant ways. For instance, a paper of this quality may do one or more of the following: is exceptionally well-composed, well-argued and rigorous; demonstrates exceptional rigour or an exceptional understanding of the wider questions and scholarly significance of the issues discussed; shows sharp philosophical insight and ability, or independent thinking; represents substantial insight or is the result of careful reflection and research. Generally, a paper will not receive an “A” if it contains mistakes/flaws/errors in writing.
- **A “B” paper is very good.** It fully meets all the expectations and requirements with regard to deadlines, length, content, presentation, documenting references, argumentation, and so forth. It shows that the student has developed a very good understanding of the assigned readings, of the lectures, and of the specific task of the assignment.
- **A “C” paper is satisfactory.** It generally meets the expectations of the assignment and demonstrates adequate knowledge of the course material, but falls short in crucial respects. For example, the author does not demonstrate very good understanding of the material; key concepts or aspects are not mentioned; an argument lacks coherence or logical structure; the paper just gathers points without showing their relation or putting them together in a cohesive form (in developed lines of argument, reasoning, or exposition); the work is not well written and/or displays too many grammar and

spelling errors, and so on.

- A **“D” paper is marginal**. It does not meet the general expectations and requirements of the assignment. While it endeavours to meet the specific criteria, it shows flaws and gaps in knowledge of the course material that prevent it from being coherent or from taking into account relevant sources, ideas, and arguments.
- An **“F” paper is poor/failing**. Work that receives an “F” makes no serious attempt to meet the formal and substantial requirements, or was not handed in at all. The flaws and gaps in understanding are so grave that the reader cannot detect a concerted effort to appropriate and use the course material.

Please also consult with grading rubric below.

Also note that when I mark papers, I assign it a letter grade. For that letter grade, I then record a percentage equivalent. My calculation of the final course grade is thus based **on percentage equivalents (not grade point equivalents)**.

Late Submissions and Extensions

- Any request for an extension must be received before the deadline or it will not be accepted, or as soon as reasonably possible in the case of an emergency medical situation in fairness to all students, there will be **no exceptions** to this policy.
- It is your responsibility to ensure that if you are unable to complete your work by the deadline or complete an exam on the assigned date, you must request an extension beforehand via e-mail (curtis.sommerlatte@concordia.ca).
- Extensions will be granted **only** to students who are able to provide **a reasonable and verifiable medical note**. Medical notes must include dates within which you are excused from work/school. Vacations and travel plans (work-related or otherwise) are **not considered valid reasons** for late submissions of or an inability to complete assignments, and exams.
- In the case of emergencies, it is your responsibility to notify me via e-mail (curtis.sommerlatte@concordia.ca) as soon as possible in order to determine the course of action required for the matter at hand.
- Organize your time effectively to ensure that you submit your work on time. Any work submitted after the deadline is considered late and will be **penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day, weekends included** (e.g., a paper whose content earns an A+ will be given a grade of A- if turned in 2 days late).
- To avoid any chance of a late penalty, it is highly advised that all written assignments be **both emailed and submitted in hardcopy**.
- You are responsible for keeping backup copies of your assignments. That is, it is your responsibility if you lose an assignment due to unforeseen circumstances, e.g., a computer crash. It is highly recommended that you keep **multiple** backups of every assignment, and to use multiple backup types: one or more physical (USB key or backup external hard drive) and one or more in the cloud (services such as Dropbox, Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive, CrashPlan).
- Please note that you are responsible for the version of the work you submit. If you turn

in the incorrect version of your work, you can resubmit the correct version prior to the deadline. If you fail to meet the deadline, the version of your work received is the one that will be graded.

- In addition, please note that it is your responsibility to ensure that your assignment is received before the deadline. Should you be unable to submit your work via Moodle or as a hard copy, you must submit your work via e-mail to me (curtis.sommerlatte@concordia.ca) before the deadline. Please give yourself enough time for online submissions to send your assignments via e-mail should a technical issue arise.
- Note the following from the Calendar (16.3.9.2): "Students are responsible for the preservation of any material, in its entire and original form, which has been returned to them."
- **Missed exam?** See: <http://registrar.concordia.ca/exam/faqdef.html>

Grading Rubric for Philosophy Papers

	The A paper	The B paper	The C paper	The D paper	The F paper
Ideas/thesis	Excels in responding to assignment. Interesting, demonstrates sophistication of thought. Central idea/thesis is clearly communicated, worth developing; limited enough to be manageable, but sharp or deep enough to allow room for thinking. Paper recognizes some complexity of its thesis: may acknowledge its contradictions, qualifications, or limits and follow out their logical implications. Understands and critically evaluates its sources, appropriately limits and defines terms.	A solid paper, responding appropriately to assignment. Clearly states a thesis/central idea, but may have minor lapses in development. Begins to acknowledge the complexity of central idea and the possibility of other points of view. Shows careful reading of sources, and at least some ability to analyze and critically evaluate sources. Attempts to define terms, not always successfully.	Adequate but weaker and less effective, possibly responding less well to assignment. Presents central idea in general terms, often depending on platitudes or clichés, or repeating points without genuinely explaining them. Usually does not acknowledge other views. Shows basic comprehension of sources, but with lapses in or absence of understanding. If it defines terms, often depends on dictionaries, etc.	Does not have a clear central idea or does not respond appropriately to the assignment. Thesis may be too vague or obvious to be developed effectively. Paper may misunderstand sources.	Does not respond to the assignment, lacks a thesis or central idea, and may neglect to use sources where necessary.
Organization & coherence	Uses a logical structure appropriate to paper's subject, purpose, audience, thesis, and disciplinary field. Sophisticated transitional sentences often develop one idea from the previous one or identify their logical relations. It guides the reader through the chain of reasoning or progression of ideas.	Shows a logical progression of ideas and uses fairly sophisticated transitional devices; e.g., may move from least to more important idea. Some logical links may be faulty, but each paragraph clearly relates to paper's central idea.	May list ideas or arrange them randomly rather than using any evident logical structure. May use transitions, but they are likely to be sequential (first, second, third) rather than logic-based. While each paragraph may relate to central idea, logic is not always clear. Paragraphs have topic sentences but may be overly general, and arrangement of sentences within paragraphs may lack coherence.	May have random organization, lacking internal paragraph coherence and using few or inappropriate transitions. Paragraphs may lack topic sentences or main ideas, or may be too general or too specific to be effective. Paragraphs may not all relate to paper's thesis.	No appreciable organization; lacks transitions and coherence.
Interpretation & analysis	Interpretations and analyses of the philosophical positions are exceptionally clear, precise and reveal a rich and insightful understanding of the assumptions, strategies and aims of the text, and/or the relation between these and broader philosophical or intellectual issues.	Interpretations and analyses of the philosophical positions are clear, precise and reveal a robust understanding of the basic assumptions, strategies and aims of the text, and show independent ability to interpret and analyze the text/issues.	Interpretations and analyses of the philosophical positions are mostly correct on all basic points and fit within standard or interpretations; these show an awareness of the basic assumptions, issues, and aims of the text, but not a developed or independent understanding of them.	Interpretations and analyses of the philosophical positions reveal little or no awareness or understanding of the issues at stake in the text; or little or no interpretation/analysis.	There is an absence of interpretation and analysis and/or a failure to engage the text.
Style	Chooses words for their precise meaning and uses an appropriate level of specificity. Sentence style fits paper's audience and purpose. Sentences are varied, yet clearly structured and carefully focused, not long and rambling.	Generally uses words accurately and effectively, but may sometimes be too general. Sentences generally clear, well structured, and focused, though some may be awkward or ineffective.	Uses relatively vague and general words, may use some inappropriate language. Sentence structure generally correct, but sentences may be wordy, unfocused, repetitive, or confusing.	May be too vague and abstract, or very personal and specific. Usually contains several awkward or ungrammatical sentences; sentence structure is simple or monotonous.	Usually contains many awkward sentences, misuses words, employs inappropriate language.
Mechanics	Almost entirely free of spelling, punctuation, and grammatical errors.	May contain a few errors, which may annoy the reader but not impede understanding.	Usually contains several mechanical errors, which may temporarily confuse the reader but not impede the overall understanding.	Usually contains either many mechanical errors or important errors that block the reader's understanding and ability to see connections between thoughts.	Usually contains so many mechanical errors it is impossible for the reader to follow the thinking from sentence to sentence.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Week	Assigned Readings	Notes
Sept. 6	LABOR DAY: NO CLASS	See December 5 below for make-up class
1 Sept. 12	Historical, Intellectual, & Cultural Background * Selections from Aristotle [found via a Moodle link] * Selections from Thomas Aquinas [found via a Moodle link]	
DESCARTES		
2 Sept. 19	Doubt and a Method for Attaining Certainty * "Meditation One" (RD 104-107) * Selection from the <i>Principles of Philosophy</i> , Part I: §§1-6 (RD 231-232) * "Meditation Two" (RD 107-113) * <i>Principles</i> , Part I: §§7-12 (RD 232-233)	Reading Exercise #1 Due <u>Recommended Readings:</u> * "Reply to the Second Set of Objections" (RD 159-162) [NOTE: "§§" = paragraph numbers]
3 Sept. 26	God as Epistemological Guarantor and The Problem of Error * "Meditation Three" (RD 113-122) * <i>Principles</i> , Part I: §§17-28 (RD 235-238) * "Meditation Four" (RD 122-127) * <i>Principles</i> , Part I: §§29-50 (RD 238-244)	Reading Exercise #2 Due <u>Recommended Readings:</u> * "Reply to the Second Set of Objections" (RD 162-165, up to Proposition I) * "Fourth Set of Objections" and "Reply" (RD 177-190)
4 Oct. 3	The Ontological Proof and Recovery of the External World * "Meditation Five" (RD 127-131) * <i>Principles</i> , Part I: §§13-16 (RD 234-235) * "Meditation Six" (RD 132-141) * <i>Principles</i> , Part II: §§1-4 (RD 253-255)	<u>Recommended Readings:</u> * "Reply to the Second Set of Objections" (RD 165-167, start from Proposition I) * <i>Principles</i> , Part I: §§51-76 (RD 244-253)
Oct. 10	THANKSGIVING: NO CLASS	Make-up day on Dec. 6
RESPONSES TO DESCARTES		
5 Oct. 17	* Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, "Selections from her Correspondence with Descartes" (WP 9-24) * Margaret Cavendish, "Selections from <i>Philosophical Letters</i> " (WP 22-45)	PAPER #1 DUE

SPINOZA		
6 Oct. 24	Substance Monism and Necessity * <i>Ethics</i> , Part I and Appendix (BS 1-29)	<u>Recommended Readings:</u> * Letters 1-4 (BS 251-258) * Letter 12 (BS 264-268) * Letters 34-35 (BS 272-275)
7 Oct. 31	The Nature of the Mind * <i>Ethics</i> , Part II (BS 29-60)	Reading Exercise #3 Due <u>Recommended Reading:</u> * Letter 32 (BS 268-271)
8 Nov. 7	Emotions, Bondage, and Human Freedom * <i>Ethics</i> , Part V (BS 143-161)	<u>Recommended Reading:</u> * <i>Ethics</i> , Part III: Preface through P7 (BS 61-67) * "General Definition of Emotions" (BS 101) * <i>Ethics</i> , Part IV: Preface through Definitions (BS 102-105)
ANNE CONWAY		
9 Nov. 14	* Anne Conway, "Selections from <i>The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy</i> " (WP 46-76)	
LEIBNIZ		
10 Nov. 21	Leibniz's Project and Early Metaphysical Views * "Preface to a Universal Characteristic" (GWL 5-10) * <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> (GWL 35-68)	PAPER #2 DUE <u>Recommended Readings:</u> * "On Contingency" (GWL 28-30) * "Primary Truths" (GWL 30-34)
11 Nov. 28	Leibniz's Public Debut * "A New System of the Nature and Communication of Substances" (GWL 138-145) * "On the Ultimate Origination of Things" (GWL 149-155)	Reading Exercise #4 Due <u>Recommended Readings:</u> * "Letter to Molanus" (GWL 240-245) * "Comments on Spinoza's Philosophy" (GWL 272-281)
12 Dec. 5	Idealism * "Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason" (GWL 206-213) * <i>Monadology</i> (GWL 213-225)	Reading Exercise #5 Due (Make-up day for class cancellation on Labor Day)

<p>13 Dec. 6</p>	<p>Freedom * On Freedom and Possibility (GWL 19-23) * "On Freedom" (GWL 94-98) * "Letter to Arnauld, May 1686" (GWL 69-77)</p>	<p>Reading Exercise #6 Due (Make-up day for classes scheduled on Monday, October 10)</p>
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