

PHIL 13: Continental Rationalism
Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz

Class Period 10
(MWF 10-11:05AM, X-hour TH 12-12:50PM)
104 Thornton Hall

Samuel Levey
309 Thornton, 646-2543
Office Hours: M 8:30-9:30AM, and by appointment.

Course Description. In this course we shall engage with some central themes in philosophy as they occur in the writings of René Descartes, Baruch de Spinoza, and G.W. Leibniz. We shall focus primarily on topics in metaphysics, philosophy of mind and epistemology, including but not limited to the following: substance, matter, mind, persons, motion, causation, space, time, God, knowledge, truth, necessity and contingency.

Texts.

- Descartes: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vols. 1 & 2. Translated and edited by Cottingham, Stoothoff, & Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984-5.
- Spinoza: *A Spinoza Reader*. Translated and edited by Edwin Curley. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Leibniz: *Philosophical Essays*. Translated and edited by Ariew & Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989.

All texts are available at Wheelock Books.

Course Format & Requirements. The course format is lecture-discussion. Please arrive well-prepared to discuss the current material. The minimum required work for this class consists of three papers. Term grades are to be assigned based upon the quality of those papers, plus scores on a handful of quizzes. No late papers will be accepted.

If anyone in this class has need for note-taking or quiz-taking accommodation, please see me before the end of the second week of classes.

Course Outline

Further short readings not listed below will certainly be assigned; specific page assignments will be given in class; and what follows—including paper due dates—is subject to change based upon the progress of the class.

Weeks 1-4 (9/21-10/14). Descartes

Meditations on First Philosophy, Objections & Replies, Principles of Philosophy, Rules for the Direction of the Mind, Discourse on the Method.

Weeks 5-7 (10/17-11/4). Spinoza

Ethics Bks. 1-3, *Objections & Replies*, “From a Non-Geometrical Draft of the *Ethics*,” “The Study Group.”

Weeks 8-11 (11/7-11/30). Leibniz

Discourse on Metaphysics, “Letters to Arnauld,” “On Contingency,” “Primary Truths,” “On Freedom,” “The Source of Contingent Truths,” “Notes on a Conversation with Michelangelo Fardella,” “On Freedom & Possibility,” “On the Radical Origination of Things,” *New System of Nature*, “Note On Foucher’s Objection,” “Letters to Bernoulli,” “Letters to De Volder,” “Monadology.”

The three course papers will be due, respectively, at the start of Week 5 (Mon. October 17, on Descartes), at the end of Week 8 (Fri. November 11, on Spinoza), and Finals Week (Mon. December 7, on Leibniz).

In each case, papers are due no later than 4PM at my mailbox in 202 Thornton.