

PHIL3002 – 17th Century Philosophy

Instructor: Dr. Matt McLennan

Office Hours: Thursday 1:00 – 3:30pm, 329B Paterson Hall

Contact: Matthew.McLennan@carleton.ca

Class Time: Wednesday and Friday 2:35 – 3:55pm

Teaching Assistants: N/A

Course description:

The 17th Century was a watershed in Western philosophy. As scholasticism collapsed in Europe, the first modern philosophers did nothing less than attempt to reconstruct the universe in thought. It is all too easy however to view the philosophical 17th Century in purely idealistic terms, i.e. in terms of a simple conversation between great minds. It is important to keep in mind that the major themes, concepts and systems of the 17th Century emerged against a backdrop of class struggle, globalization, and scientific and technological discovery.

In this spirit, students will be introduced to the main themes, concepts and systems of representative continental 17th Century philosophers. We will let the philosophers speak for themselves, but constantly strive to uncover the considerable political-economic depth of their works. Moreover, we will bring these thinkers to life by linking them to contemporary questions and concerns.

Being an upper-level course, this course will be reading intensive. However I have provided a loose reading schedule below to help you plan ahead and budget your time.

Required Texts: Available at the Carleton University Bookstore or on short-term reserve at MacOdrum Library.

- René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*
- Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*
- Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*
- G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*

Suggestions for Further Reading:

- Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*
- Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*
- Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*
- Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*
- Toni Negri, *Political Descartes: Reason, Ideology and the Bourgeois Project*
- Toni Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*
- Baruch Spinoza, *Political Treatise*
- Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*

- Matthew Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World*

Evaluation: Students will be evaluated based on one midterm test, one essay assignment, and a final take-home exam.

The marks break down as follows:

- Test (Oct. 2): 25%
- Midterm Essay (Due Nov. 20 in class): 35%
- Final take-home exam (due December 22): 40%

Test: You will have 90 minutes to answer FIVE OUT OF SEVEN long answer questions, approximately two paragraphs per answer. You will be tested on your knowledge of concepts and arguments in Descartes and Pascal.

Midterm Essay: Contemporary Interpretations of the Early Moderns

Choose ONE of the three topics listed below and write an 8 – 10 page (1.5 spaced) essay. Above under “Suggestions for Further Reading” I’ve listed some secondary sources by contemporary writers to get you started, but you may use sources that are not listed. Any citation style is fine (e.g. Chicago, APA ...).

Topic 1: Descartes is not generally considered to be a philosopher of political importance. It may therefore seem surprising that Toni Negri devotes a book-length study to the political aspects of Descartes’s thought (*Political Descartes*). Using Negri as your starting point, explain in what way, if any, Descartes’s philosophy is political.

Topic 2: In *Wittgenstein’s Antiphilosophy*, Alain Badiou names Pascal an “antiphilosopher” and in passing, pits him against Descartes (considered to be a “true” philosopher).

“Antiphilosophy ... can be recognized by three joint operations: 1. A linguistic, logical, genealogical critique of the statements of philosophy; a deposing of the category of truth; an unraveling of the pretensions of philosophy to constitute itself as a theory ... 2. The recognition of the fact that philosophy, in the final instance, cannot be reduced to its discursive appearance, its propositions, its fallacious theoretical exterior. Philosophy is an act, of which the fabrications about ‘truth’ are the clothing, the propaganda, the lies ... 3. The appeal made, against the philosophical act, to another, radically new act, which will either be called philosophical as well ... or else more honestly, supraphilosophical or even aphilosophical. This act without precedence destroys the philosophical act, all the while clarifying its noxious character. It overcomes it affirmatively.” (p.75-76)

Flesh out Badiou’s characterization of Pascal as an “antiphilosopher” by reconstructing the three joint operations as they transpire in *Pensées*.

Topic 3: The second half of the 20th Century saw a massive revival of interest in Spinoza. Choose one interpretation (or if you prefer, “use”) of Spinoza from this historical period. Explain how it works, and whether or not, in your opinion, it is plausible.

Take-home exam: During the last week of the course I will assign six long answer questions. You will answer FOUR OUT OF SIX, writing two pages per answer (1.5 spaced) and submit them to Sandy, the philosophy administrator, before 4pm, Dec. 22. Exam will be non-cumulative, covering the writings of Leibniz exclusively (though Leibniz’s views on the other philosophers covered in the course are fair game).

Course Schedule: The following is a LOOSE lecture / reading schedule. We will adapt as needed. Slight changes may arise, and will be announced with reasonable advance notice in class and on the course web page.

Week 1 (Sept. 6): Introduction to the course

Readings: N/A

Week 2 (Sept. 11 and 13):

Readings: Descartes, *Discourse on Method*

Week 3 (Sept. 18 and 20):

Readings: Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Week 4 (Sept. 25 and 27):

Readings: Pascal, *Pensées* Section I

Week 5 (Oct. 2 and 4):

Readings: Pascal, *Pensées* Section II

Week 6 (Oct. 9 and 11):

Readings: Pascal, *Pensées* Sections III and IV
Spinoza, *Ethics* Part I

Week 7 (Oct. 16 and 18):

Readings: Spinoza, *Ethics* Parts II and III

Week 8 (Oct. 23 and 25):

TEST Oct. 25

Readings: Spinoza, *Ethics* Part IV

Week 9 (Oct. 30 and Nov. 1): Fall Break

NO CLASSES

Week 10 (Nov. 6 and 8):

Readings: Spinoza, *Ethics* Part V

Week 11 (Nov. 13 and 15):

Readings: Leibniz, “Meditations on Knowledge, Truth and Ideas”, and Part II sections A, B and C4.

Week 12 (Nov. 20 and 22):

ESSAY due in class on Nov. 20

Readings: Leibniz, “A New System of Nature”, “On the Ultimate Origination of Things” and “On Nature Itself”

Week 13 (Nov. 27 and 29):

Readings: Leibniz, “Discourse on Metaphysics”

Week 14 (Dec. 4 and 6):

Readings: Leibniz, “The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology”

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (2013-14)

Assignments:

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips
- must staple the paper (there is a stapler on the essay box)
- must include the following in the lower right corner of the cover sheet:
 - student name
 - student number
 - course number and section
 - instructor's name
- The Philosophy Department does not accept assignments by FAX. You may send them by courier, if necessary.
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates in next column.
- Assignments handed in through the essay box (just inside the glass doors, Paterson Hall, Floor 3A) must be dropped into the box by **4:15** on a regular business day in order to be date-stamped with that day's date. Assignments handed in after 4:15 or on a non-business day will be stamped as having been handed in on the next business day.
- Students are required to keep copies of their assignments. If your paper is lost at any point, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot produce a copy immediately on request.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a final assignment by the due date because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral of examination/assignment. For deferred examinations, you must apply within 5 working days after the scheduled date of your exam. To apply for deferral of a final assignment, you must apply within 5 working days of the last scheduled day of classes. Visit the Registrar's Office for more information.

Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. (Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations, section 14.3, or <http://www4.carleton.ca/calendars//ugrad/current/regulations/acadregsuniv14.html#14.3>)

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The **Paul Menton Centre** for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your **Letter of Accommodation** at the beginning of the term, and no

later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (*if applicable*). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (*if applicable*) at <http://www2.carleton.ca/pmc/new-and-current-students/dates-and-deadlines/>

You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

Important Dates:

Sept. 5	Classes start (after Orientation events).
Sept. 18	Last day for registration and course changes in Fall and Fall/Winter courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from Fall term or two-term courses.
Oct. 11	University Day – no undergraduate classes.
Oct. 14	Thanksgiving Day – university closed.
Oct. 28 – Nov. 1	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 25	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000-level before the Final Examination period.
Dec. 9	Last day of classes, Fall term. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for Fall term courses.
Dec. 9	Last day to withdraw from Fall term courses (academic purposes only).
Dec. 10	No classes or examinations take place. Review classes may be held, but no new material may be introduced.
Dec. 11-22	Final examinations for Fall courses, mid-terms for Fall/Winter courses.
Dec. 22	Take-home exams are due.
Jan. 6	Winter term classes begin.
Jan. 17	Last day for registration and course changes in Winter term classes.
Jan. 31	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter courses or winter portion of two-term courses.
Feb. 17-21	Winter Break, classes suspended.
Mar. 25	Last day for tests or examinations in courses below 4000-level before the Final Examination period.
Apr. 8	Last day of Fall/Winter and Winter term classes. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for Fall/Winter and Winter term courses.
Apr. 8	Last day to withdraw from Fall/Winter and Winter term courses (academic purposes only).
Apr. 9-10	No classes or examinations take place. Review classes may be held, but no new material may be introduced.
Apr. 11-26	Final Examinations. Exams will not be held Apr. 18-20.
Apr. 18	Good Friday – university closed.
Apr. 26	Take-home exams are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:	3A35 Paterson Hall www.carleton.ca/philosophy 520-2110
Registrar's Office:	300 Tory www.carleton.ca/registrar 520-3500
Student Academic Success Centre:	302 Tory www.carleton.ca/sasc 520-7850
Writing Tutorial Service:	4 th Floor, Library http://www1.carleton.ca/sasc/writing-tutorial-service/ 520-6632
MacOdrum Library	http://www.library.carleton.ca/ 520-2735