

PHIL1301: Mind, World and Knowledge

Carleton University, fall 2013

Instructor: Dr. Matt McLennan

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

Contact: Matthew.McLennan@carleton.ca

Teaching assistants: TBA

Class times and location: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4:05 – 5:25pm, Azrieli Theatre 301

Course description: This semester's topic is: *Classics of Rationalism*

Rationalism is a philosophical tradition or tendency with ancient roots and modern-day sympathizers. Some of its main features are:

- The belief that some human knowledge is innate; that we can know things before experience;
- The belief that at least some knowledge of the world may be derived deductively, from rational arguments, without recourse to experience; that the deductive methods of geometry may be successfully deployed in other areas of human inquiry;
- The belief in a soul, or at least a certain degree of independence of mind and body (variously formulated).

In short, rationalism approaches the topics “mind, world and knowledge” in a particular way: recognizing the importance of experience, but privileging the role of mind and reason in the attainment of human knowledge. In this course we will consider rationalism historically, closely reading and critiquing some of its classics: Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz. We will end by critically examining more recent versions of rationalism, in particular Noam Chomsky's “cognitive revolution” in linguistics and psychology.

Required Texts: (All texts are available for purchase at the Carleton U bookstore. Copies of the readings, where possible and in whatever editions are available, will also be put on short-term reserve at MacOdrum Library. Some of these books, in various editions, are fairly easy to find in used bookshops.)

- Plato: *Meno and Phaedo*
- Descartes: *Meditations on First Philosophy*
- Spinoza: *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*
- Leibniz: *Discourse on Metaphysics and Other Essays*
- Chomsky: *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought*

Evaluation: Students will be evaluated based on one mid-term test, one essay, and a final exam.

- Midterm test: Oct. 8 (25% of course grade)
- Essay: Due in class Nov. 14 (35% of course grade). Detailed instructions below.
- Final exam: Date and location TBA (40% of course grade)

Class Schedule: The following is a loose schedule of lecture topics and readings. Small changes may occur as needed, and will be announced with reasonable advance notice.

Week 1 (Sept. 5): WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY? WHAT IS RATIONALISM?
READINGS: N/A

Week 2 (Sept. 10/12): PLATO
READINGS: *Meno*

Week 3 (Sept. 17/19): PLATO
READINGS: *Phaedo*

Week 4 (Sept. 24/26): DESCARTES
READINGS: *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Week 5 (Oct. 1/3): DESCARTES
READINGS: *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Week 6 (Oct. 8/10): DESCARTES and SPINOZA
MIDTERM TEST Oct. 8
READINGS: *Meditations on First Philosophy* and *Ethics*

Week 7 (Oct. 15/17): SPINOZA
READINGS: *Ethics*

Week 8 (Oct. 22/24): SPINOZA
READINGS: *Ethics*

Week 9 (Oct. 29/31): FALL BREAK
NO CLASSES

Week 10 (Nov. 5/7): LEIBNIZ
READINGS: *Discourse on Metaphysics*

Week 11 (Nov. 12/14): LEIBNIZ
READINGS: *Preface to the New Essays* and *The Monadology*
ESSAY ASSIGNMENT DUE Nov. 14 in class

Week 12 (Nov. 19/21): CHOMSKY
READINGS: *Cartesian Linguistics*

Week 13 (Nov. 26/28): CHOMSKY
READINGS: *Cartesian Linguistics*

Week 14 (Dec. 3/5): CHOMSKY and REVIEW CLASS
READINGS: *Cartesian Linguistics*

OPTIONAL REVIEW CLASS Dec. 5

Essay Assignment (40% of course grade, due in class Nov. 14)

Answer ONE of the following questions. Your answer should demonstrate a strong knowledge of class discussions and relevant readings. Above all, you must ARGUE your opinion. The point of a philosophy paper is not simply to give your opinion on a topic, but to convince the reader using reasoned argument. Essay expectations will be further discussed in class, and I will post a document on the WebCT called “How to write a philosophy paper”.

- 1) According to Descartes, what is a human being, and how does it work? Is his definition of a human being plausible?
- 2) According to Spinoza, what is a human being, and how does it work? Is his definition of a human being plausible?

Word limit: 2000-2500 words (approx. 8-10 pages), not including notes and bibliography.

Marks will be deducted at the rate of 5% per calendar day written work is late without valid reason. Valid reasons for late submission of written work include illness, disabling stress, and family emergencies. Documentation (e.g. doctors’ or counsellors’ notes) is required.

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