

PHIL 1301-B

Mind, World, and Knowledge

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Carleton University
Department of Philosophy

Term: Winter 2022
Meetings: n/a
Venue: online
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- **The PowerPoint slides etc. are posted on Brightspace.**

Course description

Descartes, one of the central figure of the rationalist school, brought to the philosophical forum questions such as “What am I?”, “Does one’s mind differ from one’s body?” and if so, “How does the mind interact with the body?”. The Cartesians observed that some phenomena of nature (e.g. the mastery of language) do not fall within the mechanical philosophy of their time: they thus posited a new entity, the *res cogitans* (the mind) to account for these phenomena. In rejecting the mechanical philosophy, nowadays rationalists are in a position to deal with Descartes’ traditional questions in a new way. In this Chomsky’s foundational works on language (and the cognitive revolution he initiated) play a central role and welcome new solutions and dissolutions to some traditional philosophical puzzles.

Aims and Objectives

The module aims to provide students with a good knowledge of Descartes and rationalist philosophy of mind and to appreciate how recent studies on the foundation of language can deal with some of the Cartesian traditional problems.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the class students will appreciate:

- the deepness of Descartes’ philosophy of mind,
- some rationalist developments of it (e.g. Arnauld and Leibniz)
- the actuality of some puzzles he proposed and dealt with and
- the way the latter can be handled within some contemporary form of rationalism.

By engaging in constructive discussion and by critically evaluating some theses and arguments presented, students will also acquire:

- the capacity to communicate ideas clearly and concisely in both written and verbal form and
- to engage with others in constructive debate.

Through essays writing and the feedback:

- you will further develop the capacity to present problems and propose solutions to them in a clear, precise and concise way.

Requirements

It is mandatory to have a Carleton student account and to register on CuLearn.

Assignments

One short essay and a final (2 h.) exam

- Short Essay (1500 words maximum) Weight: 40%
- Final exam (answer 2 questions out of 5) Weight: 60%

Due Assignment

- Short Essay: **First day of class after reading week**
- Final exam: **Exam Period (a 2 hs exam)**

Texts Recommended

- The books should be available at Carleton Bookstore. Most of the literature, though, can be found on the net.

Primary literature:

- Chomsky, N., 1966, *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought*, Harper & Row, New York
- Chomsky, N., 2000, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge
- Descartes, R., 1985, *The Philosophical Writing Vol. I*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge
- Descartes, R., 1984, *The Philosophical Writing Vol. II*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge

Main texts that will be discussed and that you should read:

- **Descartes, R. 1641, *Meditations***
In: **Descartes, R., 1984, *The Philosophical Writing Vol. II*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge**

Other editions available (also on the net).

Descartes' *Meditations* (with *Critics and Replies*) + *Discourse* free at:

- http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/f_descarte.html

Leibniz's *Nouveau Essays* (introduction and first 2 chapters) free at:

- http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/f_leibniz.html

Secondary literature: In bold the most useful texts

- Antony, L. M. & Hornstein, N. (eds.), 2003, *Chomsky and His Critics*, Blackwell, Oxford
- Calvin, W.-H. & Bickerton, D., 2000, *Lingua ex Machine*, MIT, Cambridge
- **Cottingham, J., 1986 *Descartes*, Blackwell, Oxford**
- **Jolley, N. 2005 *Leibniz*. Routledge, London**
- **McGilvray, J. 1999, *Chomsky: Language, Mind, and Politics*, Polity Press, Cambridge**
- Smith, N. 1999, *Chomsky: Ideas and Ideals*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge
- Wilson, C. 2003, *Descartes's Meditations: An Introduction*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge

Net Resources (Free of charge)

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/>

Essay

You should write—1500 words (or 6 typewritten double-spaced pages) **maximum**—on one of the following three questions:

1. Why, according to Descartes, the idea of God is innate?
2. What is the importance of God in Descartes' philosophy?
3. "I cannot share the opinion of Montaigne and others who attribute understanding or thought to animals" (*Letters to the Marquis of New Castle* 23 Nov. 1646; CSMK III: 302).
Discuss.

Topics to be discussed

Each topic requires a 3 h class

1. Descartes

Primary reading: Descartes, *Meditation 1 and 2*

Secondary reading: Cottingham, *ch. 1, ch. 2*

2. Descartes on God and His Existence

Primary reading: Descartes, *Meditation 3 and 4*

Secondary reading: Cottingham, *ch. 3*

3. Ideas and Reality

Primary reading: Descartes, *Meditation 4, 5 and 6*

Secondary reading: Cottingham, *ch. 4*

4. Leibniz: Metaphysics

Primary reading: Leibniz, *Monadology*

Secondary reading: Jolley, *Leibniz*

5. Leibniz on Mind, Knowledge, and Ideas

Primary reading: Leibniz, *New Essays, Introduction and ch. 1*

Secondary reading: Jolley, *Leibniz*

6. Mechanism and Linguistic Creativity

Primary reading: Arnauld & Nicole, *Port Royal Grammar*

Secondary reading: Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics (+ Introduction)*
McGilvray, *ch. 2, ch. 3*

7. Universal Grammar

Primary reading: Arnauld & Nicole, *Port Royal Grammar*

Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics*

Secondary reading: McGilvray, *ch. 2, ch. 3*

8. Res Cogitans and Dualism

- Primary reading: Descartes' *Meditations*, *Fourth set of Objections (Arnauld)* + *Descartes' Reply*
Chomsky, *New Horizons*, ch. 4
- Secondary reading: Cottingham, ch. 5

9. Dualism and Its Problems

- Primary reading: Chomsky, *New Horizons*, ch. 1, ch. 4
Louise & Horenstein (eds.), *Chomsky and His Critics: Lycan's article (ch. 1) + Chomsky's reply*
- Secondary reading: Cottingham, ch. 5

10. The Poverty of the Stimulus Argument

- Primary reading: Chomsky, *New Horizons*, ch. 6, ch. 7
- Secondary reading: McGilvray, ch. 3, ch. 4

11. Language Origins and Development

- Primary reading: Chomsky, *New Horizons*, ch. 3, ch. 5
- Secondary reading: Calvin & Bickerton, *Lingua ex Machina*

12. Revision Class

Revision class

Suggestions for Writing a Paper

Source: *Episteme Links*

<http://www.epistemelinks.com/index.aspx>

Cf. G. J Matthey:

<http://philosophy.ucdavis.edu/matthey/phi22n/paphints.html>

Don't bring in extraneous details about the context in which the works were written. Your paper assignments are focussed on a specific topic. Your paper must stick to that topic. For example, "Descartes was a philosopher who was born in France, lived in the Netherlands, and died in Sweden."

Do frame the nature of the philosophical problem clearly. For example, "Is it possible to demonstrate the existence of God using no other information except about what it is to be God?"

Don't go off on a tangent. "Some philosophers have tried to prove that God exists by claiming that the order of nature requires an intelligent designer. Others have thought that the world does not necessarily exist, and if so, then there must be a God which necessarily exists and explains why the world exists. The first kind of argument is called the 'argument from design' and the second kind is called the 'cosmological argument.'"

Do stick to the issues mentioned in the paper assignment.

Don't throw out opinions casually. Example. "How could anybody prove that God exists? That is the kind of things human beings are just incapable of knowing."

Do give reasons for any opinion you express. "Descartes claimed that there is a nature of God. But what evidence is there that there really is such a thing as a nature of God, rather than just a concept of God that we make up ourselves?"

Don't make undocumented claims about what any of the authors wrote.

Do back up your description of the philosopher's position by use of quotations from the text. Parenthetical page references to the text are sufficient in lieu of footnotes. For example, "According to Descartes, God has a nature and this nature includes existence. He claims that his idea of God's nature is different from a false idea he made up himself, like a four-sided figure that is not a square but is inscribed in a circle. 'For there are a great many ways in which I understand that this idea is not an invention that is dependent on my thought, but is an image of a true and immutable nature' (p. 47)."

Don't use the words of others without quotation. This is plagiarism, which is a punishable academic offence. Your reader will be watching out for plagiarism. One good way to recognize when you are plagiarizing is to notice any change of style, say some sentences which use a lot of words you do not use ordinarily, or whose grammatical structure is very different from your own.

Do use your own words to paraphrase what an author says.

Don't neglect to address all points in the paper topic in detail.

Do provide sufficient detail on all points, so that the grader can recognize your mastery of them.

Don't pad your paper or eliminate vital parts to get it to the suggested length.

Do write economically. Make the paper just long enough to complete the required tasks and no longer. If you deviate significantly from the suggested length, consider whether you have said too much or left something out.

Don't simply write down a bunch of logically unconnected statements or assertions. For example, "Descartes tried to prove that God exists in a couple of ways. Spinoza tried to do the same thing, but he did it differently. Descartes just makes a lot of things up, and Spinoza does too."

Do present the material in the form of arguments. One way of looking at an argument is as the defense of a conclusion by appeal to premises which are acceptable to anyone who considers them objectively, such as that it impossible to think of God except as existing. "From the fact that I cannot think of God except as existing, it follows that existence is inseparable form God, and that for this reason he really exists" (p. 46).

Don't use colloquial language to make a point. For example, "Descartes's second attempt to prove God's existence was totally lame."

Do use standard language.

Don't confuse technical language with ordinary language. For example, Descartes's use of 'nature' is sometimes different from ordinary uses, such as 'part of the earth that is not developed by humans.'

Do explain any technical terms when you introduce them. For example, "The 'ontological argument' is an attempt to prove that God exists simply from the definition, or nature, or idea of God."

Set of Questions for the Exam.

The five exam questions will be drawn from the following list.

In the 2 h. exam you'll be asked to reply to two (no more no less) questions. (Exam without notes/books).

1. What are the differences between Descartes and Chomsky?
2. Discuss and characterize UG and its role in language acquisition.
3. Explain the poverty of the stimulus argument.
4. "The mind-body problem made sense in terms of the mechanical philosophy that Newton undermined, and has not been coherently posed since." (Chomsky 2000: 86)
Explain and Discuss.
5. What's the difference between IL (internal language) and EL (external language) and which one is the object of linguistic study? Why?
6. What does it mean to say that Chomsky is a biological rationalist?
7. Explain, the differences between a Pidgin and a Creole and why some rationalists mention them?
8. What is the importance of the *Port-Royal Grammar*?
9. Explain Plato's problem and how, respectively, Descartes and Chomsky solve it.
10. Why are Chomsky and Descartes rationalists and how do their rationalist programs differ?
11. What are the main arguments supporting the view that LAD is innate? And what does it mean to say that it is innate?
12. Discuss Arnauld's critique in the *Fourth Set of Objections* of Descartes' argument for the mind/body distinction and Descartes' reply.
13. What are the main features of Cartesian linguistics?
14. What is the mind/body problem? How does Descartes attempt to solve it? How does Chomsky address it?
15. "The faculty of language can reasonably be regarded as a "language organ" in the sense in which scientists speak of the visual system, or immune system, or circulatory system, as organs of the body". (Chomsky 2000: 4)
Explain and discuss.
16. Are ideas innate? Why yes/no?

17. What are Leibniz's monads? How do they differ from Descartes' immaterial substances?
18. What is the unison problem and how does Descartes solve it?
19. What are the similarities between Descartes and Chomsky?
20. What does it mean to say that monads are windowless?

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2021-22)

Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. There will be NO hard copies placed in the essay box this coming year.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further 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. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor 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 [EDC](#) website.
- *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 your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for Student Activities:* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor 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.

Important Dates:

Sept. 8	Classes start.
Sept. 22	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 11	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 25-29	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 26	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 10	Last day of fall term classes. Classes follow a Monday schedule. Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. 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 a fall term course.
Dec. 11-23	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 23	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 10	Classes begin.
Jan. 24	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 21	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 22-25	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 29	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Apr. 12	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Classes follow a Friday schedule. Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 13	No classes or examinations take place.
Apr. 14-28	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 15	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 28	All take-home examinations are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:
www.carleton.ca/philosophy
 520-2110

Registrar's Office:
www.carleton.ca/registrar
 520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:
www.carleton.ca/academicadvising
 520-7850

Writing Services:
<http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/>
 520-3822

MacOdrum Library
<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>
 520-2735