

COURSE SYLLABUS
Philosophy 104: *The Rationalists*, Winter 2008
T, TH, 3:30-4:50, CSB 004

INSTRUCTOR:

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Office Hours: W 1-3, or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course concerns four of the most important philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries: René Descartes (1596-1650), Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715), Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716). Though their thoughts differ in many important respects, they have come to be known as the “Rationalists” because of the place they assign reason in their theorizing. A proper understanding of the Rationalists is important for understanding the thought of the “Empiricists” (most influentially: Locke, Berkeley, and Hume) as well as appreciating the power of the synthesis of Rationalist and Empiricist positions affected by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). But their views on the nature of God, the metaphysics of mind and body, the limits of reason, and the nature of the good life are interesting and important even for those who don’t make these connections to other traditions in philosophy.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings*. Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch. Cambridge.

Malebranche, *Philosophical Selections*. Nadler. Hackett.

Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader*. Curley. Princeton.

Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*. Ariew and Garber. Hackett.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

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| 1. | Attendance in lecture | | |
| 2. | In-class midterm exam on Descartes | 1/31 | 30% |
| 3. | A 5-page midterm paper on Malebranche or Spinoza | 2/28 | 30% |
| 4. | Cumulative final exam with emphasis on Leibniz | 3/18, 3-6 | 40% |

SCHEDULE:

Week 1 1/8 **Introduction to the Rationalists**

DESCARTES

1/10 **Descartes’ New Method**

Readings: *Discourse on the Method*, Parts 1-4 (pp. 20-40); *Meditations*, Synopsis and Meditation 1; *Objections and Replies* (123-126)

Week 2 1/15 **The Cogito**

Readings: Meditation 2; *Objections and Replies* (126-131); *Principles of Philosophy*, I.51-53 (177-178)

- 1/17 **Representationalism and the Mind**
Readings: Meditation 3; *Objections and Replies* (131, 150-155)
Proofs of God's Existence
Readings: Meditation 3; *Objections and Replies* (131-133, 155-158)
- Week 3 1/22 **The Problem of Error**
Readings: Meditation 4; *Objections and Replies* (133-135)
- 1/24 *Study Questions for In-Class Exam Handed Out*
- The Cartesian Circle**
Readings: Meditation 5; *Objections and Replies* (135-143)
- Week 4 1/29 **The Existence of Bodies and the Mind/Body Relationship**
Readings: Meditation 6; *Objections and Replies* (143-150, 158-159)
- 1/31 *In-Class Exam*
- MALEBRANCHE
- Week 5 2/5 **Body, Soul, and God**
Readings: *Search*, Preface, Book I (3-26)
- 2/7 **Vision in God**
Reading: *Search*, Book III.ii.1-6; Elucidation 10 (27-45, 60-76)
Ways of Knowing
Readings: *Search*, Book III.ii.7; IV.11; V.5; Elucidation 6, 11 (46-59, 77-91)
- Week 6 2/12 **Occasionalism**
Readings: *Search*, VI.ii.3, 9; Elucidation 15 (92-144)
Order and Law
Readings: *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, Discourse I; *Dialogues on Metaphysics*, Fourth Dialogue (257-268, 183-197)
Freedom
Readings: *Search*, Book I.1-2; *Treatise on Nature and Grace*, Discourse III, Part I (8-17, 269-277)
- SPINOZA
- 2/14 **The Geometrical Method**
Reading: *Ethics*, Part I, Definitions, Axioms, Props. 1-5; excerpts, letters 2-4 & 8-10; criticism of Descartes on the Cartesian circle (66-74, 77-82)
Argument for Monism

- Readings:* *Ethics*, Part I, Props. 5-15
- Week 7 2/19 *Midterm Paper Topics Handed Out in Class*
- Necessitarianism**
Reading: *Ethics*, Part I, Props. 16-36, Appendix; excerpts from letters 80-83 (274-276)
- 2/21 **Parallelism and Identity**
Readings: *Ethics*, Part II, Definitions, Axioms, Props. 1-13 (to p. 128); excerpts from letters 63-66, 70, 72 (269-274)
- Mind and Knowledge**
Readings: *Ethics*, Part II, Props. 14-43
- Week 8 2/26 **Will and Freedom**
Readings: *Ethics*, Part II, Prop. 44-end; letters 57-58 (266-269)
- LEIBNIZ
- 2/28 *Midterm Papers Due at Start of Class*
- First Principles**
Reading: *Discourse on Metaphysics* (35-68); *On the Ultimate Origination of Things* (149-55)
- Week 9 3/4 **Contingency and Freedom**
Readings: *Remarks on Arnauld's Letter...* (69-77); *On Freedom* (94-98); *The Source of Contingent Truths* (98-101); *Letter to Coste, On Human Freedom* (193-196)
- 3/6 **Anti-Cartesianism**
Readings: *To Arnauld* (77-90); *New System of Nature* (138-145); *Postscript of a Letter to Basnage de Beauval* (147-149)
- Week 10 3/11 **Idealism**
Readings: *Note on Foucher's Objection* (145-147); *From the Letters to De Volder, 1699-1706* (171-186); *The Monadology* (213-225)
- 3/13 **Conclusion and Review**
- Finals Week 3/18 **Final Exam**
3-6, Location TBA

Note: This schedule is only provisional and is subject to change at the instructor's discretion. If they occur, schedule changes will be announced in lecture.