

PHL 310: The Rationalists

University of Toronto, Fall 2019

Instructor: Dr. Owen Pikkert, owen.pikkert@mail.utoronto.ca

Lecture hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:00 to 10:30 in SS 2127

Office hours: Thursdays 1:30 to 3:30 in JHB 433

Course description

This course is a detailed examination of three rival metaphysical systems as found in the first part of Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, the first part of Spinoza's *Ethics*, and Leibniz's *Primary Truths*, *On the Ultimate Origination of Things*, *Monadology*, and most of the *Correspondence with Clarke*. The goal throughout will be mastery of some of the main ideas and arguments as presented in these texts. Topics to be discussed include the existence and nature of God, the mind-body problem, the nature of substance, necessitarianism, various metaphysical principles, and other topics as well.

Logistics

Evaluation: A midterm at 25% (on 22 Oct), two papers at 25% each (due 29 Oct and 3 Dec), and a final exam at 25% (date determined by the Registrar's Office for Dec).

Readings: All of the readings are freely available via Quercus. They include both primary and secondary sources. You will not be tested on the secondary sources; they are simply intended to help you understand the primary sources, in addition to whatever help you may receive from the lectures. If you are the sort of person who likes structure, here's one suggested course of reading for the secondary sources: for Descartes read the entirety of either Williams (1978) or Wilson (1978); for Spinoza read chapters 1-5 of Bennett (1984), chapters 2-4 of Nadler (2006), and chapter 2 of Della Rocca (2008); and for Leibniz read chapter 2 of Mates (1986), the article by Couturat (1902), chapters 1-5 of Rescher (1967), and chapters 1-4, 11, and 15 of Russell (1900). This course of reading commits you to approximately 200 to 300 pages of secondary sources per philosopher. If, however, you find any source unhelpful in achieving mastery of the primary texts, then do not feel obliged to wade through it.

Papers: The first paper will be from a choice of three topics, two on Descartes and one on Spinoza (up to 1p15). The second paper will also be from a choice of three topics, one on Spinoza (1p16-36) and two on Leibniz. You may not write both of your papers on Spinoza. Topics and instructions will be posted to Quercus well before the due dates, and papers must be submitted online via Quercus.

Midterm and final exam: The midterm covers all of Descartes and up to 1p15 of Spinoza. The final exam covers 1p16-36 of Spinoza and all of Leibniz.

Late submissions, extensions, and missed midterms: Late papers will be penalized at 5% for each calendar day, and papers more than one week late will not be accepted. To request an extension for a paper or an alternative date to write a missed midterm, you must submit one of the following types of documentation deemed official by the University: a [Verification of Student Illness or Injury Form](#), a Student Health or Disability Related Certificate, a College Registrar's Letter, or an Accessibility Services Letter.

Email: Only use email for short logistical questions that are not already answered on the syllabus. Philosophical and textual questions are best saved for office hours.

Turnitin.com: Normally, students will be required to submit their papers to Turnitin.com (now incorporated into Quercus) for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their papers to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com website.

Academic integrity

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, please reach out to me. Note that you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from me or from other [institutional resources](#).

Lecture schedule

5 Sep	Introduction		
10 Sep	Descartes	The method of doubt	<i>Principles</i> I.1-12
12 Sep	Descartes	The ontological argument	<i>Principles</i> I.13-16
17 Sep	Descartes	The mark of the maker argument	<i>Principles</i> I.17-21
19 Sep	Descartes	The nature of God	<i>Principles</i> I.22-28
24 Sep	Descartes	The source of error	<i>Principles</i> I.29-50
26 Sep	Descartes	Substance dualism	<i>Principles</i> I.51-65
1 Oct	Descartes	Primary and secondary qualities	<i>Principles</i> I.66-76
3 Oct	Spinoza	Definitions and axioms	<i>Ethics</i> 1def1-8, 1ax1-7
8 Oct	Spinoza	The no shared attribute thesis	<i>Ethics</i> 1p1-5
10 Oct	Spinoza	The necessary existence of substance	<i>Ethics</i> 1p6-11

15 Oct	Spinoza	The indivisibility of substance	<i>Ethics</i> 1p12-13
17 Oct	Spinoza	Monism	<i>Ethics</i> 1p14-15
22 Oct		Midterm	
24 Oct	Spinoza	An unorthodox God	<i>Ethics</i> 1p16-20, 1app
29 Oct	Spinoza	Modes & determinism, Paper 1 due	<i>Ethics</i> 1p21-36
31 Oct	Leibniz	Metaphysical principles	<i>Primary Truths</i>
5 Nov		Reading week	
7 Nov		Reading week	
12 Nov	Leibniz	The cosmological argument	<i>Ultimate Origination</i>
14 Nov	Leibniz	The argument from eternal truths	<i>Ultimate Origination</i>
19 Nov	Leibniz	Monads (1)	<i>Monadology</i> 1-30
21 Nov	Leibniz	Monads (2)	<i>Monadology</i> 31-90
26 Nov	Leibniz	God's wisdom	<i>Clarke</i> 1-2
28 Nov	Leibniz	Objections to Newton	<i>Clarke</i> 3-4
3 Dec	Envoi	Paper 2 due	
Dec		Final exam	