

PHIL 004-001
History of Modern Philosophy
Spring 2015

Course Description

In this course, we will study a number of figures and texts in the 17th through 18th centuries to examine two central philosophical issues of this period.

The first issue is how some early modern philosophers conceived of the relationship between God and world. In this section, we will look at various answers to the question: can we make sense of all aspects of the natural world without any appeal whatsoever to a God who created it? In the process of looking at various answers to this question, we'll also note the transformation of Western intellectual thought in this period, most notably, the slow separation of theology, metaphysics, and natural sciences into distinct disciplines. In this section, we will study texts of Descartes, Cavendish, Du Châtelet and Hume.

The second issue is how some early modern philosophers think about the nature of human autonomy. In this section, we will look at different theories of human autonomy, including the impact upon such theories of the roles people play as a result of being members of families and other social groups. In this section, we return to Descartes and Cavendish, including Elisabeth's correspondence with Descartes, before turning to the work of Astell and Kant.

Of the seven figures we will study, four are women whose works have long been lost or underappreciated in the history of philosophy. And so throughout the course of the semester we will also be concerned with the meta-themes of canon formation and canon change.

Texts

The following texts are required and are available at the Penn Book Center, 130 S. 34th Street (34th and Sansom):

- Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, translated and edited by Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch (Cambridge University Press)
- Descartes and Elisabeth, *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, translated and introduced by Lisa Shapiro (Chicago University Press)
- Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (second edition), ed. Popkin (Hackett Publishing)
- Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (revised edition), translated by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann, introduced by Christine M. Korsgaard (Cambridge University Press)

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Schedule of topics and readings for lectures

14 January: Introduction

- no required readings

19 January: MLK Day

- NO CLASS MEETINGS

PART I: GOD AND WORLD

Descartes

21 January: God, the human mind, truth

- *Meditations*, synopsis, Meds. I-III, pp 76-98 (Descartes text)

26 January: God, evil, human freedom, God's purposes

- *Meditations*, Med. IV, pp 98-105 (Descartes text)
- *Principles*, part I, arts. 29-44, pp. 170-174 (Descartes text)
- letters (website)

28 January: continue with topic from 26 January

- *Meditations*, Med. V-VI, pp 105-116, end of paragraph ending "... things bestowed upon me by God" (Descartes text)

2 February: the senses, human survival, and God's purposes again

- *Meditations*, Med. VI, pp 116 starting with paragraph that begins "There is nothing that my own nature..." – 122 (Descartes text)
- *Discourse on Method*, part V, pp. 40-46 (Descartes text)

Cavendish

4 February: materialism and causation without God

- selections from *Philosophical Letters, Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy, and Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (website)

9 February: metaphysics of freedom, human and non-human

- selections from *Philosophical Letters, Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy, and Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (website)

11 February: laws, order, disorder

- selections from *Philosophical Letters, Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy, and Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (website)

16 February: nature's purpose, God's purpose

- selections from *Philosophical Letters, Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy, and Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (website)

Du Châtelet

18 February: Cartesian and Newtonian background; the principles of knowledge

- *Foundations of Physics*, preface, chapter 1, pp. 116-138 (website)

23 February: on God

- *Foundations of Physics*, chapter 2, pp. 138-147 (website)

25 February: scientific method, the limits of human knowledge, and the importance of probability

- *Foundations of Physics*, chapter 4, pp. 147-155 (website)

Hume

2 March: God, world, purpose

- DNR, introduction and § I-VII, pp. 1-48 (Hume text)

4 March: God, evil, morality

- DNR, introduction and § VIII-XII, pp. 49-89 (Hume text)

*week of 9 March: **spring break***

- NO CLASS MEETINGS

16 March: Miracles, science, the ethics of belief

- Of Miracles pp. 107-125 (Hume text)

PART II: AUTONOMY

Descartes and Elisabeth

18 March: happiness, public lives, private lives

- letters between Descartes and Elisabeth from May 1645 through September 1645 pp. 85-115 (Descartes-Elisabeth text)

23 March: Stoicism, self-possession

- letters between Descartes and Elisabeth from October 1645 through September 1646, pp. 115-144 (Descartes-Elisabeth text)

25 March: health of body, health of mind

- letters between Descartes and Elisabeth from October 1645 through October 1648, pp. 144-175 (Descartes-Elisabeth text)

Cavendish

30 March: genre and method: literature and philosophy

- *Youths Glory, and Deaths Banquet* (website)

1 April: guest lecture on Cavendish by Daniel Fryer

- readings TBD

6 April: women's lives and relational autonomy

- *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure* (website)

Astell

8 April: genre and method: political polemics, irony, philosophy

- *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*, preface, pp. 7-31 (website)

13 April: the social contract, the marriage contract and autonomy

- *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*, pp. 32-53, end of paragraph ending "... Affronts and Injuries" (website)

15 April: men, women, friendship, autonomy

- *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*, pp. 53, starting at paragraph beginning "What then is to be done?" – 80 (website)

Kant

20 April: introduction; philosophical, moral, and rational cognition

- *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, preface and first section, pp. 3-20 (Kant text)

22 April: metaphysics of morals I

- *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, second section, pp. 21-39, to end of paragraph ending "... beheld in her true form" (Kant text)

27 April: metaphysics of morals II

- *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, second section, 39, start of paragraph beginning "The question therefore is this..." – 55 (Kant text)

29 April: critique of pure practical reason

- *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, third section, pp. 56-72 (Kant text)