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Office Hours: Tues 5:20 – 6:00pm, Thurs 12:15 – 1:15pm
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Phil 3121: Modern Philosophy

Fall 2016

T, Th 3:40 – 5:20 pm



Course Description

This is a survey of seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophy, focusing on how thinkers of this period sought to reconcile human agency with new developments in science. We will examine how philosophers of this period conceived of nature, asking such questions as: What does it mean for one thing to be the cause of another? Is the physical world causally determined? What role does God play in the course of natural events?

Our main preoccupation, however, will be with how *we* fit into this picture. Are *our* bodies as determined as the rest of nature? What about our minds? Given that our minds causally interact with the physical world, how exactly are we to conceive of the mind's place in nature? Are human freedom and moral agency compatible with physical determinism? Are they compatible with divine omnipotence?

In this course, we will also explore the conception of philosophy as therapy, which was prevalent in the modern period. Philosophy promised to provide tools for self-perfection, enabling us to clarify our intellect and gain control over wayward emotions and desires so that we could become more virtuous and happier. We will explore the efficacy and limitations of the philosopher's toolkit, investigating just how much control we have over our own happiness.

Among the figures that we will study in this course are: Descartes, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, Malebranche, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, Du Châtelet, and Hume.

Course Objectives

The aims of this course are manifold. You will be reading a number of the most important texts in the history of philosophy, texts that have influenced Western

thought in powerful ways. Contained within these works are some of the most ingenious (and occasionally bizarre) philosophical arguments of all time. You should come away from this course with a solid grasp of these important texts and the pivotal arguments contained therein. You should be able to speak intelligently about each of the main philosophers whom we will be studying and to identify how these philosophers differ from one another.

Moreover, wrestling with these arguments should enable you to improve your skills as a critical readers and thinkers. You will be asked to dissect complicated arguments, raise questions, identify unrecognized conceptual possibilities, follow discussions with patience and charity, and explore the implications of arguments. These skills will aid you in thinking more clearly and rewardingly.

You will be refining these critical skills by working through issues that are of enduring significance. By engaging with many of the central texts in modern philosophy we will be grappling with many of the hardest problems in philosophy, problems that are central to understanding ourselves and the universe and which are not settled by any other discipline. So you will not only learn to think more clearly and rewardingly, you will learn to think more clearly and rewardingly about some of the most challenging and important problems in philosophy, problems that lie at the heart of epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics.

Finally, you will also improve your ability to express yourself effectively both in writing and orally. The writing assignments in this course will demand that you present the ideas of others clearly and accurately, structure your ideas effectively, formulate strong thesis statements, and present convincing arguments in support of your thesis. Learning to communicate more clearly will in turn enable you to think more clearly.

Text

All readings will be made posted on Blackboard in a single file marked “Core Philosophy Course Packet.” You may, of course, read these materials on a computer, an e-reader, or on a hard copy that you’ve printed off. But however you read the texts, you must bring the materials with you to class.

Assignments and Methods of Assessment

Four Essay Sets (4 x 15)	60 %
Participation, Attendance, and In-Class Assignments	15 %
Take-Home Final Exam <i>or</i> Final Paper	25 %

Essay sets are due during the class sessions marked “Discussion Day.” You must bring hard copies into class and be prepared to talk about your essays. If there is a

very compelling reason why you cannot complete an assignment on the scheduled date, you must let me know at least three days in advance so that we can work out other arrangements. All late papers will be reduced by *at least* a full letter grade (subject to my discretion).

As you might infer from the participation and attendance grade, a failure to attend class on a regular basis will severely hurt your grade. Attendance will be taken at every class. If you have to miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what was covered and what the reading assignment will be for the subsequent class. We might be amending the reading schedule from time to time and you must be aware of the changes that are made.

Each of you will construct and pose *two* carefully framed discussion questions over the course this semester. Your question should arise from an attempt to grapple with a central problem in the text and it should aim at eliciting discussion.

Expectations and Policies in the Classroom:

A classroom is a form of community. As members of this community we all have a number of formal and informal responsibilities.

Here are some **expectations that we can all have for one another:**

- We will treat one another honestly and fairly and will generally carry ourselves in a professional way (without taking ourselves *too* seriously).
- We will show up for class! I have an attendance policy not to satisfy my punitive urges, but because in order for us to have a successful learning community we must, minimally, be present. We owe it to one another.
- We will assume a charitable, respectful posture when reading/listening to the views of others. In other words, we will try to interpret the views of others in the best possible light.

Some other things that **I expect from you:**

- You will come to class having read and thought about the material, and you will participate constructively in classroom discussion.
- You will seek to be stimulated intellectually. How much one learns depends to a significant degree on how much one *cares* to learn. So you will do your best to stay engaged and interested.
- You will ask me to clarify points if you are confused. It is often hard for an instructor to know what is clear and what is not without feedback from students. I will be relying on your feedback throughout the semester.
- You will turn your cell phones off before class and will not carry on side conversations, send text messages, or participate in any other non-class-related form of communication.

Some other things that **you can expect from me:**

- I will do my best to challenge and stimulate you, to make sure that your efforts in the classroom are rewarded.
- I will do my best to ensure that anyone who puts in the effort can understand the material, no matter how difficult.
- I will make myself available to you outside of class by holding office hours, answering email as promptly as possible, and scheduling additional meetings if necessary.
- I will treat you with respect both inside and outside of the classroom and will do my best to create an environment in which you can feel comfortable and confident.
- I will try to articulate my expectations for assignments as clearly as possible, and I will assess these assignments as fairly and impartially as I can.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

The faculty and administration of Brooklyn College support an environment free from cheating and plagiarism. Each student is responsible for being aware of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism and for avoiding both. The complete text of the CUNY Academic Integrity Policy and the Brooklyn College procedure for implementing that policy can be found at this site:

<http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bc/policies>. If a faculty member suspects a violation of academic integrity and, upon investigation, confirms that violation, or if the student admits the violation, the faculty member **MUST** report the violation.

Disability Services:

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations students must first be registered with the Center for Student Disability Services. Students who have a documented disability or suspect they may have a disability are invited to set up an appointment with the Director of the Center for Student Disability Services, Ms. Valerie Stewart-Lovell at 718-951-5538. If you have already registered with the Center for Student Disability Services please provide your professor with the course accommodation form and discuss your specific accommodation with him/her.

Provisional Reading Schedule:

Thurs., Aug. 25	Introduction to Course
Tues., Aug. 30 Thurs., Sept. 1	Descartes , <i>Meditations</i> IV and VI Correspondence between Descartes and Elisabeth , Shapiro, pp. 61 – 73 (6 May, 1643 – 1 July, 1643)
Tues., Sept. 6	Correspondence between Descartes and Elisabeth , Shapiro, pp. 85 – 99 (18 May, 1645 – 4 August, 1645) and pp. 111 – 122 (15 September 1645 – 6 October 1645).
Thurs., Sept. 8	Descartes , <i>Passions of the Soul</i> , I.30 – 50 Descartes , <i>Passions of the Soul</i> , III.153 – 161, §211 – 212
Tues., Sept. 13 Thurs., Sept. 15	<i>Discussion Day #1</i> Spinoza , Preliminaries and <i>Ethics</i> , Part I (through Proposition 14)
Tues., Sept. 20 Thurs., Sept. 22	Spinoza , <i>Ethics</i> , Part I (cont.) Spinoza , <i>Ethics</i> , II - III
Tues., Sept. 27 Thurs., Sept. 29	Spinoza , <i>Ethics</i> IV - V <i>Discussion Day #2</i>
Tues., Oct. 4 Thurs., Oct. 6	No Class No Class
Tues., Oct. 11 Thurs., Oct. 13	No Class Malebranche , <i>The Search After Truth</i> , Preface (xxxiii – xliii) and 1.1 - 1.2 (pp. 1 – 11)
** <i>Friday, Oct 14</i>	Malebranche , <i>The Search After Truth</i> , “Conclusion of the First Three Books” and Book 5.1 - .2.
Tues., Oct. 18	Malebranche , <i>The Search After Truth</i> , 6.2.3 and Elucidation Fifteen.
Thurs., Oct. 20	Leibniz , <i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> , §§1 – 16, 30 - 33
Tues., Oct. 25 Thurs., Oct. 27	Leibniz , Correspondence with Arnauld Leibniz , <i>Monadology</i>
Tues., Nov. 1 Thurs., Nov. 3	<i>Discussion Day #3</i> Locke , <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> (selections) Leibniz , Preface to the <i>New Essay</i>

Tues., Nov. 8 **Locke**, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (selections)
 Thurs., Nov. 10 **Collins**, Correspondence with Clarke, pp. 45 – 51, 225 – 238

Tues., Nov. 15 **Du Châtelet**, *Discourse on Happiness*
 Thurs., Nov. 17 **Du Châtelet**, *Discourse on Happiness*

Tues., Nov. 22 *Discussion Day # 4*
 Thurs., Nov. 24 *No Class (Thanksgiving)*

Tues., Nov. 29 **Hume**, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.1
 Thurs., Dec. 1 **Hume**, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.3.3 – 1.3.8

Tues., Dec. 6 **Hume**, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.4.6 - 1.4.7
 Thurs., Dec. 8 **Hume**, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2.3.1 – 2.3.2
 Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, XI

Final Assignments Due in Class on Thursday, December 15, 3:30 – 5:30 pm.