

Fall 2013

PHIL 352  
17<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy  
M: 2:30-4:20 W: 2:30-3:20

**Contact Info:**

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**Course Description**

The seventeenth century is marked by the development and entrenchment of mechanist science and its associated recasting of the natural world as similar to a machine. This shift in scientific worldview brought with it real philosophical problems, cutting to the heart of questions in metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of mind. At the centre of these questions is that of the nature of the human being, and in particular of how humans do what is taken to be distinctive of us – understanding the world around us. Answers to this question are framed by commitments regarding the kinds of things there are, and of how things are able to affect one another. There are many ways to approach this constellation of issues: we will focus on three themes: Nature [what is it?]; Representation [what is an idea? how do our mental representations afford knowledge of their objects?] and Self [what marks us as individuals who represent the world?] We will anchor our discussion in close readings of Descartes, Malebranche, and Spinoza, but we will also look at some other thinkers who are critical of them: Elisabeth, Princess of Bohemia, Margaret Cavendish and Anne Conway.

**Course Requirements:**

1 3-4pp paper 25%

2 5-6 pp papers 30% each

Participation, including weekly questions/responses for discussion 15%

**Texts:**

Required

Descartes, Selected Philosophical Writings, Cambridge UP

Malebranche, Philosophical Selections, ed. S Nadler, Hackett

Spinoza, Ethics and Other Writings, ed. E Curley, Princeton UP

Additional readings either provided in class, or available online.

Various secondary source materials will be available on reserve or through the library databases.

Recommended (available on reserve):

Gary Hatfield, *Descartes and the Meditations*, Routledge

Catherine Wilson, *Descartes's Meditations*, Cambridge

Amelie Rorty (ed) *Essays on Descartes's Meditations*, UCalifornia Press

Karen Detlefsen, (ed) *Cambridge Companion to Descartes's Meditations*, Cambridge

Steven Nadler (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Malebranche*

Steven Nadler, *Malebranche and Ideas*

Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*

Don Garrett (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, Cambridge

Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, Routledge

Nadler, Steven, *Spinoza's Ethics*, Cambridge

Nadler, Steven, *The Philosopher, The Priest and the Painter: A Portrait of Descartes*, Princeton

**Late Paper Policy:**

Late papers are **not** desirable. One third of a grade will be docked from your grade each day after I have finished marking those papers received on time. (Note: You run a great risk if you do not turn your papers in on time. If only a few people turn papers in on time, I will finish my marking quickly and papers will start counting late sooner.)

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is a serious breach of academic honesty. Plagiarism consists of taking another's work as one's own. It can involve using another's words without attribution, but it can also involve using another's ideas without giving credit. **BE SURE TO CITE YOUR SOURCES.** Internet sources should be cited by noting the http address. For these assignments, there will be no need to consult secondary sources. **Instances of plagiarism will be penalized.** If you are caught plagiarizing, you will at least FAIL THE ASSIGNMENT in which the violation occurs. Repeat violations and particularly egregious instances of plagiarism, will result in a FAILURE OF THE COURSE. If you have questions about plagiarism take the library tutorial.

### **CANVAS** (<http://canvas.sfu.ca>).

There is a course module set up on CANVAS. Students are expected to contribute to the discussion section of this module by writing short (paragraph length) responses to the reading.

Syllabus, slides, and paper topics will be available for downloading on CANVAS, as will additional readings in electronic form. Students can log onto CANVAS with their SFU username and password. If you are enrolled in the course, PHIL 352 will appear on your menu.

**A note about weekly responses:** To receive full participation marks students must respond 10 out of 14 weeks. These responses can take the form of sorting out difficult passages, raising objections, marking something of interest, raising a well-framed question, or explaining why something you find confusing is confusing to you. You are encouraged to respond to other students.

### **Schedule of Reading (Tentative and Subject to Change)**

<b>Week of</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Assignments</b>
Sept 4	Introduction: What's so interesting about the 17th century?		Think about three themes: Nature, Self, and Representation
Sept 9-11	Descartes: Skeptical challenges and the nature of thinking	Meditations 1 and 2, with relevant Objections and Replies	
Sept 16-18	Descartes The existence of God, one view of representation, causation and promise of rationality	Meditation 3 with relevant Objections and Replies	paper topics distributed Sept 18
Sept 23-25	Descartes Free Will, Truth and Falsity, and the beginnings of an understanding of material nature	Meditations 4 and 5 with relevant Objections and Replies	
Sept 30/Oct 2	Descartes Thinking, Matter and the whole human being, Representation revisited	Meditation 6, with relevant Objections and Replies *** <i>Principles II.</i>	<b>paper 1 due Oct 2</b>
Oct 7-9	Elisabeth-Descartes correspondence on Mind-Body Causation	Letters of 1643 (available electronically through the library)	

Oct 14-16	Malebranche on causation and free will	<i>Search</i> , 8-1792-127; <i>Dialogues on Metaphysics</i> , 222-238 <i>Treatise on Nature and Grace</i> 269-77	<b>no class Oct 14</b> paper topics distributed Oct 16
Oct 21-23	Cavendish: on matter, motion and causation	<i>Philosophical Letters</i> , Ch.1-3, 30-38 (pdf on Canvas)	
Oct 28-30	Malebranche on Ideas and Representation	<i>Search After Truth</i> , pp. 24-26, 32-50, <i>Dialogues on Metaphysics</i> , pp. 183-210	<b>paper 2 due October 30</b>
Nov 4-6	Spinoza on Nature and causation	<i>Ethics</i> , Part I	
Nov 11-13	Spinoza on Ideas and Representation	<i>Ethics</i> , Part II	<b>no class Nov 11</b>
Nov 18-20	Spinoza on human beings	<i>Ethics</i> , Part III	paper topics distributed Nov 18
Nov 25-27	Anne Conway: On God, creatures and creation	<i>The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy</i> , Ch 1-4 (Ch 6-7, 9 if there is time)	
Dec 2	catch up/wrap up		<b>paper 3 due Dec 2</b>