

PHIL 360: 17th Century Philosophy

Fall 2016

McGill University

Instructor: Charlotte Sabourin

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Office hours

LEA 935 (Leacock building)

Wednesday 3:00 – 4:00

Friday 3:00 – 4:00

Lectures

September 7th – December 2nd

MCMED 1027 (McIntyre building)

Wednesday 1:05 – 2:25

Friday 1:05 – 2:25

Course outline

This course will focus on self-knowledge, a topic of foremost importance in early modern philosophy. It raises a number of fascinating questions such as:

- i) What is the self? (should we think of the self as embodied, or rather as something purely rational? is the self permanent and immutable, or constructed and always evolving? etc.)
- ii) What is it to know oneself? (is it a special kind of knowledge? must all knowledge begin with self-knowledge? is it possible to know anything outside of one's mind? can external factors (society, prejudices, etc.) have an impact on one's self-knowledge? etc.)

In order to investigate as many of these questions as possible, the course will be divided into five units:

I. Descartes and the *cogito*: must all knowledge begin with knowledge of the self?

II. Spinoza and the idea of an emancipatory self-knowledge: the joyful outcomes of knowing oneself.

III. Gournay, Suchon, Poulain de la Barre, Astell and the impact of prejudices on self-knowledge: thinking sexual difference in the early modern era.

IV. Cavendish and her materialist, organic and vitalistic conception of the self.

V. Locke, Leibniz and the debate on innate knowledge: can we have an innate conception of ourselves, or is this something that we build over time?

Assignments

- Two short papers (analyses of selected passages of the texts): 30% and 35%
 - 30% 1st short paper (Spinoza). Due date: October 7th.
 - 35% 2nd short paper (Cavendish). Due date: November 11th.
- A final exam (take-home): 30%
- Participation: 5%.
Students should come to class having read the day's assignment and bring a copy of the texts with them.

N.B.: Written assignments will not be accepted by email.

N.B.: Late assignments will suffer a 1/3 grade deduction per calendar day (e.g. a B will become a B-, should it be one day late)

Texts

- Baruch de Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works* (ed. & tr. by E. Curley), Princeton University Press, 1994.
* Available at The Word Bookstore (469 Milton)
N.B. *The Word Bookstore accepts only cash and personal cheques.*

*Excerpts of the following works will be made available on MyCourses:

- René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (ed. & tr. by J. Cottingham), Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Marie de Gournay, "The Ladies' Complaint" in *Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works* (ed. & tr. by R. Hillman and C. Quesnel), University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- François Poulain de la Barre, *On the Equality of the Two Sexes* (ed. & tr. by V. Bosley), University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (ed. by P. Springborg), Broadview Press, 2002.
- Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (ed. by E. O'Neill), Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Generic NL Freebook Publisher [in public domain].
- Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding* (ed. and tr. by P. Remnant and J. Bennett), Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Grading Criteria

To do excellent work in this course, you need to do more than reiterate what the authors say or what was said in class. An "A" indicates that you not only understand the text, but that you have also thought critically about it. A "B" stands for an above-average understanding of the material without any major errors. A "C" reflects a basic comprehension of the material with, however, some significant misunderstandings or errors. A "D" shows only a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material, most of it being misunderstood. An "F" indicates no understanding of the material.

Tentative schedule

- 07.09: **Introduction:** self-knowledge and early modern philosophy.
- 09.09: **Descartes:** *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 1st-2nd Meditations (on MyCourses)
- 14.09: **Descartes:** *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3rd Meditation (on MyCourses)
- 16.09: **Descartes:** *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 4th-5th Meditations (on MyCourses)
- 21.09: **Descartes:** *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 6th Meditation (on MyCourses)
- 23.09: **Spinoza:** *Ethics*, part I, prop. 1 – 23
- 28.09: **Spinoza:** *Ethics*, part I, prop. 24 – 36 + appendix
- 30.09: **Spinoza:** *Ethics*, part II, prop. 1 – 19
- 05.10: **Spinoza:** *Ethics*, part II, prop. 20 – 49
- *07.10: **Spinoza:** *Ethics*, part IV, preface – prop. 39 (*N.B. **Spinoza assignment due**)
- 12.10: **Gournay:** *The Ladies' Complaint* (on MyCourses) and **Suchon:** *Treatise on Ethics and Politics*
- **14.10: NO CLASS. There will be an optional make-up session during the last two weeks of the semester.
- 19.10: **Poulain de la Barre:** *On the Equality of the Two Sexes* (excerpts on MyCourses)
- 21.10: **Astell:** *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (excerpts on MyCourses)
- 26.10: **Cavendish:** *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, “To the Reader” + Preface (on MyCourses)
- 28.10: **Cavendish:** *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, s. I-II (on MyCourses)
- 02.11: **Cavendish:** *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, s. XXXV (on MyCourses)
- 04.11: **Cavendish:** *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, s. XXXVI + s. XIII (“Of the Knowledge of Man”) (on MyCourses)
- 09.11: **Locke:** *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (on MyCourses)
- *11.11: **Locke:** *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (on MyCourses) (*N.B. **Cavendish assignment due**)
- 16.11: **Locke:** *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (on MyCourses)
- 18.11: **Locke:** *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (on MyCourses)
- 23.11: **Leibniz:** *New Essays on Human Understanding* (on MyCourses)
- 25.11: **Leibniz:** *New Essays on Human Understanding* (on MyCourses)
- 30.11: **Leibniz:** *New Essays on Human Understanding* (on MyCourses)
- 02.12: **Leibniz:** *New Essays on Human Understanding* (on MyCourses)

Policy on electronic devices

Cell phones are not permitted to be used in class without the explicit permission of the instructor. The use of a laptop for the strict purpose of taking notes is permitted. Internet-related activities will not be tolerated.

Policy on extensions

No extensions will be granted without an appropriate medical note. Please contact the instructor as soon as possible if you have medical reasons justifying an extension.

Varia

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(To learn more about plagiarism, see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)

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