**PHIL 360: 17th Century Philosophy**  
Fall 2016  
McGill University

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**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

  *Available at The Word Bookstore (469 Milton)*
  N.B. The Word Bookstore accepts only cash and personal cheques.


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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“In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change."