

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH
Phil 3410: Descartes and Spinoza
Winter 2018

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Office hours: Fridays 11:30-1:30, or by appointment

Rene Descartes and Baruch Spinoza are two of the most defining figures of the early modern period, ushering in distinctively modern conceptions of the self. Both thinkers presented radically-new conceptions of mind, body, and humans' relationship to the world around them.

Course Objectives:

This course will explore Descartes's and Spinoza's attempts to define, and re-define, such foundational concepts as knowledge, certainty, mind-body dualism, reason, passion, and morality. We will look at their respective conceptions of the nature of reality, human cognition, and the ideal of proper reasoning as a pathway to personal, scientific, and social improvement.

Learning Outcomes:

- *understand* the degree to which the intellectual traditions of the West have shaped modern culture, society, politics, science, religion, and metaphysics.
- *Identify and critically evaluate* central philosophical claims made by canonical philosophers of the early modern period
- clearly and accurately *communicate complex issues* and *argue successfully* for one's own view.
- *identify and question* the often implicit presuppositions that inform various viewpoints, and gain the confidence to propose novel and creative solutions.

Required Texts:

- Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, translated by Donald A. Cress
- Baruch Spinoza, *The Essential Spinoza, Ethics and Related Writings*, edited by Michael L. Morgan, with the Translations of Samuel Shirley
- Selected online readings to be posted on Courselink

Method of Evaluation:

- 2 Critical Summaries 45% (#1 worth 20%; #2 worth 25%)
- Mid-term test 25%
- Final exam 30%

Critical Summaries (45%): A critical summary is a method of critical analysis, which requires a precise formulation of the argument of a given piece of text, in your own words, along with a critical analysis of its relative strength or weakness. You will be asked to write two 3-page critical summaries (typed and double-spaced); each on an assigned piece of text. Detailed guidelines on writing critical summaries will be handed out in class and made available on Courselink. The submission dates for critical summaries are clearly indicated below on the Course Schedule. *These assignments will be submitted via Dropbox. Late assignments will not*

be accepted, except on medical or compassionate grounds. You must speak to Professor Sheridan to arrange for late submission of assignments.

Mid-term test (25%): This test will consist of one essay question (you will have a choice from two questions). You will have one hour to write, in the classroom.

Final exam (30%): This exam will consist of two essay questions. The exam will be distributed on the last day of classes; three questions will be distributed and two questions will appear on the final exam. Final Exam Date: Thursday, April 12, 7:00-9:00 p.m. (Room TBA)

Reading and Assignment Schedule

Date	Topics	Readings
January 8	Introduction to the class	No reading
January 10	Descartes' <i>Discourse</i> : 1-3	Cress: 1-18
January 15	Descartes' <i>Discourse</i> : 4-6	Cress: 18-44
January 17	Descartes' <i>Meditation I</i> Gassendi's Objections	Cress: 47-63 See Courselink
January 22	Descartes' <i>Meditation II</i> Hobbes' Objections	Cress: 63-69 See Courselink
January 24	Descartes' <i>Meditation III</i> Arnauld's Objections Caterus's Objections	Cress: 69-81 See Courselink Jan. 24: Critical Summary #1 handed out
January 29	Descartes' <i>Meditation IV</i> Gassendi's Objections	Cress: 81-87 See Courselink
January 31	Descartes' <i>Meditation V</i> Gassendi's Objections	Cress: 87-92 See Courselink
February 5	Descartes' <i>Meditation VI</i> Mersenne's Objections	Cress: 92-103 See Courselink
February 7	Elizabeth – Descartes Correspondence	See Courselink Feb. 9: Critical Summary # 1 due via Dropbox 5:00 p.m.
February 12	Passions of the Soul, Part I	See Courselink
February 14	Mid-term test	In-class (1 hour)
February 19-23	Winter Break	No readings

February 26	Spinoza's <i>TIE</i> : Sec. 1-57	Morgan: 164-176
February 28	Spinoza's <i>TIE</i> : Sec. 58-110	Morgan: 176-190 Feb. 28: Critical Summary #2 handed out
March 5 - March 7	Spinoza's <i>Ethics</i> : Part I	Morgan: 3-29
March 12 - March 14	Spinoza's <i>Ethics</i> : Part II	Morgan: 29-60 Mar. 16: Critical Summary #2 due via Dropbox 5:00 p.m.
March 19 - March 21	Spinoza's <i>Ethics</i> : Part III	Morgan: 61- 101
March 26 - March 28	Spinoza's <i>Ethics</i> : Part IV	Morgan: 102 - 142
April 2	Spinoza's <i>Ethics</i> : Part V	Morgan: 143 - 161
April 4	Wrap-up; final exams distributed	No readings
April 12	Final Exam	7:00 p.m -9:00 p.m Room TBA

E-mail Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <mail.uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. [See the undergraduate calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration.](#)

Drop Date

Courses that are one semester long must be dropped by the end of the fortieth class day (**Friday, 9 March, 2018**); two-semester courses must be dropped by the last day of the add period in the second semester. The regulations and procedures for [Dropping Courses](#) are available in the Undergraduate Calendar.

Copies of out-of-class assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Accessibility

The University promotes the full participation of students who experience disabilities in their

academic programs. To that end, the provision of academic accommodation is a shared responsibility between the University and the student.

When accommodations are needed, the student is required to first register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS). Documentation to substantiate the existence of a disability is required, however, interim accommodations may be possible while that process is underway.

Accommodations are available for both permanent and temporary disabilities. It should be noted that common illnesses such as a cold or the flu do not constitute a disability.

Use of the SAS Exam Centre requires students to book their exams at least 7 days in advance, and not later than the 40th Class Day.

More information: www.uoguelph.ca/sas

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Each student at the University of Guelph has rights which carry commensurate responsibilities that involve, broadly, being a civil and respectful member of the University community. [The Rights and Responsibilities are detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar](#)

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

[The Academic Misconduct Policy is detailed in the Undergraduate Calendar.](#)

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded or copied without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

Resources

The [Academic Calendars](#) are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs.