

Descartes and Spinoza (PHIL 312)

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and by appointment

Spring Quarter, 2008
Technological Institute LG76
MW 3:30-4:50

Course Description:

Descartes and Spinoza are two of the pivotal figures in the Western tradition of philosophy. We will examine their views on the nature of God, causation, substance, mind, knowledge, the material world, and our place in the universe. We will also consider the ways in which Descartes and Spinoza both drew upon and broke with the orthodox theories of their time.

Required Texts:

Descartes. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. I, tr. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
Descartes. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. II, tr. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
Spinoza. *The Essential Spinoza: Ethics and Related Writings*, tr. by S. Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006.
Bennett, Jonathan. *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984.
Cottingham, John. *Descartes*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.

Recommended Texts:

Descartes. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. III, tr. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, and A. Kenny. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
Cottingham, John (ed.). *Descartes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998.
Hatfield, Gary. 2002. *Descartes and the Meditations*. London: Routledge.
Wilson, Margaret. 1978. *Descartes*. London: Routledge.
Spinoza. *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Vol. 1, tr. by E. Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.
Spinoza. *The Complete Works*, Michael Morgan (ed.) and Samuel Shirley (tr.). Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002.
Spinoza. *Ethics*, G.H.R. Parkinson (tr.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Required Work:

Work for the course will include three papers:

- 1st paper: 4-5 pages, worth 25% of the final grade
- 2nd paper: 4-5 pages, worth 25% of the final grade
- 3rd paper: 8-10 pages, worth 50% of the final grade

Excellent class participation may also factor into the final grade.

Course Policies:

- (1) In order to pass the course, all assignments must be completed.
- (2) Extensions must be requested before the due date.
- (3) Only paper versions of the assignments may be handed in.

- (4) VERY IMPORTANT: plagiarism will not be tolerated. All cases of alleged violation of academic integrity will be referred to the Assistant Dean for Advising and Academic Integrity. Possible penalties range from failing the course to permanent exclusion from the university. For more on plagiarism, see:
<http://www.wcas.northwestern.edu/advising/dishon.html>
http://www.writing.northwestern.edu/avoiding_plagiarism.html.

Students with Disabilities:

Any student with a documented disability needing accommodations is requested to speak directly to the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) (847-467-5530) and the instructor, as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first two weeks of class). All discussions will remain confidential.

Blackboard:

Much of the business of this course, including access to readings on reserve, will be conducted through the Course Management System (Blackboard). You are encouraged to check it frequently, as I may post announcements there from time to time. To access Blackboard, you will need to use your NetID and password. The web address for Blackboard is:
<https://courses.northwestern.edu/webapps/login/>.

Schedule of Readings:

Mar. 31 Introduction to 17th-Century Philosophy

Part I. Descartes

Apr. 2 ***Meditations on First Philosophy (part 1)***

Translator's preface, Dedicatory letter to the Sorbonne, Preface to the reader, Synopsis, Meditations One and Two (CSM II: 1-23)

Apr. 7 ***Meditations on First Philosophy (part 2)***

Meditations Three and Four (CSM II: 24-43)
Cottingham 1-21

Apr. 9 ***Meditations on First Philosophy (part 3)***

Meditations Five and Six (CSM II: 44-62)

Apr. 14 **The method of doubt, skepticism, and the Cogito**

Principles of Philosophy, Part One 1-7, 10 (CSM I: 193-6)
2nd OR (CSM II: 87-8, 93-6), 3rd OR (CSM II: 121, 137), 5th OR (CSM II: 179-180, 241-2), 6th OR (CSM II: 278, 285), 7th OR (CSM II: 302-313)
Cottingham 29-42

Apr. 16 **Clear and distinct perceptions and the Cartesian Circle**

Principles of Philosophy, Part One 13, 30, 45-50 (CSM I: 197, 203, 207-9)
2nd OR (CSM II: 89-91, 100-6), 4th OR (CSM II: 309-310), 5th OR (CSM II: 193-5, 227-228, 249-250, 263-4), 6th OR (CSM II: 279, 289), 7th OR (CSM II: 309-310)
Cottingham 22-29, 66-73

Apr. 21 **God**

Principles of Philosophy, Part One 14-23 (CSM I: 197-201)
1st OR (CSM II: 66-86), 2nd OR (CSM II: 88-89, 91, 96-100, 106-8),
Cottingham 47-64

Apr. 23 **Dualism of mind and body**

Principles of Philosophy, Part One 8-9, 11-12, 51-65 (CSM I: 195-197, 210-216)
3rd OR (CSM II: 122-124), 4th OR (CSM II: 139-144, 154-162),
Cottingham 107-118

Apr. 28 **Interaction between mind and body: a “substantial union”**

The Passions of the Soul, Part One (CSM I: 328-348), Part Two 51-2, 74, 137,
147-8 (CSM I: 349, 354, 376, 381-2), Part Three 211-2 (CSM I: 403-4)
5th OR (CSM II: 238-9, 266-7)
Cottingham 119-132

Apr. 30 **The material world and causation**

Principles of Philosophy, Part Two 3-29, 36-42 (CSM I: 224-235, 240-243)
The World (CSM I: 81-98)
Optics, Discourse One (CSM I: 152-6)
Cottingham 79-88
First paper due

Part II. Spinoza

May 5 **The Nature of Substance**

Ethics I definitions, axioms, p1-15 (3-13)
Bennett ch. 3

May 7 **God/Nature**

Ethics I p16-36, appendix (13-29)
Bennett ch. 4

May 12 **Thought and Extension**

Ethics II definitions, axioms, p1-11 (29-36)
Bennett ch. 6

May 14 **The Human Mind**

Ethics II p12-31 (36-47)
Bennett ch. 7 (sections 37-39)

May 19 **Knowledge and Volition**

Ethics II p32-49 (47-60)
Bennett ch. 7 (sections 40-44)

May 21 **Human Emotions**

Ethics III preface, definitions, postulates, p1-18 (61-72)

Bennett ch. 10

May 26 Memorial Day (no class)

May 28 No class

June 2 **Human Bondage**

Ethics IV preface, definitions, axiom, p2-8, 18-28, 35-37, 64, appendix (102-108, 111-116, 118-122, 134, 138-142)

Bennett ch. 12

Second paper due

June 4 (Reading period—make-up class)

Human Freedom

Ethics V preface, axioms, p1-7, 10, 14-31, 33-36, 40, 42 (143-158, 160-161)

Bennett ch. 14

June 9 **Final paper due (11 AM)**