

Department of Philosophy
Seventeenth-Century Philosophy: 107-360A/2018
Professor A. Laywine
Leacock 918/398-1671, a.laywine@mcgill.ca
Office Hours (tentatively): Wednesday 14:30-16:00

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to philosophy of the seventeenth century. One thing seems to have formed a point of consensus for philosophers at this time: the need to break with the past and try something new. For many philosophers, the past was Aristotle. The consensus, such as it was, probably stopped there. What had Aristotle and his medieval followers gotten so badly wrong? The diagnoses were often different, but each suggested a different path into the future (for philosophy). A philosopher who claimed Aristotle had relied too naively on the senses to advance the sciences might recommend a strategy for shutting them down and giving authority to another faculty of knowledge – the intellect. One who thought Aristotle had not relied enough on the senses and too readily engaged in idle speculation might recommend a program of reform based on experiment and observation. One who thought Aristotle had depended on frivolous distinctions because he mistook linguistic conventions for indications about how things really are might recommend a careful reform of the sciences based on a philosophical enquiry into the nature of language. Our program this term will be to read carefully and examine critically a representative sample of seventeenth-century proposals for a ‘new philosophy’. The course will be broken down into the following four units each devoted to a different proposal.

Unit One: Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and the project of setting out the sciences anew – readings from the *Great Instauration*, *New Organon* and *Atlantis* (with supplementary readings from Aquinas and Robert Boyle)

Unit Two: Descartes (1596-1650) and the project of setting out the sciences anew – readings from the *Discourse on the Method* and the *Meditations on First Philosophy*

Unit Three: Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) on a mission against the Kingdom of Darkness – readings from *Leviathan*

Unit Four: Leibniz (1646-1716) and the idea of giving Aristotelian hylomorphism a second chance – selected readings TBA

Please note: I am not willing to break the course down into week-by-week topics or readings, because how long we spend on any given reading will depend on the pace of class-room discussion. But each unit will take roughly three or four weeks.

I have ordered four books for this class. They are available for purchase at the Word Bookstore on Milton: Francis Bacon, *Selected Philosophical Works*, ed. Rose-Mary Sargent; Descartes, *Discourse on the Method and Meditations*; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Ed Curley; Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. & trans. Garber and Ariew – all are Hackett publications. Supplementary readings will be made available as PDF documents. Students who take this course will be expected to keep up with the readings. **They will be expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings constructively. They are also required to bring the book and supplementary readings to class.**

10% of the final grade will be for constructive participation in classroom discussion (and hence being properly prepared for such discussion by really doing the readings.) It is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for getting any credit for this component of the grade that students attend class regularly. In fact, it is a necessary condition for passing the course that students attend the class regularly. 25% will be for a short paper due some time during the term. 40% will be for a final paper due on the last day of this class. 25% will be for a formal, closed-book exam – on the readings. McGill University does not tolerate plagiarism. If you have any questions about academic integrity at McGill, please check the following link: <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/academicrights/integrity>. Les étudiant(e)s à l'Université McGill ont le droit de soumettre leurs devoirs en français s'ils le veulent: <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/academicrights/course/french>.