

17th Century Philosophy: PHIL 360

Fall 2018 T/Th 10:05 AM – 11:25 AM
BURN 1823
Thomas Colbourne

Office Hours: TBA

thomas.colbourne@mail.mcgill.ca

Description:

This course will explore the varying treatments of the passions and affects in early modern philosophy. The course will focus on close readings of key texts by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), René Descartes (1596-1650), Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), Benedict De Spinoza (1632-1677), and Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715). The role of the passions is often ignored or diminished in contemporary treatments of the early modern period, with philosophers instead tending to emphasize the role of reason, scientific method, and arguments from first principles. As a result of this myopia, philosophers from the early modern period are typically regarded as primarily – and sometimes exclusively – concerned with the role of reason in human activities. This course aims to demonstrate the importance of the passions, affects, and emotions in early modern thought. We will explore the ways that early modern philosophers viewed the passions as an important area of inquiry rather than merely a peripheral topic to be given cursory treatment. Early modern philosophers viewed humans as passionate creatures: because of our embodiment, humans are sensitive creatures, subject to bodily desires, emotions and the influence of external pressures. In order to conduct ourselves well, whether that means to satisfy our bodily desires or to live according to the dictates of reason, early modern philosophers thought that we must understand the passions in order to accommodate and account for their presence. Moreover, these philosophers often (and perhaps ambitiously) thought that the passions could be understood as an extension of the physical sciences, i.e., as explicable in terms of the motions of our bodies. Thus, the passions, while irrational by their nature, were nonetheless still subject to rational inquiry and explanation. Rather than enforcing a strict divide between the rational and irrational, early modern philosophers viewed both as two irreducible sides of human existence. While the emphasis of the course is on the passions, students will also be exposed to early modern conceptions of physics, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, politics, and a host of other related topics.

Texts:

All texts will be available on the course website (MyCourses). For those who prefer physical copies, the main texts can easily be purchased online.

- Descartes, René, *The Passions of the Soul and Other Late Philosophical Writings*, translated by Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- Hobbes, Thomas, *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*, edited and translated by J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- James, Susan, *Passion and Action in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)
- Malebranche, Nicolas, *The Search After Truth*, translated and edited by Thomas M. Lennon, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- Spinoza, Benedictus De, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, edited and translated by Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- Note: Margaret Cavendish's *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* is only available as a pdf document.

Requirements and Assignments

- **Attendance (10%)** Attendance for this course is mandatory. After the add/drop period (Sept. 17), attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. Each student can miss one class without providing a reason. Every other unexcused absence will result in a 1% deduction from the attendance grade.
- **Reading Summaries (20%)** To encourage students to complete the readings, students will be required to submit weekly summaries of the readings of ca. 300 words. The summaries should include a synopsis of one of the week's readings as well as a brief critical engagement with the text. Students must submit 10 summaries. For any given reading, the summary must be submitted no later than the Friday of the following week.
- **Essay Outline (30%)** An essay outline of ca. 8 pages will be due on Nov. 12. The essay outline is intended to encourage students to begin structuring and researching their final essay well before that essay is due.
- **Final Essay (40%)** Each student will be required to submit a final essay of ca. 15 pages by Dec. 8. The essay should be written on the same topic as the essay outline, though the thesis and structure do not have to be the same.

Further instructions for the assignments will be provided during the course.

Assignment Submission

- All assignments will be submitted electronically as a Word Document through MyCourses. Further instructions will be provided during the course.

Schedule (All readings will be made available online):

Introductions

Week 1	Sept. 3	Introduction to Class. James, "Introduction: The passions and Philosophy." Schmitter, "17 th and 18 th Century Theories of Emotions." (Optional)
	Sept. 5	The Philosophical Backdrop. James, <i>Passion and Action</i> , Part 1.

Hobbes

Week 2	Sept. 9 Sept. 12	Hobbes, <i>The Elements</i> , Part 1, Ch. I-II. Hobbes, <i>The Elements</i> , Part 1, Ch. III-V.
Week 3	Sept. 17 Sept. 29	Hobbes, <i>The Elements</i> , Part 1, Ch. VI-IX. Hobbes, <i>The Elements</i> , Part 1, Ch. X-XIV.
Week 4	Sept. 24 Sept. 26	Hobbes, <i>The Elements</i> , Part 1, Ch. XV-XIX. James, "Hobbes's Analysis of Thinking as Motion." (Optional) James, "Passions as Appetites." (Optional)

Descartes and Cavendish

Week 5	Oct. 1	Descartes, <i>The Passions</i> , Part 1. James, "The Cartesian Soul." (Optional)
	Oct. 3	Descartes, <i>The Passions</i> , Art. 51-138.

Week 6	Oct. 8 Oct. 10	Descartes, <i>The Passions</i> , Art. 139-212. Cavendish, <i>Philosophical Opinions</i> , Matter and Motion.
Week 7	Oct. 15	Cavendish, <i>Philosophical Opinions</i> , Matter and The Body.
Spinoza		
	Oct. 17	Summary of Ethics 1. Spinoza, Ethics 1. (Optional)
Week 8	Oct. 22 Oct. 24	Spinoza, E2 Preface – E2p31. James, “Spinoza on the Identity of Body and Mind.” (Optional) Spinoza, E2p32 - E2p49.
Week 9	Oct. 29 Oct. 31	Spinoza, E3 Preface – E3p28. James, “Passions and <i>Conatus</i> .” (Optional) Spinoza, E3p29 – E3p59.
Week 10	Nov. 5 Nov. 7	Spinoza, E3 Definitions of the Affects – E4p7. Spinoza, E4p8 – E4p45.
Week 11	Nov. 12 Nov. 14	Spinoza, E4p46 – E4 Appendix. (Essay Outline Due) Malebranche, <i>The Passions</i> , Book 5, Ch. 1-4. James, “Relocation of the Passions.” (Optional)
Week 12	Nov. 19 Nov. 21	Malebranche, <i>The Passions</i> , Book 5, Ch. 5-7. Malebranche, <i>The Passions</i> , Book 5, Ch. 8-12.
Week 13	Nov. 26 Nov. 28	(TBA) Course Overview.

Statement on Academic Integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offenses under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

Notes:

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

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

As instructors of this course, we endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. If you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with us and the [Office for Students with Disabilities](#), 514-398-6009.

McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

