

PHIL 360: Seventeenth-century philosophy
Fall 2022

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TTh 2:35-3:55; Birks 111

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to important texts and issues of seventeenth century philosophy. We will focus on the development of early modern metaphysics and epistemology through the works of René Descartes (1596-1650), Elisabeth of Bohemia (1618-1680), Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715), Margaret Lucas Cavendish (1623-1673), Anne Conway (1631-1679), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), and John Locke (1632-1704).

The early modern period in philosophy can be characterized by a shift away from Scholastic Aristotelianism towards a conception of the world compatible with the new mechanistic science. The interplay between science and philosophy is hinted at in a comment from Descartes to Mersenne: “These six Meditations contain all the foundations of my physics. But please do not tell people this, for that might make it harder for supporters of Aristotle to approve the *Meditations*. I hope that readers will gradually get used to my principles, and recognise their truth, before noticing that they destroy the principles of Aristotle.” We will begin by considering various ways in which the ‘new science’ forces a reconsideration of basic metaphysical and epistemological questions. This will take us to topics ranging from materialism, dualism, mind-body interaction, causation, to the limits of possible knowledge about the nature of the world.

Office hours: TBA

Texts: Descartes’ *Meditations*, Leibniz’s *Philosophical Essays* and Locke’s *Essay concerning human understanding* are available from The Word bookstore on Milton Street. The other readings will be made available on MyCourses.

Requirements: The requirements for the course are:

- (i) one critical response (maximum 500 words) worth 20%;
- (ii) one poster presentation, done in groups of 4 or 5, worth 15%;
- (ii) one short paper: 1500 words plus a mandatory peer-review component, worth 35%;
- (iii) open book final exam worth 30% of the final mark.

Extensions: Extensions to deadlines set will be granted only in **exceptional** circumstances, appropriately documented. Late work will be penalized at the rate of 1/3 of a letter grade per day.

Many students may face mental health challenges that can affect not only their academic success but also their ability to thrive in our campus community. Please reach out for support when you need it; many [resources](#) are available on-campus, off-campus and online.

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.

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

McGill University is on land which 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.