

## 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY PHILOSOPHY: PHIL 360

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Fall 2014 WF 11:35-1:05  
Lea 15  
Professor Hasana Sharp  
TA Steven Sych

Office Hours: W 1:30-3:30  
& by appointment (Ferrier 415)  
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### Course Description:

Seventeenth century rationalism is at least as preoccupied with the irrational elements of existence – passions, dreams, somnambulism, and imagination – as with the scope and power of reason. This course will comprise a comparative study of Descartes and Spinoza on the relationship between reason and passion. Both philosophers present compelling portraits of psychic life and offer distinct therapeutic programmes to mitigate the suffering of passions. Although famed for their commitments to the life of reason, they dedicated themselves to the practical problem of how to respond to the intense feelings that attend grave misfortune and interpersonal conflicts and attachments. Hence, Descartes' great work of metaphysics takes the form of a series of meditative practices, and Spinoza's unique ontology is presented in a work called *Ethics*.

Through an examination of Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, pt. I, *Passions of the Soul*, and correspondence with Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, and Spinoza's *Ethics*, we will pursue the roots and development of each thinker's rich psychology. The aim of this course is to familiarize ourselves with the major doctrines of Descartes and Spinoza. As we examine their texts, we will pay special attention to their concerns with unreason – passion, affect, corporeality, and servility. By virtue of their divergent views on the relation between body and soul, they offer different “remedies” for the ills that accompany the passions and thus diverse paths to the perfection of reason.

### Texts:

René Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, (Hackett, 1989).

Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, (Penguin Classics, 2005).

Plus *Principles of Philosophy* and selected correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elisabeth (available on MyCourses).

Books available at “The Word” bookstore on 469 Milton Street.

Note on French: Descartes' *Passions of the Soul* was originally composed in French. You are welcome and encouraged to read any edition of the original. There is an affordable bilingual edition (French-Latin) of Spinoza's *Ethics* published by *éditions du Seuil*, translated by Bernard Pautrat. I did not pre-order these texts, but recommend *La Librairie Olivieri* on 5219 chemin de la cote-des-Neiges. These texts are common enough, however, that you may find them at any bookstore with a decent philosophy section in French (or, of course, via the interwebs).

### Requirements:

Reading & Participation: Come to class having read the day's assignment and prepared to discuss the material. Please note that you are responsible for all of the assigned material even if we do not get around to a detailed discussion of it in class. Borderline grades will be affected (for better or for worse) by attendance and informed participation.

Two short papers: You will be asked to provide a sensitive analysis (close reading, or exegesis) of selected passages of the text. (30% each)

*NB: Written assignments will not be accepted by email. Late assignments will suffer a 1/3 grade deduction per day. Thus an evaluation of A- will become a B+, should it be one day late. There will be no exceptions without valid medical documentation that is promptly submitted to the professor or TA.*

Peer review of rough drafts: You will be required to exchange rough drafts *in class* with one of your peers and fill out an evaluation form. The feedback you provide on your peer's paper should be thoughtful and constructive. It will be graded. (5% each)

Take-home exam: You will write a brief comparative essay on Descartes and Spinoza. (30% of grade)

Grading Criteria: To do excellent work in this course, you need to be able to do more than reiterate what an author has said in your reading or what was said in class. An "A" indicates that you not only understand and comprehend the material, but that you have thought critically about it, fleshing out its subtleties and implications. A "B" reflects an above-average understanding of the material without any major errors; however, "B" work doesn't capture the complexity of the issues and tends toward accurate summary rather than independent analysis. A "C" suggests a struggle with the material that manages an average, basic comprehension of it but is flawed by some significant misunderstandings or errors. A "D" indicates only a rudimentary comprehension of part of the material with most of the material being misunderstood. An "F" indicates no understanding of the material.

Academic Integrity: 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 <http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity> for more information). Note that the code stipulates that any assignment suspected of plagiarism should be submitted directly to the associate dean for review.

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.

**Reading & Assignment Schedule**  
Subject to Revision

			Assignment Due
Month	Wk	Day	
Sept	i	3	Introduction to class.
		5	Descartes, <i>Principles of Philosophy</i> , pt. I, articles 1-45. (on <i>myCourses</i> )
	ii	10	Descartes, <i>The Passions of the Soul</i> (Hereafter <i>PS</i> ), pt. I, aa. 1-25.
		12	<i>PS</i> , pt. I, aa. 25-50.
Oct	iii	17	Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth and Descartes dated: 6 May 1643, 21 May 1643, 10 June 1643, and 28 June 1643 ( <i>myCourses</i> ).
		19	<i>PS</i> , pt. II, aa. 50-100.
	iv	24	<i>PS</i> , pt. II, aa. 101-148.
		26	Correspondence: 18 May 1645, 24 May 1645, May or June 1645, 22 June 1645
Nov	v	1	<i>PS</i> , pt. III, aa. 149-169.
		3	<i>PS</i> , pt. III, aa. 170-212.
	vi	8	Correspondence: 1 September 1645, 13 September 1645, 15 September 1645, 30 September 1645, 6 October 1645, 25 April 1646, May 1646.
		10	<b>Peer review, rough draft due.</b>
vii	15	Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i> (hereafter <i>E</i> ), pt. I, props. 1-28. <b>Descartes paper due.</b>	
	17	<i>E</i> , pt. I, props. 29-36, appendix.	
Nov	viii	22	<b>No class, professor away.</b>
		24	<i>E</i> , pt. II, preface – prop. 19.
	ix	29	<i>E</i> , pt. II, props. 20-49.
		31	<i>Ethics</i> I-II review, start <i>E</i> III, pref – prop. 2.
Nov	x	5	<i>E</i> , pt. III, props. 3-26.
		7	<i>E</i> , pt. III, props. 27-42, general definition of the affects.
	xi	12	<i>E</i> , pt. IV, preface – prop 18.
		14	<b>Peer review, rough draft due.</b>
Nov	xii	19	<i>E</i> , pt. IV, prop. 19-40. <b>Spinoza paper due.</b>
		21	<i>E</i> , pt. IV, props. 41 – 73, appendix.
	xii	26	<i>E</i> , pt. V, preface, props. 1-20.
		28	<i>E</i> , pt. V, props. 21-42.