
METAPHYSICS, SCIENCE & RATIONALISM in Fall 2019 (PL2036)

Course Code	PL2036	Professor(s)	Oliver Feltham
Prerequisites	None	Office Number	GL19
Class Schedule	MR: 13:45-15:05 in G-113	Office Hours	Mondays and Thursdays 16h00-17h00
Credits	4	Email	ofeltham@aup.edu
Semester	Fall 2019	Office Tel. Ext.	618

Course Description

This course explores the impact of modern science upon philosophy through an exploration of the fundamental texts of classical metaphysics - Descartes' Principles of Philosophy, Spinoza's Ethics, Leibniz's Discourse on Metaphysics and The Monadology - an examination guided by the question of what is it to act with freedom and grace in an infinite universe ruled by the laws of nature. During our exploration of these fundamental texts we will learn how to construct and contextualize a grand philosophical problem, such as that of demonstrating the existence and action of God, or the nature of external physical bodies, or the correct use of reason in a scientific account of the behaviour of light, or of bodies in motion, such as in Descartes' theory of the interplanetary vortexes causing the movements of our solar system. Through a close reading of Spinoza's Ethics we will also analyze the arguments that tie these metaphysical questions about the nature of reality, God, our minds and the physical universe to ethical and political questions concerning human emancipation from servitude and what Spinoza called the 'sad passions'.

Course Learning Outcomes

General Education

[PLEASE EDIT OR REMOVE THE FOLLOWING TEXT AS APPLICABLE]

The general education program at AUP consists of four requirements: Speaking the World, Modeling the World, Mapping the World, and Comparing Worlds Past and Present.

This course can be used to fulfill the [INDICATE THE REQUIREMENT(S) FULFILLED BY THE COURSE] requirement and as such has the following learning outcomes:

[INDICATE THE GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES]

Course Outline

PL2036 Metaphysics, Science and Rationalism

CLASS SCHEDULE Fall 2019

Week I

Session 1 Monday 2nd September — What is metaphysics?

Session 2 Thursday 5th September — Descartes' *Optics*

Reading: Extracts from Descartes' *Optics* in the Cottingham (ed), *Selected Philosophical Writings* (SW from here on)

September 8th – last day to drop/add courses online

Week II

Session 3 Monday 9th September — Descartes' *Discourse on Method* & the *Optics*

Reading: *Discourse on Method* Parts 1 & 2

Session 4 Thursday 12th September — Descartes' *Discourse on Method* & the *Optics*

Reading: *Discourse on Method* Parts 3 & 4

Week III

Session 5 Monday 16th September — Descartes' *Meditations*: hyperbolic doubt and the cogito

Reading: Descartes' *Meditations* 1 & 2

Session 6 Thursday 19th September — Descartes' *Meditations*: proving the existence of God

Reading: Descartes' *Meditations* 3 & 4

Assessment: Short essay due (1000-1500 words)

Week IV

Session 7 Monday 23rd September — Descartes' *Meditations*: proving the existence of external bodies, and the mind/body distinction

Reading: Descartes' *Meditations* 5 & 6

Session 8 Thursday 26th September — Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*

Reading: *Principles of Philosophy*, Part 1

Week V

Session 9 Monday 30th September — Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*: mechanism

Reading: *Principles of Philosophy*, Parts 2 & 4

Session 10 Thursday 3rd October — Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*

Reading: Entire extract from the *Passions of the Soul* in SW

Week VI

Session 11 Monday 7th October — Midterm exam on Descartes

Session 12 Thursday 10th October — Spinoza's *Ethics*, Introduction: imperial action and God

Reading: Book I of the *Ethics* up to Proposition 17

Week VII

Session 13 Monday 14th October — *Ethics*, Book I: the nature and activity of God

Reading: Book I of the *Ethics* from Proposition 17 till the end.

Session 14 Thursday 17th October — *Ethics*, Book II: The nature of the mind and the body

Reading: Book II of the *Ethics*

Assessment: Topic for research essay due

October 16th, Mid-semester, October 18th, Mid-semester grades due

Week VIII

Session 15 Monday 21st October — *Ethics*, Book II: How we have both true and mutilated ideas

Reading: Book II of the *Ethics*

Session 16 Thursday 24th October — *Ethics*, Book III: the basic passions, desire, joy and sadness

Reading: *Ethics*, Book III 1st half

Assessment: Abstract and bibliography for research essay due

Week IX

Session 17 Monday 28th October — *Ethics*, Book III: Affect triangles and socialization via the passions

Reading: *Ethics*, Book III 2nd half

October 30th – November 3rd, fall break (no classes)

Week X

Session 18 Monday 4th November — *Ethics*, Book IV: Human servitude and submission

Reading: *Ethics*, Book IV 1st half

November 4th, last day to withdraw from a course /no credit option

Session 19 Thursday 7th November — *Ethics*, Book IV: the problem of the collective

Reading: *Ethics*, Book IV 2nd half

Week XI

November 11th – 12th, Armistice Break (no classes)

Session 20 Thursday 14th November — *Ethics*, Book V: what is salvation?

Reading: Bk V of the *Ethics*, 1st half.

Assessment: Research Essay due (2500-3000 words)

Week XIII

Session 21 Monday 18th November — *Ethics*, Book V: why is salvation collective?

Reading: Bk V of the *Ethics*, 2nd half.

Session 22 Thursday 21st November — Leibniz, *Monadology*

Reading: Leibniz, *Monadology*– pdf on Blackboard

Week XIV

Session 23 Monday 25th November — Leibniz, *Monadology*

Reading: Leibniz, *Monadology*– pdf on Blackboard

Session 24 Thursday 28th November — Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*

Reading: Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*– pdf on Blackboard

Week XV

Session 25 Monday 2nd December— Revision

Reading: your course notes

December 6th, last day of classes,

December 7th - 11th, reading days

December 12th – 18th, Final Exams

January 2nd, all grades due

Textbooks

Title	Author	Publisher	ISBN	Required
DESCARTES: SELECTED PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS. ETHICS	COTTINGHAM ET AL. ED. BY SPINOZA	CAMBRIDGE	9780521358125 9781107655638	Yes Yes

Attendance Policy

Students studying at The American University of Paris are expected to attend ALL scheduled classes, and in case of absence, should contact their professors to explain the situation. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of any specific attendance policy that a faculty member might have set in the course syllabus. The French Department, for example, has its own attendance policy, and students are responsible for compliance. Academic Affairs will excuse an absence for students' participation in study trips related to their courses.

Attendance at all exams is mandatory.

IN ALL CASES OF MISSED COURSE MEETINGS, THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMMUNICATION WITH THE PROFESSOR, AND FOR ARRANGING TO MAKE UP MISSED WORK, RESTS SOLELY WITH THE STUDENT.

Whether an absence is excused or not is ALWAYS up to the discretion of the professor or the department. Unexcused absences can result in a low or failing participation grade. In the case of excessive absences, it is up to the professor or the department to decide if the student will receive an "F" for the course. An instructor may recommend that a student withdraw, if absences have made it impossible to continue in the course at a satisfactory level.

Students must be mindful of this policy when making their travel arrangements, and especially during the Drop/Add and Exam Periods.

Grading Policy

- 1) Short essay reconstructing an argument and a concept from Descartes (1000-1500 words) due at the end of Week 3, Thursday 19th September = 15%
- 2) Midterm exam reconstructing and contextualizing key concepts and arguments from Descartes = 15%
- 3) Research essay developing a critical interpretation of one of our three philosophers which answers a philosophical question that you have developed (2500-3000 words), and which draws on primary and pertinent secondary literature, due at the end of Week 11 on Thursday 14th November = 30%
- 4) Final exam testing your retention of what you learnt during the semester = 20%
- 5) Attendance and active participation in class discussion and group work = 20%

Other
