

Descartes

Fall 2018, University of Haifa, Tuesday 10:00-2:00

Instructor: Dr. Daniel Schneider

Course Summary: Renee Descartes is widely recognized as one of the greatest philosophers of all time. Yet today his contributions to philosophy are often given only a cursory look. As a result, his thinking is widely neglected and widely mischaracterized. In this course we take a deeper look at Descartes's views on method, epistemology, metaphysics. In doing so we will discover a surprisingly resilient and sophisticated philosophical system capable of challenging our own philosophical thinking. Our goal is to take as seriously as possible the arguments and philosophical system presented in Descartes *Meditations*. To do this we will not only read Descartes *Meditations* in the manner he asks; we will also look to supplementary readings and commentaries on his thought. This will include reading of works by other early modern "Cartesians" like Spinoza, Arnauld and maybe Malebranche. It will also include works by some contemporary philosophers.

Method:

Philosophical engagement involves both a private component and a social component. The private component consists of the careful reading of texts, rumination upon puzzles, ideas, and argumentation, and an on going struggle to articulate the results of these efforts in a clear and accessible manner. The social component is something of a test of this struggle: It is in discussion—both spoken and written—that we come to discover the limits of our understanding and where our thoughts are most confused.

Course Structure:

Class will consist of structured discussion. Sometimes discussion will be instructor lead, sometimes it will be student led. For the sake of class discussion, Students are expected to not only have read the texts assigned for the week, but also to have thought carefully about them.

Everyone is expected to come to class with questions about the material already prepared. While no one is expected to possess a complete grasp of all the content of the text, students should come to each class with a familiarity with the reading assignment, and with the ability to contribute to the group's understanding of the content found therein.

Assignments and Grading:

One Short Paper (1000-1200 words) *Due Week 6* (30 points)

Weekly Participation:

(Attendance + discussion + short weekly written summaries/questions) (30 points)

One Tutorial (1500 word max paper + discussion) (40 points)

Grade: Total Points/ 100

Required Text:

The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. II, Cottingham, J., Stoothoff R. & Murdoch D. (Eds.) (1985). [CSM II]

(All reading are available on Moodle.)

Recommended Texts:

Essays on Descartes' Meditations, ed. Amilie Oksenberg Rorty, University of California Press, 1986 [EDM]

The Cambridge Companion to Descartes, ed. John Cottingham, Cambridge University Press, 1999 [CCD]

Harry Frankfurt, *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen*, Princeton University Press, 2008 [DDM]

Schedule

Week 1: About Descartes, Preface, Synopsis, Geometrical Exposition of Second Replies.

Week 2: Required Reading: First Meditation [CSM II]

Recommended: [DDM] I recommend all of Part One, but read whatever you can.

Week 3: Required Reading: Meditation 2 [CSM II]; Peter Markie, "The Cogito and its importance" [CCD]; John Carriero, "The second meditation and the Essence of the Mind" [EDM]

Week 4: Required Reading: Meditation 3 [CSM II]; Anat Schechtman, "Descartes's Argument for the Existence of the Idea of an Infinite Being" *Journal of the History of Philosophy*

Week 5: Required Reading: Meditation 3; Louis Loeb, "The Cartesian Circle" [CCD], Spinoza, "On the Cartesian Circle," *Metaphysical Thoughts*.

Recommended: Della Rocca, "Descartes, the Cartesian Circle, and Epistemology without God," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (Jan., 2005), pp. 1-33

Week 6: Required Reading: Meditation 4 [CSM II]; Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (London: Penguin, 1978), ch. 6.; Lex Newman, *Descartes Fourth Meditation*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Sep., 1999), pp. 559-591

Week 7: Required Reading: Meditation 5 [CSM II]; <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-ontological/>

Week 8: Required Reading: Meditation 6 [CSM II]; James D. Stuart, "Descartes' Proof of the External World" *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan., 1986), pp. 19-28

Week 9: Required Reading: Daniel Garber, *Descartes Physics* [CCD]; Nelson, *Micro Chaos*.

Week 10: Required Reading: Fourth Set of Objections and Replies [CSM II]

Recommended: Robert Imlay, "Arnauld on Descartes' Essence: a Misunderstanding," *Studia Leibnitiana*, Bd. 11, H. 1 (1979), pp. 134-145

Week 11: Required Reading: Correspondence with Elizabeth,

Lisa Shapiro (1999): Princess Elizabeth and Descartes: The union of soul and body and the practice of philosophy, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 7:3, 503-520

June 22 Week 12: Tutorial Sessions