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PRELIMINARY SYLLABUS

PHI 516
DESCARTES AND THE CARTESIAN CENTURY
Monday, 9AM-11:50AM
Laura Wooton 201
Autumn 2022

This course focuses on Descartes and later 17th C reactions to Descartes, both positive and negative. When Descartes began to write and publish in the 1630s, he was one of many who were attempting to outline a new philosophy challenging the orthodoxies of the age, particularly the Aristotelian philosophy that had become entrenched in the schools. But within a short time Descartes had attracted the attention of his contemporaries. By the end of the 17thC his name had become virtually synonymous with the idea of a new philosophy. In this seminar we will begin by discussing briefly what exactly the Cartesian philosophical program was, from the *cogito* to cosmology. But the focus of the course will be on reactions to Descartes and his thought, from the first reactions during Descartes' lifetime, both positive and negative, to the end of the century. There was scarcely a domain of inquiry that Descartes' thought didn't touch, including metaphysics, physics, mathematics, psychology, theology, and even Biblical studies.

This course is directed both at students who are intending to do serious research in the history of philosophy, particularly the history of early-modern philosophy, and at students in other areas of philosophy who would like some general exposure to the history of modern philosophy. For those intending to continue with serious work in the history of philosophy, the course will be an introductory survey of what is becoming a lively field of interest in contemporary history of philosophy. But more generally, through exploring Cartesianism and its opponents, we will explore the debates that gave rise to so-called modern philosophy and in that way explore what it meant at that crucial moment in the history of philosophy for philosophy to be modern.

Below is a preliminary outline of the main topics we will be discussing in the seminar. The details of the readings will be further fleshed out closer to the dates of the seminars. A number of sessions will be led by visitors to the seminar, senior scholars who are doing innovative work on Cartesianism and its opponents. I am also hoping that the main work of the seminar will be supplemented by student presentations. At the first session, I will distribute a general bibliography of works on 17thC Cartesianism and reactions to Descartes, along with some notes on figures and issues of particular interest and importance. Students who would like to give a presentation in the seminar will be asked to choose one of these topics to work on during the term, alongside of what we will be working on together in the class sessions. I am hoping that a number of students will give presentations on their special topics to supplement the work of the seminar. The special topics can also be used as the basis of a unit paper, whether or not students have opted to give an in-class presentation. Units can also be earned by writing on any other topic of general relevance to the seminar. Students outside of the Department of Philosophy can earn a grade by writing a term paper, with or without an in-class presentation.

The following books have been ordered at *Labyrinth Books*:

Descartes, *The World and Other Writings*, Stephen Gaukroger, ed. (Cambridge University Press) [Available online through the Library catalogue] [Abbreviated “Gaukroger”]

Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, John Cottingham et al., eds. vols. I and II (Cambridge University Press) [Available online through “Past Masters: Continental Rationalists” on the Library website (under “databases”).] [Abbreviated “CSM I” and “CSM II”]

Spinoza, ed. and trans. E.M. Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press)

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (9/6) Introduction: The state of philosophy when Descartes first began writing: the political and intellectual background. An outline of the Cartesian system, and a history of its publication. How Descartes saw his position in the history of philosophy.

Reading: Descartes, *Discourse on the Method* (CSM I); Garber, “Descartes and the *Novatores* (on Canvas).

Week 2 (9/13) First reactions: the Objections and Replies to the *Meditations*.

Reading: From the Objections and Replies: First (Scholasticism), Third and Fifth (Materialism), Fourth (theology) (In CSM II)

Week 3 (9/20) First reactions: Utrecht/Leiden (Calvinist); the official Catholic condemnation; university reactions

Reading: Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, chaps. 1-3; Collacciani and Roux, “Mathematics Theses in defended at the collège de Clermont (1637-1682); Garber, *Cartesius triumphatus: Gerard de Vries and Opposing Cartesianism at the University of Utrecht*”; an assortment of documents concerning Descartes and Cartesianism at French universities in the late 17thC. (All will be posted on Canvas.)

Week 4 (9/27) NO CLASS

Week 5 (10/4) Spinoza’s ambivalent Cartesianism.

Reading: *Principles of Descartes’ Philosophy*; *Ethics* II, props. 14-31; preface to *Ethics* III and V. (In *Collected Works* I) Garber, “Knowing Mind through Knowing Body: Spinoza on Causal Knowledge of the Self and the External World,” posted on Canvas.

Week 6 (10/11) Fabrizio Baldassarri: Descartes, the Cartesians, and the world of living things.

Reading: TBA

[Fall Break]

Week 7 (10/25): Henry More's attack on Cartesianism

Reading: Excerpts from the Descartes/More correspondence; More, *Immortality of the Soul, Enchiridion Metaphysicum*; Correspondence between Henry More and Anne Conway; Alan Gabbey, "*Philosophia Cartesiana Triumphata*"

Week 8 (11/1) Roger Ariew: Descartes in the classroom: Cartesian textbooks

Reading: TBA

Week 9 (11/8) Steven Nadler: Varieties of occasionalism in the Cartesian tradition.

Reading: TBA

Week 10 (11/15) Descartes Refuted: Pierre-Daniel Huet's *Censura philosophiae cartesianae*

Reading: Selections from Huet's *Censura*.

Week 11 (11/22)* Tad Schmaltz: Cartesian empiricism

Reading: TBA

Week 12 (11/29): Leibniz's *Animadversions* and other texts.

Reading: *Critical Thoughts on Descartes' Principles* and selections from others of Leibniz's writings.

Week 13 (12/6) Descartes lionized and satirized

Reading: Excerpts from Baillet, *La vie de Monsieur Descartes* (1691) (the abridged English trans.) and from the English edition of Gabriel Daniel's anti-Cartesian science-fiction novel, *Voyage du monde de Descartes* (1690) and other related texts.

* Officially this Tuesday is supposed to follow a "Friday" class schedule. Since we are missing class on 9/27, I am using this as a make-up day, since there are no PHI graduate seminars scheduled on Friday morning.