

Philoso 3022F: Cartesianism and its Critics

Course Outline 2020-21

Dr. Benjamin Hill

Fall Term 2020
Lecture (001)
Emergency Remote Learning
MWF / 13:30–14:20*

*TBD by class consensus, see Class Charter below

Instructor: Benjamin Hill (he/him/his)
STVH 3140
519.661.2111 (x80143)
Virtual Office Hour: F 13:30–14:20*
Email: Please use OWL Messages
Emergencies Only: bhill28@uwo.ca

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. With this, we respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers. We acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples (e.g. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) endure in Canada, and we accept responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through our teaching, research, and community service.

EMERGENCY REMOTE LEARNING ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that the current emergency situation is extraordinary and that the extra demands of remote learning are difficult to manage even in the best of times, to say nothing of during the current pandemic. In retooling this course for the current emergency remote learning environment, our aim has been to avail ourselves of the best research and recognized good principles and practices for remote learning. **We pledge that this course will not consist of you watching us speaking into a camera 3 hours a week.** Because we also recognize the special challenges facing all of us because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've aimed to incorporate recommended structures and progressive strategies for supporting student wellness and well-being, as well as academic achievement, during the pandemic. **We pledge that we will be sensitive to and supportive of everyone's personal challenges and to recognize academic accommodations that a student's specific situation may require.**

COURSE GOAL

The goal of this course is to complete a *deep reading* of one of the greatest works of systematic philosophy of all times, Nicolas Malebranche's Cartesian treatise *The Search After Truth*. The course will offer a unique opportunity for an in-depth, critical engagement with the work that defined Cartesianism for most thinkers in the late 17th and 18th centuries. Rarely do any of us find the time to so fully engage with such a masterpiece. This course will offer that immersive engagement.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Nicolas Malebranche, the Premier Philosopher of the 17th Century

Perhaps you've heard of Malebranche when studying Hume's skepticism, Berkeley's idealism, or Leibniz's monadology. Maybe you've even read a few excerpts defending occasionalism or the vision of all things in God. But do you believe that you really understand Malebranche's version of Cartesianism, or why someone like Pierre Bayle would proclaim him to be "the premier philosopher of our age"? To be sure, Malebranche was the greatest Cartesian, the one who epitomized Cartesianism at its most sophisticated and developed to 17th and 18th century philosophers. He was also the primary philosophical antagonist for every important thinker until Kant's focus on Hume's skepticism shifted attention away from Malebranche. But why say he's the "premier philosopher" of the entire age? Curious? Would you like to see why, in the middle of the Age of Genius, someone as learned and important as Bayle would single out Malebranche—rather than Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, or Locke—as the Premier Philosopher? Here's your chance to find out what Malebranche was all about.

This course will conduct a deep dive into Malebranche's Cartesianism through a focused and deep reading of his masterpiece, the greatest and most detailed systemization of the Cartesian vision, *The Search After Truth*. We will read the whole of the *Search* along with the *Elucidations* published alongside it as deeper explanations of key points of controversy or potential confusion. Students can expect intense philosophical discussions of the central core of late 17th century Cartesianism and the philosophical underpinnings of the most complete and systematic philosophical system to be developed in the early modern period. We will cover topics ranging from epistemology and philosophical anthropology, through metaphysics of substance, power, and cause, to theodicy and the character of evil. Reading approximately 70 pages per week, we will leave the final two weeks of the term to focus on the process of developing and writing a critical, philosophical term paper.

Prerequisites: Philoso 2202F/G

Antirequisites: None

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

PREFERRED NAMES AND PRONOUNS

If you prefer to be called something other than the name on file with the Registrar, please let us know. Please also feel free to specify the pronoun(s) you wish to be referred to by. If anyone mispronounces your name or forget your preferred name/pronoun, please correct them. I always greatly appreciate being corrected when I mispronounce or forget someone's preferred name/pronoun.

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CLASS CHARTER

The first week of the course, we will establish a Class Charter, which describes the expectations and norms for our encounters and activities as a group. This is a student participatory activity that is focused on establishing group consensus regarding these expectations and norms. Research points to the many benefits from student participation in forging consensus regarding these expectations and norms. Appendix 1 outlines the basic topics and questions that should be addressed specifically for this class and includes draft text for the class to modify or use for its Charter.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

See [Appendix 2](#) for the alignment of the course learning outcomes with the program and Western degree learning outcomes.

By the end of this course, successful students will be able to:

1. **Restate** and **Explain** the themes, theses, arguments, and doctrines of Malebranche's *The Search After Truth*.
2. **Question** and **Criticize** the theses, arguments, presuppositions, and philosophical motivations of Malebranche's *The Search After Truth*.
3. **Contrast** Malebranche's version of Cartesianism from some alternative versions and possibilities for constructing a Cartesian system.
4. **Formulate** a coherent and philosophically interesting, critical thesis directed toward specific target(s) within Malebranche's *The Search After Truth*
5. **Defend** that thesis and **Evaluate** the response(s) that a Cartesian philosopher like Malebranche could offer.

METHODS OF EVALUATION

All assignments are due at midnight on their specified due dates and must be submitted via OWL or MS Teams unless specified otherwise. Assignments that have an automatic 48-hour grace period may be submitted via OWL or MS Teams as "late" but without any late penalty. To submit an assignment after the 48-hour grace period, when the OWL and MS Teams submission portal has closed, contact Prof. Hill and, if necessary, your Academic Dean, regarding an academic accommodation and alternative submission. Assignments that are designated "Pass/Fail" will be scored as follows: Pass = 100; Fail (with submission) = 40; No Submission = 0.

Weekly Philosophical Discussion Items (40%)

Interpretative Paper Project (60%)

Weekly Philosophical Discussion Items (40%) [Learning Outcomes: 1, 2, 3]

At the end of every week (midnight on Fridays), students are required to submit in MS Teams THREE (3) discussion points (min 150 words each; 450 words in total) that critically engage with the philosophical content of the week's reading. These should be

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points at which the primary source material, or its interpretation, seem especially interesting from a philosophical point of view. “Philosophically interesting” can mean a significant vulnerability, a philosophical breakthrough, or an important invulnerability to traditional concerns. Discussion items are graded numerically, and each is eligible for the automatic 48-hour grace period.

Critical Term Paper Project (60%) [Learning Outcomes: 2, 4, 5]

Students are required to complete a Critical Term Paper Project during the term. The final two weeks of the term will be solely dedicated to working on this Project. The Project consists of THREE (3) concrete deliverables:

- A Draft Paper Proposal **Due November 20** [worth 10%; graded Pass/Fail/No Submission with qualitative feedback] specifying the philosophical research question, the key passage(s) from the primary text, the basic interpretation of those passages, and the working hypothesis being explored in the Project;
- An Argument Outline **Due December 2** [worth 15%; graded numerically with qualitative feedback] specifying the structure and character of the defense being developed for the student’s Critical Term Paper submission; and
- An Interpretative Term Paper (minimum 2000 words) **Due December 9** [worth 35%; graded numerically] that explains and defends the student’s critical conception of Malebranche’s ideas.

A critical paper defends a way of evaluating the philosophical content of a selection of key texts. It presupposes an interpretation of those key texts. Its thesis is that the philosophical idea(s) or argument(s) are or are not worthy of philosophical acceptance for a set of clearly characterized and united reasons. An argument outline is an outline of the student’s argument presented in the critical paper as a defense of their assessment and the reasons on which it rests. A paper proposal is a brief description of the topic to be engaged in the paper, a statement of the central philosophical question to be solved in the project, and a preliminary, provisional statement of what the student anticipates the solution will prove to be. Details of each component as well as a grading rubric and guidelines and advice for planning and completing each component can be found in Appendix X and on the course MS Teams and OWL sites. Each component of the project is eligible for the automatic 48-hour grace period.

Extra Credit Opportunities [Learning Outcomes: 1, 2, 3, 4]

Opportunities for extra credits may be made available throughout the term. Some may be for extra credit on the score of a particular assignment; some may be for extra credit on one’s course grade. All opportunities will be announced in MS Teams and on OWL with the expectations and potential credits specified.

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Essay Course Word Count

As a course that satisfies the senior level essay course requirement, student enrolled in this course should expect to submit a minimum of 2500 words of written work.

Department Target Average Policy

The Philosophy Department has a policy requiring a 74 average for each 2nd year course. The grades I assign will be in the OWL “Gradebook”. Should there be any discrepancy between the grade I recorded for you in OWL and your “official” grade reported by the Registrar, you should contact the Philosophy Department Undergraduate Chair for clarification and explanation. Western’s current policies and procedures for undergraduate student academic appeals can be found [here](#).

REQUIRED TEXTS

Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search after Truth*, edited by Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

VIRTUAL OFFICE HOURS

We have a closed Facebook group, TBA which you are welcome to join. I will record office hours Fridays at 13:30-14:20 EDT on Facebook Live and post the video to this group. For my virtual office hour, you are invited to join me in person at my office (be prepared to be “live” on Facebook video!), to post questions or comments ahead of time on the Facebook Group page or into the comments during the Facebook Live event, to post questions ahead of time in the OWL “Forum” for questions, or to deposit questions in my “Question Box” during class time. All questions received will be answered during the Facebook Live virtual office hour. Should you wish to discuss something private and confidentially with me, please contact me to arrange an alternative meeting time.

COURSE SOCIAL MEDIA

In addition to our official MS Teams and OWL site, we have a course website and blog as well as social media presence.

Website and blog: **TBA**

Facebook public page: **TBA**

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/DrBenjaminHill1>

To receive credit for any public event or social media challenge, your posting must include the official course tags. Students without any social media presence or who wish not to post anything that might compromise their personal privacy to social media should contact Prof. Hill regarding alternative ways of documenting their participation or meeting the social media challenge(s).

@drbenjaminhill1

@ **TBA**

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#3022cartesianism&critics
#westerncartesianism2020
#westernu

PROFESSIONALISM

Education is a professional activity and campus is a professional environment. Everyone is expected to comport themselves in a manner appropriate for and conducive of such an environment. All academic activities, interactions, and conversations should be conducted in a respectful, inclusive, and professional manner. **Judgmental, belittling, shaming, rude, ridiculing, bullying, and all other such behavior, comments, and attitudes are inappropriate and will not be tolerated.** We require that all discussion be respectful and kind even when that discussion is critical, defensive, emotional, and contradictory.

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AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website [here](#). It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

ACCOMMODATION

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Western Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found [here](#).

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SELF- REPORTED ABSENCE FORM

Students who experience an unexpected illness or injury or an extenuating circumstance (48 hours or less) that is sufficiently severe to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements (e.g., attending lectures or labs, writing tests or midterm exams, completing and submitting assignments, participating in presentations) should self-declare using the online Self-Reported Absence portal. This option should be used in situations where the student expects to resume academic responsibilities within 48 hours or less. The conditions in place for self-reporting of medical or extenuating circumstances are [here](#).

EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty, students will receive assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade. For 3000- or 4000-level courses in which such a graded assessment is impracticable, the instructor(s) must obtain an exemption from this policy from the Dean and this exemption must be noted on the corresponding course syllabus. In rare instances and at the Dean's discretion, other courses could receive a similar exemption, which also must be noted in the course syllabus.

For Phil 3022F the following grades will be available prior TBD, a total of xx.xx% of your final grade:

COURSE ASSIGNMENT

The last day of scheduled classes in any course will be the last day on which course assignments will be accepted for credit in a course. Instructors will be required to return assignments to students as promptly as possible with reasonable explanations of the instructor's assessment of the assignment.

ACADEMIC OFFENCES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, [here](#).

PLAGIARISM CHECKING

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](#).

SUPPORT SERVICES

[Registrarial Services](#)



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[Student Support Services](#)
[Services provided by the USC](#)
[Student Development Centre](#)

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to [Mental Health@Western](#) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519.661.3030 (during class hours) or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends.

DRAFT

