

DESCARTES (PHIL 433 / PHIL 533)
MW, 2:00 3:50, 122 MCK

Instructor: Annabelle Dufourcq

Course description

This course proposes to trace a path through Descartes' work by reading and analyzing selections from several major texts: *Rules For The Direction Of The Mind*, *Discourse On Method*, *Treatise On the Passions* and excerpts from the correspondence. A close reading of the six *Meditations* will constitute the backbone of the course. We will also occasionally examine classical commentaries and disputes on Descartes' work (Guérout, Marion and Dicker, notably). The purpose will be twofold: on the one hand, to study the structures, the principal parts, and the evolutions of this philosophy, and, on the other hand, to understand the spirit that drives it, the grounds and the meaning of its significance in the history of philosophy. Beyond the widespread depiction of Descartes as the founder of a technological and ego-centered modernity, Cartesian philosophy deserves a more nuanced study of its internal tensions. As, indeed, a founder of modernity, Descartes nevertheless cannot help letting us glimpse what lies behind the scenes of the foundation: the difficulties, the remainders and the problematic decisions that established the boundaries of modern thought. How can the Cogito and God share the status of the very first ground for the Cartesian philosophical edifice? Is not Descartes' philosophy a place where a rift between human knowledge and the divine emerges, a rift nonetheless still serenely sealed by Cartesian rationality? Shall we ascribe to Descartes the assertion of a dualism between the soul and the body, and that in spite of his correspondence with Elizabeth or the *Treatise on the Passions*? How are we eventually to interpret the major role played by the will, common sense, and the virtue of generosity in a philosophy that can never cease to surprise the contemporary reader by its quietude and its gentle urbanity?

Texts

Descartes:

Philosophical Writings

Volumes 1 & 2

Cambridge University Press

(Recommended: Volume 3: Correspondence)

(For the French readers: Descartes, *Œuvres philosophiques*, Edition de F. Alquié, Classiques Garnier, trois tomes)

Additional essays and book chapters made available through Blackboard

Course requirements:

Undergraduate students:

Participation/Attendance: 10%

Mid-term exam: 20%

Reading reports (3): 30%

Final paper: 40%

Graduate students:

Participation/Attendance: 10%

Paper proposal: 20%

Final paper: 70%

1. **Participation/attendance:** You are expected to participate actively in this course, which includes attending every class, reading all assigned material prior to class, and participating productively and professionally in class discussions. Missing three classes *for any reason* will result in a full grade reduction. An additional full grade reduction will be made for each additional missed class after the third. Three late arrivals for class will count as one absence. The quality and quantity of your participation in the class discussion will be evaluated in assigning 10% of your final grade.

2) **Mid-term exam:** the in-class mid-term examination will consist in comprehensive questions regarding the required readings and the issues studied in class. You will be asked to give the definition of major Cartesian concepts, to briefly present Descartes' theses and arguments on topics already studied in class. You will also be assigned to comment on short selected passages from the required readings.

3) **Reading reports:** Undergraduate students will be expected to do three reading reports. A reading report is a one-page presentation of all the texts assigned for one class. You will be expected to give an accurate summary of the texts at hand (with a particular emphasis on the issues raised by the author(s), the concepts, theses and arguments at work, the structure of the developments). You should also give a glimpse of what makes the originality of the texts. You may include a presentation of your philosophical responses to the text. If several texts are assigned, it should be relevant to demonstrate the links between them.

You will have to pick up three sets of reading of your choice.

Reading reports (printed copy) are due at the beginning of the corresponding class.

4) **Paper proposal:** Graduate students will submit in the 7th week a prospectus of their final paper. This proposal will consist in (1) a 2-3 page detailed description of the topic, the key-questions and the plan of your paper; and (2) a 1-2 page annotated bibliography of the texts (primary and secondary literature) you intend to study and to refer to in your final paper. This should include a summary of each quoted text and a precise explanation of its relevance for your paper proposal.

The deadline for the submission of the paper proposal is Friday May 18th.

5) **Final paper:** Final papers should explore in detail a specific issue posed by Descartes' philosophy. It may consist in close study and interpretation of a particularly difficult text (or series of texts) from Descartes' work, or in a reflection on the specificity of Descartes' treatment of a philosophical general issue. The confrontation of Descartes' thought with other classical authors and with the critical readings of commentators is expected but your paper has to remain focused on Descartes' specific texts, concepts and arguments.

I will hand out in advance suggested topics for the papers. Undergraduate students may choose from this list or create a topic of their own on the model of the suggestions. Graduate students will be expected to design the topic they want to investigate.

Final papers should be around 10-12 double-spaced pages (8-10 pages for undergraduate students), must be proof-read and use a standard system of citation (e.g. Chicago Manual of Style).

Papers are due on the date scheduled for the final exam, and extensions will be granted only in the case of genuine, documented emergencies. Late papers will lose one letter grade for each calendar day that they are late.

Policies

Incompletes and extensions will be given only in the event of documented emergencies.

Retaining copies of all coursework: Please retain copies of all work submitted and the original copy of all work returned to you during the term until the final course grade has been posted. In the event of any question concerning whether grades have been accurately recorded, it is your responsibility to provide these copies as documentation.

Computers and other electronic equipment: Use of electronic equipment, including cell phones, pagers, MP3 players, and laptop computers is prohibited during this class. Exceptions to the prohibition of laptops may be requested from the instructor and will be granted only for legitimate academic reasons. Use of laptops for academic reasons will be monitored throughout the term, and failure to restrict their use to this function will result in the revocation of any laptop privileges.

Academic Honesty: Please review and familiarize yourself with the provisions of the Code of Student Conduct regarding academic honesty. You can find a summary in each term's Schedule of Classes or by the Office of Student Life's Duck Guide: http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/duck_guide/duckguide.htm. Violations of academic honesty will be met with disciplinary action (the usual punishment is an "F" for the course).

Inclement Weather: It is generally expected that class will meet unless the University is officially closed for inclement weather. If it becomes necessary to cancel class while the University remains open, this will be announced on Blackboard and through the Blackboard email system.

Individual Differences: If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please don't hesitate to consult with me. If you have a disability that may prevent you from fully demonstrating your abilities, you should contact me personally as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure your full participation and facilitate your education process. The university offers a wide range of services to support you in your efforts to meet the course requirements, including the following:

* **University Teaching and Learning Center (TLC):** TLC provides numerous resources (including courses, workshops, and tutoring) to help UO students succeed. They work with a diverse student body with a wide range of needs. If you are unsure which resources would work best, they are happy to answer questions and share suggestions. Web: <http://tlc.uoregon.edu/> – Phone: 541-346-3226.

* **University Counseling and Testing Center (UCTC):** The UCTC provides comprehensive mental health care and testing services to the University of Oregon campus. The primary mission of the UCTC is to provide quality clinical/therapeutic services, psychological testing and

assessment, psychoeducational workshops, and outreach as well as emergency services. Web: <http://counseling.uoregon.edu/dnn/> – Phone: 541-346-3227

* ***Accessible Education Center (AEC)***: The AEC is dedicated to facilitating and supporting accessible education through active collaboration with students, faculty, staff, and the community. The AEC works to create and sustain physical, curricular, and informational environments that are informed by and responsive to the diverse characteristics and experiences of students with disabilities and variations of ability. Web: <http://aec.uoregon.edu/> – Phone: 541-346-1155

Tentative schedule:

Any changes to these assignments will be announced in class or through Blackboard

Week 1

* 4/2

Introduction to the course.

* 4/4

The early stages of Descartes' work. The three dreams and the birth of the method.

Readings:

- *Olympica* (Baillet's account in *Vie de Monsieur Descartes*)
- *Rules for the Direction of the mind* (Rules 1 to 4)

Week 2

* 4/9

The *Rules for the direction of the mind* and Descartes' "grey ontology" (Marion)

Readings:

- *Rules for the Direction of the mind* (Rules 5 to 12)
- J.L. Marion *Descartes' Grey ontology*, §30 et 31

* 4/11

Descartes metaphysics, general introduction: first occurrence of metaphysical questioning in Descartes' work and relationships between method and metaphysics

Readings:

- *Letters to Mersenne* 15 April, 6 May, 27 May 1630
- *Discourse on Method* (1st and 2nd Discourses)

Week 3

* 4/16

The Meditations

Readings:

- Martial Gu eroult, *Descartes' philosophy interpreted according to the order of reasons*, volume I (The Soul and God), tr. by Roger Ariew, introduction and chapter 1
- *Meditations on first Philosophy*, First Meditation

* 4/18

The *Cogito* (1)

Readings:

- *Meditations on first Philosophy*, Second Meditation
- *Meditations on first Philosophy*, Objections and Replies, Fifth set of objections, Gassendi's objections and Descartes' replies (on the Second Meditation, in particular §8)

Week 4

* 4/23

The *Cogito* (2) Issues and discussions

- *Meditations on first Philosophy*, Objections and Replies, Second set of objections, Descartes' reply (excerpt: The philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol II, p.100)
- *Principles of philosophy*, I, §10
- George Dicker, *Descartes*, Chapter 2 (On Meditation II)
- Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §16 and 17
- Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, Introduction and First Meditation

* 4/25

Third Meditation. The First demonstration of the existence of God, "through the effects".

Readings:

- *Meditations on first Philosophy*, Third Meditation

Week 5

*4/30

The Cartesian circle

Readings:

- George Dicker, *Descartes' philosophy interpreted according to the order of reasons*, Chapter 3 (On Meditation III) p.167-174
- Martial Gu eroult, *Descartes' philosophy interpreted according to the order of reasons*, volume I, Volume I, p 5 §22 *nexus rationum*

*5/2

Fourth Meditation, the error and the infinity of the will

Readings:

- *Meditations on first Philosophy*, Fourth Meditation
- *Letter to Mesland*, 9 February 1645

Week 6

*5/7

Mid-term exam

*5/9

Fifth Meditation. The ontological proof.

Readings:

- *Meditations on first Philosophy*, Fifth Meditation

Week 7

*5/14

A Cartesian theology?

Readings:

- B. Pascal, *Conversation avec Monsieur de Saci*.
- "Sur La Theologie Blanche de Descartes. by Jean-Luc Marion" Review by Charles Larmore, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (Mar., 1984), pp. 156-162

*5/16

Sixth Meditation, Metaphysics and the issue of a science of the sensible world

Readings:

- *Meditations on first Philosophy*, Sixth Meditation

Week 8

*5/21

Cartesian Physics

Readings:

- *Principles of Philosophy*, II, §20-39
- Optics (1st, 4th & 6th discourses)
- Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, III

*5/23

From Descartes' metaphysics to a Cartesian science of the living being. Body and Soul (1)

Readings:

- *Treatise on Man* (excerpts)
- *Discours On Method*, Fifth discourse (excerpt: p.134-141)
- Letter to Meyssonier, 29 January 1640
- Letter to Mersenne, 1 April 1640
- Letter to the Marquess of Newcastle, 23 November 1646

Week 9

*5/28

From Descartes' metaphysics to a Cartesian science of the living being. Body and Soul (2): Was Descartes a dualist?

Readings:

- Letters to Regius December 1641 and January 1642
- Letters to Princess Elizabeth, 21 May 1643 & 28 June 1643
- Letter to More 5 February 1649
- *Principles of Philosophy* I, §48 & II, §2

*5/30

A Cartesian ethics? (1) Provisional moral code and the essential link between Reason, will, and contentment

Readings:

- *Discourse on Method*, Third Discourse
- *Principles of Philosophy* I, §3
- Letter to Reneri April/May 1638 (1 & 2)
- Letter to Elizabeth May/June 1645, June 1645, 4 August 1645.
- Letter to Queen Christina 20 November 1647.
- Letter to Chanut, 6 June 1647
- *Principles of Philosophy*, *Preface to the French edition*.

Week 10

*6/4

A Cartesian ethics? (2) Between Physiology and ethics: *Treatise on the Passions*, Definition of the notion of passion.

Readings:

- *The Passions of the Soul*, First Part

*6/6

A Cartesian ethics? (3) *Treatise on the Passions*, virtue and good use of the passions

Readings:

- *The Passions of the Soul*, Second Part and Third Part (§§ 149 to 161)