**Philosophy 310S Graduate seminar on Descartes & Spinoza**

**American University of Beirut**

**Department of Philosophy**

**Spring 2020 W 3:30 PM – 6:00 PM, Fisk 141**

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| Instructor: Dr. Chris Johns  E-Mail: cj08@aub.edu.lb  Phone: Ext. 4259 | Office: 147 Fisk Hall  Office Hours: After class and by appointment. |

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Descartes & Spinoza were the premier rationalists of the 17th century, marking a major turning point in the history of philosophy. In this seminar we are interested in a close reading of their most important works and in understanding the close relationship of their thought. Major topics of focus are substances and their modes, God, corporeal nature and the “mechanical turn” in physics, cognition, passion, the mind-body relationship, and the relationship between metaphysics, the physics of bodies, and ethics. The “geometric method” will be amply “demonstrated” throughout.

The course will emphasize close, reflective, reading as well as student input. One half of class time will be devoted to close reading of select passages. The other half will be devoted to student questions and comments. Be prepared each week with questions for the texts. Much primary and secondary reading is assigned. Each week you will submit, one day *prior* to class time, a 700-word “journal paper” on the current week’s readings. Students will also compose one 2,500-word midterm paper and a 5,000-word final paper incorporating secondary sources. Students are expected to read *all* assigned material and more and to use it judiciously in their papers.

This course mainly emphasizes philosophical thinking, which I take to be the slow, careful, and reflective reading and analysis of texts and concepts. Classes will be discussion-driven, so be prepared by reading the assigned texts ahead of the date of discussion. My goal is not only to introduce these vital philosophers and topics, but also to develop the habit of reading and thinking philosophically.

**Program Learning Outcomes**

* The ability to accurately identify the argument(s) (premises and conclusion) which someone is advocating.
* The ability to identify and assess objections to arguments in our readings.
* The ability to develop, explain, and defend your own views.
* To become familiar with the main problems in the philosophy of scienceand to gain an appreciation and philosophical understanding of them.

**Essential**: By taking this class, you agree to read, understand, and comply with this syllabus. By ‘syllabus’ I mean all of the documents found in the **Syllabus Section** on Moodle. If I make any changes to the syllabus, I will inform you. If you have a question about any policy, I am happy to talk about it.

**Required Texts**: The assigned material is available either on Moodle or from the AUB Bookstore. See Course Schedule below for assigned reading schedule.

* Descartes: *Selected Philosophical Writings: Discourse on the Method; Meditations; Objections & Replies; Principles of Philosophy Parts I and IV; Passions of the Soul, Part One.* (AUB Bookstore) *Principles of Philosophy* Parts II and III; *Passions of the Soul* Parts 2 & 3 (Moodle)
* Spinoza: *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*; *Ethics* (Moodle)
* Lord, Beth. *Spinoza’s Ethics* (AUB Bookstore)
* Secondary lit. (Moodle)

**Graded Requirements**:

* Weekly journal: 25% of total
* Midterm Paper: 30%
* Final paper: 40%
* Participation: 5%

**Weekly writing journal:** By Midnight Tuesday of each week you will upload to Moodle a 700-800 word journal. Late journals will not be accepted. The journal is your place to keep a running track of your ideas or whatever course-related matter you would like to write about—with an eye toward your papers. Consider it free-writing and thinking practice. I will not grade them or give you feedback; but they must be written grammatically and coherently (points removed for carelessness or insufficient length). Successfully complete all 15 of them and get 100 points for 25% of your grade. Fewer than 15 will yield a % of the whole. For example, 12 out of 15 = 80 points. 10/15 = a lousy 67 points.

**Midterm and Final paper:** The Midterm paper runs between 2000 and 2,500 words and will be based on some problem you identify in the readings in the first half of the course (I may suggest paper topics). The Final paper should come to around 5,000 words, and will be more comprehensive in scope and will incorporate some secondary material. The word limits will be strictly adhered to.

Formatting: Papers must be formatted according to the “Papers--formatting, saving, submitting” instructions on Moodle (see Syllabus Section). I will type comments on your paper, grade it, and return it to you electronically. Be sure to read my comments!

Style: These papers are of the “critical” type, meaning that you will take a position (a thesis) and support it with valid reasons. The Grading Criteria for these papers are as follows: 1. **You must be able clearly to state your thesis and its supporting reasons.** 2. You must support your thesis with valid reasons and evidence. 3. You must show that you understand the authors views that you are writing about. 4. You must be able to write in clear, grammatically correct, English. 5. Your main ideas must be logically organized, and your thoughts clear and concise.

* Essays that fulfill all of the above criteria in an excellent manner will receive at least 90 points.
* Essays that do so in a “good” manner, or fulfill the criteria partially, will receive at least 80 points.
* Essays that need work in at least two of the above criteria will receive at least 70 points.
* Essays that do not fulfill several of the above criteria, or do so in a weak manner, will receive at least 60 points.
* Essays that fail to display much knowledge of the readings, *or* are incomprehensible or thoughtless in expression, will receive 59 points or less.
* Plagiarism will be severely punished. See below.

The best way to prepare for your papers is to read the assigned readings *carefully* and pay attention to how we talk about them in class. Additional instructions, criteria, and writing guides are found on Moodle under the syllabus section.

**Grade Calculation:** I want you to understand how your grades are assigned and calculated, so that you can know better what I expect and so that you can exercise more control over your own progress. See “Grades, Calculating and Estimating” on Moodle. This will show you completely explicitly how all calculations are made, so that you can do them yourself. Here is a brief explanation: All grades are recorded on Moodle’s “Grades” (as well as on the assignments themselves), so you can view them as soon as I have put them up (Moodle🡪Administration🡪Grades).

To estimate your grade at any point in the semester, simply figure your average and multiply it by the “weighted” amount; then sum the weighted amounts. Moodle will also give you an accurate estimate.

Note: on the final grade, before entering on AUBsis, I round up the decimal from .60.

**NOTE**: I am happy to discuss my grading criteria and my reason for your grades. I am happy to help you get the best grade you can. However, do not ask me to raise your grade for any reason. If you do, I will *lower* your course grade by two points. Also, keep in mind that while hard work is important, it does not always result in a good grade. The grade depends on my judgment of your final product. I encourage you to talk to me about how to do better.

**Attendance:** This is a graduate seminar meeting once per week. You are expected to attend every class. If you miss **3** classes *for any reason*, you will either be dropped from the course and receive a “W”, or you will receive a failing grade. Two absences result in a 5-point reduction on your final grade. Two *late* arrivals will count as one absence. *If you think you may have problems meeting these attendance restrictions, talk to me.*

**Note**: AUB policy requires that your other courses cannot schedule make-up exams or extra sessions at times conflicting with any other regularly scheduled course (including this one). In case of conflict, you must inform your professors that you must attend your regularly scheduled course and you must be given exam/meeting times that do not conflict with any part of it. If your professor refuses to accommodate you, please refer him/her to me.

**Participation and class conduct**: Participation counts as 5% of your grade. To participate well, you must do the readings *before* class so we can talk about them effectively in class.

Four main rules: 1. No electronic devices of any kind allowed (unless you have a special need to use a computer). 2. You may not talk while others are talking. 3. You may not read non-class material during class. 4. Do not leave the room for more than 10 minutes and do not leave early.

**Plagiarism**: is the intentional or careless use of someone else’s writing or ideas as if they were your own, without citing the author of them. As graduate students you should know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Plagiarism includes paraphrasing without attribution, paraphrasing by replacing a few words here and there with your own words or using a thesaurus (very popular!), copying the words from a spoken video, using encyclopedia passages without attribution, copy/pasting from various blogs and anonymous sites, submitting parts or wholes of papers purchased online, submitting papers written by other students, friends, or family, or paying someone to write your paper or any part of it; or simply having someone “help” you write your paper (not including the Writing Center, unless they give you ideas and construct sentences for you). Plagiarism undermines the general objectives of academia and harms everyone. **If you plagiarize any amount of work in this class, you will receive a grade of zero for the assignment. It is possible for you to fail the course based on one instance of plagiarism. I will also submit a report to the Academic Affair Committee for judgment. If they judge against you, your offense will go on your academic record and you could be dismissed from the university.** You can, of course, **easily avoid plagiarism simply by *citing your sources properly***. If you are unsure of how to cite sources properly, see “**Documenting Sources: Rules & Mechanics**” posted on Moodle. But *you are responsible for any plagiarism*. If you are struggling with an assignment, or with your English, please come and talk to me. I am here to help.

NOTE: Writing a paper does *not* consist of using a source and changing a few words here and there. Nor does paraphrasing a source consist of changing a few words here and there. To paraphrase means to make a compact summary of the main point of a paragraph, for purposes of clarification for the reader. All paraphrasing must be documented. If not, it is plagiarism.

More information on Plagiarism is posted on Moodle under the syllabus section.

**The Writing Center:** If you have writing issues that need extra attention, please take advantage of the Writing Center, located in Ada Dodge Hall, Room 214. Their instructors help all students, from first-year to doctoral. Keep in mind that they will *not* proofread or copy-edit your work. Walk in or make an appointment: 9 am - 5 pm, Monday – Friday. West Hall 336; Ext. 3157; E-mail: [writing@aub.edu.lb](mailto:writing@aub.edu.lb)

**Accessible Education services:** AUB strives to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers due to a disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please inform me as soon as possible.  In order to receive reasonable and efficient accommodations, you must register with the Accessible Education Office: [accessibility@aub.edu.lb](mailto:accessibility@aub.edu.lb); +961-1-350000x3246; West Hall, 314.

**Non-Discrimination/harassment**: AUB is committed to facilitating a campus free of all forms of discrimination including sex/gender-based harassment prohibited by Title IX. The University’s non- discrimination policy applies to, and protects, all students, faculty, and staff. If you think you have experienced discrimination or harassment, including sexual misconduct, we encourage you to tell someone promptly. If you speak to a faculty or staff member about an issue such as harassment, sexual violence, or discrimination, the information will be kept as private as possible, however, faculty and designated staff are required to bring it to the attention of the University’s Title IX Coordinator. Faculty can refer you to fully confidential resources, and you can find information and contacts at www.aub.edu.lb/titleix https://www.aub.edu.lb/titleix . To report an incident, contact the University's Title IX Coordinator Trudi Hodges at 01-350000 ext. 2514, or titleix@aub.edu.lb <mailto:titleix@aub.edu.lb> . An anonymous report may be submitted online via EthicsPoint at www.aub.ethicspoint.com https://www.aub.ethicspoint.com/ .

**Moodle**: Here you will find course material such as the syllabus, some course readings, citation mechanics, tips on writing papers, and such. Class notices and announcements will be sent to you by e-mail (via the “News Forum”) so, **check your AUB e-mail** regularly.

**E-mail**: **So that we may better communicate, you must use your AUB e-mail and “authenticate” it so that I can see your name and know who you are.**

---See course schedule, below--

**Course Schedule**: This schedule is subject to change, although any changes will be announced well in advance. Read the assigned material *prior* to class time. Journals must be uploaded by midnight Tuesday *Always* bring the assigned material to class. *If you do not bring the material to class, I may ask you to leave until you return with it!*

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| **Week. Date** | **To have read before class** | **Additional readings & activities** |
| **1**. Jan 22 | Descartes, *Discourse on Method* | *Intro to course* |
| **2.** Jan 29 | Descartes, *Meditations* 1-3 | Cambridge Companion, Descartes, “Introduction.” (Moodle) |
| **3.** Feb 5 | Descartes, *Meditations* 4-6 | Cambridge Companion, “Cartesian Dualism.” |
| **4.** Feb 12 | Descartes, *Objections & Replies* | Correspondence with Elizabeth of Bohemia (Moodle) |
| **5.** Feb 19 | Descartes, *Passions of the Soul* 1 & 2 |  |
| **6.** Feb 26 | Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, 3 | Damasio, *Descartes Error*, “A Passion for Reasoning” (Moodle) |
| **7.** March 4 | Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* 1 & 2 | Garber, “Descartes’ Physics” (Moodle) |
| **8.** March 11 | *Principles of Philosophy*, 3 & 4 | **Midterm Paper due Thursday 6 pm**  Upload on Moodle |
| **9.** March 18 | Spinoza, *Descartes’ Principles*   * Introduction to *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy and Metaphysical Thoughts* pp. 108-9. (2 pp) * Contents (5 pp) * The Preface to the Honest Reader (by Lodeqijk Meyer) pp. 116 - 120 (4 pp) * Principles of Philosophy Part 1, pp. 121 – 147 (26 pp) * Part 2, through the axioms and propositions 1 & 2, that is, only pp. 147-151 (4 pp) * Part 3 (174-177 (3 pp) | |
| **10**. March 25 | Spinoza, *Descartes’ Principles*   * Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts Part 1, pp. 177 – 189 (12 pp) * Appendix Part 2, pp. 189 – 212 end (23 pp) | ~~Annunciation Day NO CLASS—schedule make up session.~~ **We will meet online.** |
| **11**. April 1 | Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I  Lord, Part I | Cambridge Companion to Spinoza, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics.” (Moodle) |
| **12.** April 8 | Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part II  Lord, Part II | Melamed, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Substance.” (Moodle) |
| **13.** April 15 | Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part III  Lord, Part III |  |
| **14**. April 22 | Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part IV  Lord, Part IV | Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza* “Appetite & Emotion” (Moodle) |
| **15**. April 29 | **Last class**  Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part IV  Lord, Part V  Final Paper topics |  |
| **16.** May 6 | **May 3-6, Reading period** | **Final exam week, 7-…** |
| May 13 | **Final Paper due** **May 15.** | End of Semester May 18 |