

Syllabus

Seminar on Descartes (PHH6425)

Basic information

- Instructor: Dr. Stewart Duncan
- Office: 330A Griffin-Floyd
- Phone: 352-273-1808
- Email: sdrd@ufl.edu; <mailto:sdrd@ufl.edu> Outside class and office hours, this will be the best way to contact me. Please remember to use your ufl.edu email address for all correspondence.
- Office hours: Wednesdays, 2:00-4:00pm, and by appointment
- Canvas: There is a Canvas site for the class. This hosts the syllabus, schedule, and pdf files of assigned secondary literature. It is also where you will submit your papers, and where you will find information about grades. I may also use the announcements section to post additional information about the class.

Schedule

See the separate [Schedule \(https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/445527/pages/schedule\)](https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/445527/pages/schedule) page.

Book and reading

There is one required book for the class. It is René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, volume 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). This contains a translation of all the Objections and Replies, as well as the Meditations themselves.

An electronic text of the contents of volumes 1 and 2 of that translation is available in the Continental Rationalists section of the Past Masters database, to which UF subscribes. Original language texts of Descartes's works are also available on Past Masters.

Other assigned reading will be posted on the Canvas page.

Graded work

There are two pieces of graded work due for this class. They are described below. For information about other work you will need to do for the class, please see the section below on expectations.

The **first paper assignment** is a paper of 2,000–2,500 words. This paper is due by 3:00pm on Tuesday 3/1 (that is, by the start of the last class meeting before spring break). Your grade for this paper is worth 20% of your overall grade for the class. Topics for this paper will be made available two weeks before the deadline (i.e., on Tuesday 2/15). In writing this paper, you will engage in detail with some aspect of the Objections and Replies to the *Meditations*. For this assignment, you will not be required to engage with secondary literature, though you may do so.

The **final assignment** is a paper of 5,000–6,000 words. This paper is due by 7:30pm on Thursday 4/28. (If you look in the schedule of courses, you will find this is the end of the scheduled final exam time for the class.) Your grade for this paper is worth 80% of your overall grade for the class. For this paper assignment you will be expected to engage with recent, high-quality secondary literature on the issue you are investigating.

In preparing for the final paper, you must first submit a **paper proposal**. These should be submitted no later than 3:00pm (the start of class) on Tuesday 4/5. In your proposal you should describe (a) the topic your paper will address, (b) the question your paper aims to answer, (c) primary texts that are relevant to answering this question, (d) secondary literature that is relevant to answering the question, (e) your initial thoughts about what your answer to that question will be, and (f) your initial thoughts about how you will argue for the thesis.

Expectations

- You are expected to attend all classes, arriving on time and not leaving early.
- You should be properly prepared for each class. This will involve, at a minimum, doing all the required reading for each day. When asked in class, you should be able to explain questions you have about the reading, or things that puzzled you about it.
- This is a small seminar, which depends on class discussion. Everyone is expected to participate constructively in that discussion.

Course objectives

In our discussion, we will have three main aims. One aim is historical: that you come to understand some of the views and arguments of Descartes and his contemporary critics. The second is more skill-focused: to work on reading and understanding unfamiliar texts from an unfamiliar context. The third aim is that you come to understand and engage with current conversations among scholars of these issues.

The first two aims will be in view throughout the semester, and your achievements in the areas will be assessed by both papers. The third aim will be in view in the second half of the semester, and your achievements in this area will be assessed by the final paper.

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Grading policies

- Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with [university policies](https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/) (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>).
- All assignments will be given a numerical grade. At the end of the semester, your overall numerical grade will be calculated, based on your grades for and the relative weights of the assignments. This numerical grade will be converted to a letter grade using the following table below.
- Current UF policies for assigning grade points may be found at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx> (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>).

Grade conversions

Numerical grade (n)	Letter grade	GPA
$90.0 \leq n \leq 100$	A	4.0
$86.7 \leq n < 90.0$	A-	3.67
$83.3 \leq n < 86.7$	B+	3.33
$80.0 \leq n < 83.3$	B	3.0
$76.7 \leq n < 80.0$	B-	2.67
$73.3 \leq n < 76.7$	C+	2.33
$70.00 \leq n < 73.3$	C	2.0
$66.7 \leq n < 70.0$	C-	1.67
$63.3 \leq n < 66.7$	D+	1.33

$60.0 \leq n < 63.3$	D	1.0
$56.7 \leq n < 60.0$	D-	0.67
$0 \leq n < 56.7$	E	0

Course evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at

<https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/> (<https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/> (<https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>). Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/> (<https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>).

Accommodations for students with disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](https://disability.ufl.edu/) (<https://disability.ufl.edu/>). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Schedule

Meeting 1. Introduction. Tuesday 1/11/22.

- *Discourse on the Method*, parts 4 and 5

Meeting 2. Meditations 1. Tuesday 1/18/22.

- Meditation 1
- From the Objections and Replies:

Meeting 3. Meditation 2. Tuesday 1/25/22

- Meditation 2
- From the Objections and Replies:

Meeting 4. Meditation 3. Tuesday 2/1/22

- Meditation 3
- From the Objections and Replies:

Meeting 5. Meditation 4. Tuesday 2/8/22

- Meditation 4
- From the Objections and Replies:

Meeting 6. Meditation 5. Tuesday 2/15/22

- Meditation 5
- From the Objections and Replies:
- **Short paper topics available**

Meeting 7. Meditation 6. Tuesday 2/22/22.

- Meditation 6
- From the Objections and Replies:

Meeting 8. Other texts on mind and body. Tuesday 3/1/22.

- Extracts from the correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia
- Deborah J. Brown and Calvin G. Normore, *Descartes and the Ontology of Everyday Life* (Oxford University Press, 2010), section 6.2 ("The Union of Mind and Body: Core Texts")

(Oxford University Press, 2019), section 6.2 (THE UNION OF MIND AND BODY. CORE TEXTS), pp.168–84

- The **short paper is due** by 3:00pm (the start of class) on this day.

Spring break is between meetings 8 and 9

Meeting 9. Mind-body interaction. Tuesday 3/15/22

- Andrew R. Platt, *One True Cause: Causal Powers, Divine Concurrence, and the Seventeenth-Century Revival of Occasionalism* (Oxford University Press, 2020), chapter 3, “Mind-Body Interactionism” (pp.87–136)

Meeting 10. The self. Tuesday 3/22/22.

- Colin Chamberlain, “What Am I? Descartes’s Various Ways of Considering the Self?”, *Journal of Modern Philosophy* 2:1 (2020) 1–30.
- Colin Chamberlain, “The body I call ‘mine’”: A sense of bodily ownership in Descartes”, *European Journal of Philosophy* 27 (2019) 3–24.

Department talk. Colin Chamberlain (Temple University). Friday 3/25/22.

Meeting 11. Substance and immateriality. Tuesday 3/29/22.

- Marleen Rozemond, "Descartes, Malebranche and Leibniz: Conceptions of Substance in Arguments for the Immateriality of the Soul", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 24:5 (2016) 836–57.
- See also: Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, “Descartes’ Substance Dualism and His Independence Conception of Substance”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46:1 (2008) 69–90; Anat Schechtman, "Substance and Independence in Descartes", *Philosophical Review* 125:2 (2016) 155–204.

Meeting 12. The metaphysics of mind-body union (1). Tuesday 4/5/22.

- Tad Schmaltz, "Suarez and Descartes on the Mode(s) of Union", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 58:3 (2020) 471–92.
- Deborah J. Brown and Calvin G. Normore, *Descartes and the Ontology of Everyday Life* (Oxford University Press, 2019), chapter 6 ("The State of the Union"), pp.165–200.
- **Paper proposals due**

Meeting 13. The metaphysics of mind-body union (2). Tuesday 4/12/22

- Alison Simmons, “Mind-Body Union and the Limits of Cartesian Metaphysics”, *Philosophers’*

Imprint 17:14 (2017) 1–36.

Meeting 14. The location of spirits. Tuesday 4/19/22.

- Jasper Reid, "The Spatial Presence of Spirits among the Cartesians", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46:1 (2008) 91–117.

Final paper deadline

- The final paper is due by 7:30pm on Thursday 4/28.