

ADVANCED UNDERGRADUATE SEMINAR – CONCEPTIONS OF GOD IN EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

A basic and deeply held conviction of many early modern metaphysicians is that *everything* depends on God. This dependence was often used to construct proofs for the existence of God. There were however many debates regarding the exact nature of this dependence and about the compatibility of the resulting metaphysical conception of God with established theological, moral or scientific views. In this Course we will study the different conception of God and utilize the role it plays in the various systems to discuss central issues in early modern metaphysics such as causality, freedom, modality and the lawfulness of nature. The course will culminate with an examination of Kant's criticism of rationalistic theology.

Reading list

René Descartes

Meditations on First Philosophy + Objections and Replies (meditations 3, 5), *Principles of Philosophy* (I, II.36-40)

Nicolas Malebranche

Search after Truth (III.2.1–7, VI.2.3, Elucidation. XV), *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion* (2, 7)

Baruch Spinoza

Ethics I

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

Discourse on Metaphysics, Critical Thoughts the Principles Of Descartes, That a most Perfect Being exists, On the Radical Origination of Things, The Monadology 31-59, *The Principles of Nature and Grace* 1-13

Anne Conway

The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy

Émilie Du Châtelet

Foundations of Physics (chapter 2)

Moses Mendelssohn

Morning Hours (chapters 13-17)

Immanuel Kant

The Only Possible Argument (section 1, 3), *Critique of Pure Reason* (The Ideal of Reason, Appendix to the Dialectic), *Lectures on The Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* (Transcendental Theology)

Course Units

Unit 1 – Cartesianism

Descartes' proofs for the existence of God: the cosmological, the ontological
Descartes on self-causation, creation, preservation and the laws of nature
Leibniz's and Kant's criticism of the ontological argument
Malebranche – occasionalism, seeing everything in God

Unit 2 - Spinozism

Spinoza's monism and determinism
Conway's Platonism and criticism of Spinoza
Wolff's criticism of Spinoza

Unit 3 – Leibnizianism

God, contingency and necessity

The principle of sufficient reason and the cosmological proof

God and the ground of possibility and eternal truths

Mendelssohn's unique proof for the existence of God

Du Châtelet's proof from the systematicity of nature

Unit 4 – Kant's conception of God

The pre-critical 'Only Possible argument'

The refutation of the three theistic proofs

The Ideal of reason, the regulative use of the idea of God