

Phil 3121: Modern Philosophy
Fall 2016
Section TY3 Class Number 14108
T, TH 3:40 – 5:20 pm



Course Description

This is a survey of seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophy, focusing on how thinkers of this period sought to reconcile human agency with new developments in science. We will examine how philosophers of this period conceived of nature, asking such questions as: What does it mean for one thing to be the cause of another? Is the physical world causally determined? What role does God play in the course of natural events?

Our main preoccupation, however, will be with how *we* fit into this picture. Are *our* bodies as determined as the rest of nature? What about our minds? Given that our minds causally interact with the physical world, how exactly are we to conceive of the mind's place in nature? Are human freedom and moral agency compatible with physical determinism? Are they compatible with divine omnipotence?

In the final part of the course, we will turn to the conception, prevalent in the modern period, of philosophy as therapy. Philosophy promised to provide tools for self-perfection, enabling us to clarify our intellect and gain control over wayward emotions and desires so that we could become more virtuous and happier. We will explore the efficacy and limitations of the philosopher's toolkit, investigating just how much control we have over our own happiness.

Among the figures that we will study in this course are: Descartes, Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, Malebranche, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, Du Châtelet, and Hume.