

Phil 100B: The Rationalists
Winter, 2026

Tuesday and Thursday, 7:10–8:45pm, Kresge Acad 3101

Contact Information

Professor: Abe Stone (abestone@ucsc.edu)¹
Office: Cowell Annex A-106
Website: <https://people.ucsc.edu/~abestone/courses>
Zoom class meeting: <https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/93487586528?pwd=gvJhCknA0Ja4ANSbQ5HaxAu3fuHtYP.1>
Office hours: TBA

Teaching Assistant:
James Read (japread@ucsc.edu)

Discussion Sections

Section	Time	Place	TA
A	Wed. 7:10–8:15pm	Hum & Soc Sci 250	James
B	Fri. 4:00–5:05pm	Hum & Soc Sci 250	James

Course Description

Readings from the three most famous members of the school of 17–18th century Continental Rationalists: René Descartes (1596–1650), Benedict (a.k.a. Baruch) de Spinoza (1632–1677), and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716).

Modality: In general, I will lecture in person in our assigned classroom, but I intend also to live-stream every lecture over Zoom. I will also make a recording of every lecture available on YouTube.

¹Please feel free to contact the instructor and/or your TA with questions about the substance of the course (philosophical issues, questions about the meaning of the texts, questions about paper topics, etc.). On administrative issues (grades, lateness/extensions, due dates, section times, etc.) please try your TA first.

Course Requirements

Participation in discussion sections (good participation will be possible grounds for raising course grade, especially if it is on a borderline).

“Metaphysics exercises” (kind of a short take-home multiple choice quiz), due most class days (all exercises together are worth 35% of the final grade; graded heavily on a curve). These will be made available on-line via the “Tests & Quizzes” tool on Canvas. qqq

Two short papers (2–3 pages), due Friday, January 30 and Friday, February 20 (each worth 15% of the final grade).

One longer paper (6–8 pages) (worth 35% of the final grade). The paper is due Tuesday, March 17, but you must hand in an introductory paragraph and brief outline (approximately one sentence per paragraph of the proposed complete paper) at some time on or before Tuesday, March 10. There will be special discussion sections to get feedback on this first paragraph and outline from your TA and fellow students. This preliminary assignment will not be separately graded, but if you do not hand it in at all or if it is wholly unsatisfactory, your grade on the final paper will be reduced by one half step (e.g. A to A-).

All paper assignments are available on-line, and there are links to them from this syllabus as well as from my main course page. I will discuss the assignments in class when the due date draws near.

Papers are to be handed in, as attachments, via the “Assignments” tool on Canvas. Please submit in MSWord format, or in a format easily convertible to MSWord. The system will accept late submissions, but late papers may not receive full credit. The system is *not* set up to allow resubmissions: once you press the “submit” button, it will not let you change your response. If, however, you mistakenly submit something and want to change it, please contact me and I can make an exception.

Please do not plagiarize. If you do and I catch you, you will receive no credit for the assignment and may fail the course, and you will also be subject to “disciplinary sanctions” from the University. (In contrast: if you hand in a paper consisting mostly of quotes from or paraphrases of other sources you

have consulted, properly cited, you will not get a good grade — a good paper will contain your own interpretations and thoughts — but you will not fail, either.) If you have any questions about what plagiarism is or how to avoid it, you can ask me, or consult the resources listed on the Library website.² For possible consequences of plagiarism, see the Academic Integrity Policy.³

As noted above, the ME's will be accessed and submitted on-line via Canvas. (The system will accept late submissions, but credit — possibly reduced — will only be given up until the time that the correct answers are available, usually one week after the due date.)

AI policy: I encourage the use of AI assistance with proper caution (i.e., keeping in mind that current AI is often wrong). You may use AI assistance basically in any way that would not constitute cheating if you used a human for the same thing. Similarly, you should cite the AI in cases where you would cite a human. If in doubt, feel free to ask me for clarification.

All assignments are due by 11:55pm on the due date.

Attendance at lecture is *strongly* encouraged, but it is not a course requirement and I will not be taking attendance.

You can find answers to some commonly asked questions about my assignments and grading in my FAQ (<https://people.ucsc.edu/~abestone/courses/faq.html>).

Texts

Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, tr. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch (Cambridge, 1988) (ISBN: 978-0521358125).

Most, if not all, of the assigned readings from this text are available, in a different translation, on Google Books and Wikisource. There are LibriVox recordings (again, in a different translation) of the *Discourse on the Method* and the *Meditations*.

Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, ed. R. Ariew and D. Garber (Hackett, 1989)

²<https://guides.library.ucsc.edu/c.php?g=1349850&p=9960819>.

³<https://undergraduate.ucsc.edu/our-units/academic-integrity-office/academic-misconduct/>.

(ISBN: 978-0872200623).

This collection is available on-line (free to read, but costs to download) on Scribd. Many of (but not all) of the assigned readings are to be found free on Google Books. There is a LibriVox recording of the *Monadology*.

Spinoza, *The Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect, and Selected Letters*, tr. S. Shirley, ed. S. Feldman (Hackett, 1991) (ISBN: 978-0872201309).

Again, there are free versions of the *Ethics* on Google Books and LibriVox, though not in the same translation.

These texts can be ordered through the bookstore and will be on reserve at McHenry. Readings not from texts on the above list are available on Canvas.

Readings

Tuesday, January 6: (no reading, first class). (Lecture on YouTube.)

Background: Aristotelian Metaphysics

Thursday, January 8: selections from Aristotle (on substance and accident). (Lecture on YouTube.)

Tuesday, January 13: selections from Aristotle and Porphyry (on the predi-cables and the categories). ME #1 due.

Thursday, January 15: selections from Plotinus, Porphyry, Avicenna, and Thomas Aquinas (on substance and accident). ME #2 due.

Descartes

Tuesday, January 20: Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, parts 1–3 (pp. 20–35), part 6, first paragraph (p. 46); *Principles of Philosophy* I.1–3 (p. 160), IV.207 (p. 212). ME #3 due.

Thursday, January 22: *First Meditation* (pp. 76–9). No ME due.

Tuesday, January 27: beginning of *Second Meditation* (pp. 80–83, through the paragraph ending “in this restricted sense of the term it is simply thinking”); *Principles of Philosophy* I.9–10 (p. 162–3), .20 (pp. 166–7); *Objections and Replies*, selection entitled “[Appendix: Arguments Arranged in Geometrical Fashion],” pp. 150–52. ME #4 due.

Thursday, January 29: remainder of *Second Meditation* (pp. 83–6); *Principles of Philosophy* I.8 (p. 162), .11 (p. 163), .45–8 (pp. 174–6), .51–4 (pp. 177–8), .63 (p. 182), .66 (p. 183), II.4 (p. 190). ME #5 due.

Friday, January 30: **First paper due.**

Tuesday, February 3: *Third Meditation* (pp. 86–98). No ME due.

Thursday, February 5: *Fourth* and *Fifth Meditations* (pp. 98–110); *Principles of Philosophy* I.6 (p. 161); *Objections and Replies*, selection entitled “[The indifference of the will]” (pp. 134–5). ME #6 due.

Tuesday, February 10: *Sixth Meditation* (pp. 110–22). ME #7 due.

Spinoza

Thursday, February 12: Spinoza, *Ethics* I, beginning through Scholium to Prop. 15 (pp. 31–43). *Theologico-Political Treatise*, ch. 7, tr. Elwes, pp. 98–top of 101 (ending “which occur in the Bible”). (All readings from the *Theologico-Political Treatise* are available as a single file on Canvas.) ME #8 due.

Tuesday, February 17: *Ethics* I, Prop. 16 through end (pp. 43–62). *Theologico-Political Treatise*, pp. 101–4 (ending “its meaning concerning them”). ME #9 due.

Thursday, February 19: *Ethics* II, beginning through Scholium to Prop. 18 (pp. 63–79). *Theologico-Political Treatise*, paragraph beginning at the bottom of p. 106 (“We have thus shown ...”) and ending on p. 107 (“...about the former”); top of p. 114 (beginning “There only remains”)–top of p. 117 (ending “the learned fare alike”). ME #10 due.

Friday, February 20: **Second paper due.**

Tuesday, February 24: *Ethics* II, Prop. 19 to end (pp. 80–101). *Theologico-Political Treatise*, pp. 117–119.

Thursday, February 26: *Ethics* III, beginning through Scholium to Prop. 11 (pp. 102–111) and Prop. 53 (p. 136); IV, Definitions (pp. 155–6) and Prop. 28 (p. 168); V, Preface (pp. 201–3), Prop. 4 (p. 206) and Prop. 14 to end (pp. 210–23). ME #11 due.

Leibniz

Tuesday, March 3: Leibniz, “A New System of Nature,” first three paragraphs (pp. 138–9); from letters to Clarke: 1.4 (pp. 320–21), 2.12 (p. 324), 3.17 (p. 327), 4.42 (p. 331), 5.107–11 (pp. 343–4), along with Clarke’s replies to each; “A Specimen of Dynamics,” first two paragraphs (pp. 118–19); “Discourse on Metaphysics,” §§⁴ 8–12, 24, 26–8, 33 (pp. 40–44, 56–7, 58–60, 64–5). ME #12 due.

Thursday, March 5: “A New System of Nature,” remaining part (pp. 139–45); “Monadology,” §§1–61 (pp. 213–21). No ME due.

Tuesday, March 10: selections from Thomas Aquinas (on angels); Leibniz, from letters to de Volder, last two paragraphs of B, first paragraph of C, and first paragraph of D (pp. 178–9, 181–2); “Monadology,” §§62–81 (pp. 221–3). **Introductory paragraph and outline of final paper due.** No ME due.

Thursday, March 12: Leibniz, “Dialogue on Human Freedom,” pp. 111–17; letter to Coste (pp. 193–6); “Discourse on Metaphysics,” §§13–16, 19–20, 30–32, 35–7 (pp. 44–9, 52–3, 60–64, 66–8); “Monadology,” §§82–end (pp. 223–5). ME #13 due.

Tuesday, March 17: **final paper due.**

⁴The symbol § stands for “section”; §§ means “sections.”

Timeline

Timeline of various stuff more or less relevant to this course:

399 B.C. Death of Socrates	–	
322 B.C. Death of Aristotle	•	347 B.C. Death of Plato
197 B.C. <i>Roman conquest of Greece</i>	–	
1 <i>Birth of Jesus (approx.)</i>	–	
305 Death of Porphyry (approx.)	•	270 Death of Plotinus
410 <i>Sack of Rome by the Visigoths</i>	–	312 <i>Conversion of Constantine to Christianity</i>
529 <i>Emp. Justinian closes phil. schools of Athens</i>	–	
622 <i>Muhammad flees from Mecca to Medina</i>	–	
8th–9th c. <i>Aristotle translated into Arabic</i>		
	•	1037 Death of Avicenna
11th–13th c. <i>Aristotle translated into Latin</i>		
1204–1261 <i>Latin (Crusader) rule in Constantinople</i>	•	1274 Death of St. Thomas Aquinas
1347–1351 <i>The Black Death</i>		
1453 <i>Fall of Constantinople to Turks</i>	–	1517 <i>Martin Luther posts “95 Theses”</i>
	•	1641 Publ. of D.’s <i>Meditations</i>
1677 Publ. of Spinoza’s <i>Ethics</i>	•	1714 Leibniz composes “Monadology”
1781 Publ. of <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> (1st ed.)	–	1789 <i>French Revolution</i>
2026 <i>Now</i>	–	

