

Descartes's *Meditations* in its Medieval Context

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Office Hours: TBD

Summary: An in-depth study of Descartes's *Meditations*. We will compare each *Meditation* after the first with a medieval parallel, while examining a selection of recent and classic literature on the *Meditations*. We will conclude the term by considering Christia Mercer's proposal that Descartes's *Meditations* was inspired by Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle*.

Texts:

You will need to acquire a copy of Descartes's *Meditations*. Use either the translation by Cottingham (Cambridge) or by Cress (Hackett). Do not use any other translation. The former is standard, but I think the latter is quite good. All other readings will be provided on Canvas.

Term Paper: Students enrolled in the class for credit will be required to complete a 15–20 page term paper. All students taking the course for credit are **required** to meet with me to discuss their paper.

Presentations: Each participant, including auditors, will be expected to make one presentation over the course of the quarter. I will ask you to make a 8-10 minute presentation on one of our readings for the day, concluding with some possible discussion questions. I will ask you to meet with me digitally before your presentation so we can discuss it. I will model such a presentation in the first class of the quarter.

Policy Statements:

1. Late Papers and Extensions: For each day that a paper is late, it will be penalized 2/3rds of a letter grade. Late papers will only be accepted up to four days after the assignment is due. I have made the paper deadlines as late as possible for you to have the most time to complete the assignments, therefore, I will *not* be able to grant any extensions.
2. Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: You must document all of your source material. If you take any text from somebody else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also

cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas, or other material. If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, ask! Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be treated according to university policy. It is also your responsibility to make sure you have turned in a readable pdf for all paper assignments.

3. Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me or email me by the end of the first week of class. All discussions will remain confidential.
4. Auditing: Auditing will be permitted in this class. However, it is my expectation that, with the exception of the term paper, auditors will be full participants in the class. The digital format will already be difficult to manage, and it's important that everyone who joins the course is committed to being fully engaged.

Tentative Schedule:

1. Intro, Meditation 1
 - Meditation 1
2. Meditation 2
 - Meditation 2
 - Augustine, *De trinitate* 15.12.21
 - Marmura, "Avicenna's Flying Man in Context"
3. Meditation 2 (cont.)
 - Meditation 2
 - Scotus and Marchia, excerpts on substance
 - Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes 1274–1671*, Chapter 8
4. Meditation 3
 - Meditation 3
 - Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Q. 2.3
 - Schechtman, "Descartes's Argument for the Existence of the Idea of an Infinite Being"
5. Meditation 3
 - Meditation 3
 - Suarez, *Metaphysical Disputations* 22.1
 - Freddoso, "Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature"
6. Meditation 4
 - Meditation 4
 - Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, excerpts

- Jayasekera, “Imitation and ‘Infinite’ Will: Descartes on the *Imago Dei*”

7. Meditation 5

- Meditation 5
- Anselm, *Proslogion*
- Spade, “Anselm and Ambiguity”

8. Meditation 6

- Meditation 6
- Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Q. 75.1–2, 76.1
- Hoffman, “The Unity of Descartes’s Man”

9. The Interior Castle

- Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*
- Mercer, “Descartes’ debt to Teresa of Avila”