Our Bodies Our Selves: Problems of Embodiment
aka Seminar in Continental Rationalism
Philosophy 8611
Fall Semester 2018
Temple University

Time and Location

Thursdays, 3:30-5:50 pm, Anderson Hall 722

Instructor

Prof. Colin Chamberlain
Office: Anderson Hall 746
Office hours: Tuesdays 1:00—2:00 pm (or by appointment)
Email: colin.chamberlain@temple.edu

Description

The body is a puzzle because it does not fit comfortably on either side of the many dualities that often structure philosophical and everyday thinking. The body can seem to be both me and not-me, both what I am and merely one of my possessions, both inner and outer, both subject and object, both self and world. In this seminar, we will study various problems of embodiment as they arise during the early modern period. We will consider metaphysical questions about the relations between mind, self and body; phenomenological questions about the peculiar experiential relation we stand in to our bodies; and epistemological questions about the distinctive ways in which we know our own bodies. Readings will include selections from René Descartes, Elizabeth of Bohemia, Nicholas Malebranche, Mary Astell, John Norris, and Damaris Masham. Some familiarity with Descartes’s works (and especially the Meditations) will be presupposed.

Required Texts

Astell, A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, ed. P. Springborg (Broadview Press).
Descartes and Elisabeth, The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes (The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe), ed. and trans. L. Shapiro (University of Chicago Press), abbreviated LS below.
Other required texts will be available either through Temple’s online catalogue, or the course website.

**Reading Sheets**

Each week you will prepare a 2-3 page reading sheet on the required texts. Basically, I want you to create an outline of the problem space for each week. (This is basically what I will be doing to prepare for the seminar too.) I’ve included some prompts in the schedule of readings below, and you should start with those. You should identify (a) key problems raised by the texts for the week, both interpretive and philosophical, (b) the answers that are being proposed in the secondary literature, and (c) important primary texts. Part of doing the history of philosophy is just identifying the key passages, especially when it comes to less canonical figures. Also, you want to keep track of which passages support which readings, and which passages are counterexamples. E.g. Alison Simmons reads Descartes as saying X, but Descartes also says Y, and that doesn’t seem like it fits with X. Put the secondary literature on trial as you’re reading. The reading will be more fun, and you’ll get more out of it!

*Bring your reading sheet to Thursday’s class in duplicate.* You will give me a copy at the start of class and keep a copy for yourself to use during class. The reading sheet need not be all prose. It can include outlines, lists, drawings, diagrams, etc.—whatever helps you organize your thoughts. Reading sheets will be graded for completion, and won’t be accepted late.

**Short Papers**

I would like everybody to write at least two short (~ 3 page) response papers over the course of the semester, responding to that week’s topic (you are welcome to do more!). These papers should articulate and defend a clear thesis, e.g. this is what Descartes means by X; Malebranche argues for Y by appealing to Z; so-and-so’s reading of Astell is wrong because of Q; Malebranche seems to commit himself to an inconsistent set of propositions, etc. These papers should be as polished as you can make them — ‘aspiring to publishable quality’, to use one of the department’s favorite phrases — and that means they need to be focused. Write simply. Use concrete examples. Eliminate all throat-clearing. Other guidelines for these short papers: (i) your paper is due on the day of class for the topic you’re responding to, (ii) when you turn in a short paper, you don’t need to do a reading sheet, (iii) you should write your papers on two different philosophers, (iv) the last day to submit a short paper is November 15, so that people start really focusing on their final papers.

**Final Paper**

By the end of the semester you will write a (roughly) 25-page seminar paper. It is very hard to write a good paper from scratch at the last minute. I strongly encourage you to start looking for a topic immediately. Come talk to me about possible topics and we can do some brainstorming. I expect *everyone* to meet with me at least once prior to Thanksgiving break to discuss their paper.
topic (and the earlier the better). Also, you should have a polished outline by the last day of class for workshopping purposes. I am more than happy to read drafts, although it may take me a week or two to give you comments. The paper will be due December 12, 11:59 pm. No extensions.

**Grades**

Reading Sheets & Participation: 10%
Short Papers: 20%
Final Paper: 70%

**Plagiarism**

Cite all sources you use. If you are caught plagiarizing, you will receive an F on the assignment and I will report you to the department chair.

**Devices**

No cellphones in class. I encourage you to *print* the readings. But if you want to use your laptop in class for the readings, I’ll allow it. That being said, if you use a laptop, I expect you to disable the wifi connection.

**Disability Statement**

This course is open to all students who met the academic requirements for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible. Contact Disability Resources and Services at 215-204-1280 to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

**Statement on Academic Freedom**

Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The University has adopted a policy on Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy # 03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link: [http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02](http://policies.temple.edu/getdoc.asp?policy_no=03.70.02)

**Schedule of Readings**

The secondary literature on Descartes is vast. As you are getting oriented, start with the readings suggested here. But don’t stop there. Keep track of what these papers cite, and then use their bibliographies as gateways into the literature. The literatures on Malebranche and Mary Astell are significantly more tractable, but a similar procedure applies.
1. August 30: Introduction: Dualism and its Discontents

Descartes argues that mind and body are really distinct substances, capable of existing apart from one another. Mind is ‘a thinking, non-extended thing’, whereas body is ‘a non-thinking, extended thing’ (AT VII 78/CSM II 54). Descartes’s dualism raises two classic problems. First, it seems to undermine the possibility of mind-body interaction. If the mind is non-extended, how can it set the body in motion when someone intentionally waves her hand? Call this the Interaction Problem. Second, it is unclear how joining a mind to a human body can generate a mind-body union or unity, i.e. what Descartes calls a human being. For one thing, it is just very unclear what kind of thing the human being could be. Call this the Union Problem. These problems have dominated scholarly discussions of embodiment in Descartes. To kick off the semester, I will provide a brief overview of these problems, as well as some of the solutions that have been advanced in the literature.

Required Primary Texts:

Meditation 6 (AT VII 71-90/CSM II 50-62); Fourth Replies (AT VII 219, 228/CSM II 154-5, 160); Sixth Replies (AT VII 440-47/CSM II 296-301); Discourse V (AT V 55-60/CSM I 139-141); Principles IV.189, AT VIII 315-6A/CSM I 279-80; Passions of the Soul I.30-34, AT XI 351-355/CSM I 339-40.

Recommended texts for the Interaction Problem:


Recommended Texts for the Union Problem:


2. September 6: The Elizabeth Correspondence

Descartes gets pressed to confront the relationship between mind and body in his correspondence with Elizabeth. But his response to her questions has seemed puzzling to many commentators: he claims that we have a primitive sensory notion of union. What the heck does that even mean? And how is it supposed to help?

Required Primary Texts:

Review the previous week’s readings, and then dig into the Elizabeth. *Correspondence with Elizabeth*: E to D, 16 May 1643 (AT III 660-62/LS 61-2); D to E, 21 May 1643 (AT III 663-68/LS 63-7); E to D, 20 June 1643 (AT III 683-85/LS 67-9); D to E, 28 June 1643 (AT III 690-95/LS 69-71); E to D, 1 July 1643 (AT IV 1-3/LS 72-3).

Required Secondary Literature:


Recommended Primary Texts:

Letters to Hyperaspistes, August 1641 (AT III 423-25); to Regius, December 1641 (AT III 454-55; 460-62), January 1642 (AT III 491-509); to Mesland, 9 February 1645 (AT IV 162-70); to Regius, July 1645 (AT IV 248-50); to Mesland, 1645 or 1646 (AT IV 345-48); for [Arnauld], 29 July 1648 (AT V 220-23); to More, August 1649 (AT V 402); *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet*.

Recommended Secondary Literature:

3. September 13: Sensory Representation: Mental

Descartes holds that sensory perception is the unique province of human beings; angels don’t get to see red or smell coffee. He claims that sensory perceptions are to be ‘referred to’ the combination of mind and body, and, as we saw last week, he also argues that our grasp of the union is sensory. But sensory perception is a thorny topic for Descartes, with scholars disagreeing about very basic questions like whether sensory ideas are even representational. This week and the next, we will dig into questions about the nature of sensory representation. This week, we will ask: do sensory perceptions/ideas represent anything? If so, what? And how (i.e. in virtue of what do they represent)?

Required Primary Texts:

Meditations 3 & 6 (AT VII 35-52 & 71-90/CSM II 24-36 & 50-62); Sixth Replies, 9th point (AT VII 418 & 436-439/CSM II 281-2 & 294-6); Optics 1, 4-6 (AT VI 81-93, 109-147/CSM I 152-6, 164-175); Le Monde, Ch. 1 (AT XI 3-6/CSM I 81-2); Treatise on Man, (AT XI 176-197/CSM I 106-7).

Required Secondary Literature:


Recommended Secondary Literature:


4. September 20: Sensory Representation: Corporeal & Human

This week, we are going to approach sensory representation from the body’s side of things. I am interested in questions roughly parallel to the ones we raised last week about sensory perceptions in the mind. Does Descartes recognize a corporeal sense of representation? For example, do the states of a non-human animals represent anything in its environment? If so, what and how? And what do these corporeal representations represent to: the animal as a whole, or a proper part of the animal, such as its brain? Finally, I am interested in thinking about what Descartes’s corporeal sense of representation might teach us about his approach to representation more generally.

Required Primary Texts:

- Optics 1, 4-6 (AT VI 81-93, 109-147/CSM I 152-6, 164-175); Treatise on Man, (AT XI 176-197/CSM I 106-7); Discourse on Method V, (AT V 55-60/CSM I 139-141); Passions I.i-xvi (AT XI 327-342/CSM I 328-335).

Required Secondary Literature:


Recommended Secondary Literature:


5. September 27: Passionate Representations
What is the function of the passions? Are the passions representational states? If so, how should we understand their representationality? What do they represent, and to whom? If they do not represent, what function do they serve? This last question will become important as we move into Malebranche, given that he is very clear that passions are non-representational mental states.

Required Primary Texts:

*Passions of the Soul* (as much as you can), *Correspondence with Elizabeth* (the rest)

Required Secondary Literature:


Recommended Secondary Literature:


6. October 4: Malebranche on the Senses, part I

This week we turn to Malebranche. Like Descartes, Malebranche holds that the function of the senses is to help us preserve the body. But how do the senses perform their function? More specifically, what kind of information do the senses provide to help us survive in the dangerous world of *res extensa*? I argue that, for Malebranche, the senses are restricted to representing relations to the body. But is that right?

Required Primary Texts:

*Preface to the Search* (OCM I 9-26/LO xxxiii-xl;iiii); *Search* I.1 (OCM I 39-48/LO 1-6); *Search* I.5-7 (OCM I 69-100/LO 19-36); *Search* I.10-13 (OCM 121-154/LO 48-66); *Search* I.20 (OCM I 186-9/LO 85-6).

Required Secondary Literature:


Recommended Primary Texts:

The rest of *Book I* of the *Search*; Elucidations VI, VIII, and XI.

Recommended Secondary Literature:


7. October 11: Malebranche on the Senses, part II

This week, we are going deeper into Malebranche’s account of what the senses represent. More specifically, we will look at what Malebranche has to say about our experience of causality. Malebranche is famously an occasionalist, who argues that God is the only true or genuine cause, and that created beings are merely occasions for God’s exercise of his causal powers, typically in law-like ways. (Check out the SEP article on occasionalism for more on this.) I want to argue that Malebranche holds that the senses (mis)represent created beings as if they were true or genuine causes. More specifically, the senses (mis)represent three kinds of causal relations: body-body interaction, the action of body on mind, as well as the action of mind on body in the case of voluntary action. If that’s right, then this position sets Malebranche apart from Hume, who famously claims that the external senses do *not* provide any impression of causation or power. I am still working out these ideas, and so I can use all the help (and counter-examples) I can get!

Required Primary Texts:

*Search* I.17 (OCM I 171-175/LO 76-78); *Search* VI-II.3 (OCM II 309-320/LO 446-452); *Elucidation* XV (OCM I 203-252/LO 657-685).
8. October 18: Malebranche on the Imagination

Malebranche holds that the imagination has a similar function as the senses: namely, of contributing to the preservation of the body. But what kind of contribution does the imagination make, and, more specifically, how does its contribution differ from and complement the senses? In other words, what can the imagination do for us that the senses can’t? Both the senses and imagination are faculties of ideas or representation, so presumably the imagination provides us with some kind of biologically-relevant information. But what? Simmons (2003, 2008) has done an enormous amount of work documenting the particular ways in which the senses contribute to survival. Can we use her work as a model for a similarly detailed treatment of the Malebranchean imagination? Malebranche’s account of the imagination hasn’t received much scholarly attention, and so I think there’s lots of interesting work still to be done here!

Required Primary Texts:

Search II-I.1 (OCM I 190-195/LO 87-90); Search II-I.5 (OCM I 212-229/LO 101-109); Search II-I.7 (OCM I 232-255/LO 112-124); Search II-II.2, (OCM I 274-278/LO 134-136); Search II-III.1-2 (OCM 320-340/LO 161-172); Search II-III.6 (OCM 370-378/LO 191-195); Conclusion of the First Three Books (OCM 488-492/LO 261-3).

Required Secondary Literature:


Recommended Primary Texts:

The rest of Book II (though heaven help you); Elucidation VIII (OCM III 71-118/LO 596-605) ←— especially if you’re interested in the Fall.
Recommended Secondary Literature:

Antoine-Mahut, Delphine. *Forthcoming*. “The Imagination,” in *The Oxford Handbook to Malebranche*, ed. Sean Greenberg. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. *** Unfortunately, this is only in French at the moment. It will be translated eventually…. but that hasn’t happened yet. If you read French, it would be really good to take a look.***


9. October 25: Malebranche on the Passions

How do the passions contribute to the preservation of the body? How does their contribution differ from the senses and imagination? Once God has created a being with senses and imagination, what do passions bring to the table? One important clue here is that the passions belong to the will — i.e. the volitional side of the mind — whereas the senses and imagination belong to the understanding — i.e. the cognitive or representational side of the mind. But why do we need special, body-preserving volitional states *in addition* to the representational states provided by the senses and imagination? Another question to think about: how do the senses, imagination, and passions work together to help us preserve our bodies? Malebranche is clear that he thinks there is a kind of harmony between these faculties. But how should we understand this claim?

Required Primary Texts: *Search* IV.13 (OCM II 113-125/LO 330-336); *Search* V.1-4 (OCM II 126-166/LO 337-362); *Search* V.6-10 (OCM II 177-227/LO 369-398).

Required Secondary Literature:


Recommended Primary Texts: The rest of Book V (again, heaven help you)

Recommended Secondary Literature:

10. November 1: Mary Astell: Letters Concerning the Love of God & Damaris Masham’s Response

This week we will consider the reception of Malebranchean themes in Britain — and, more specifically, his view that we should only love God, the true cause of pleasure and pain — focusing on the correspondence between Mary Astell and John Norris (an English Malebranchean), as well as the response to this correspondence by Damaris Masham. I am not entirely sure what we will find here. But I am interested in the sorts of questions we’ve been looking at in Descartes and Malebranche: for example, what do Norris, Astell and Masham have to say about the way we experience causality? What roles does the body play in sensation? What kind of account of the passions do they articulate? How are they thinking about the functions of the senses, passions, and imagination? What is their attitude towards the bodily side of ourselves? I don’t really have a line to push this week (or, at least, not yet!) — so this session will be a bit more exploratory. Project Vox (website about early modern women philosophers) has some really helpful resources — check that out if you get excited about Astell.

Required Primary Texts:

Astell, Mary and Norris, John. *Correspondence Concerning the Love of God* (as much as you can — I will try to narrow this down); Masham, Damaris. *Discourse Concerning the Love of God* (excerpt on website).

Required Secondary Literature:


Recommended Primary Texts: Plato, *Symposium*; Malebranche, *Treatise on Morality* I.iii.8-10 (OCM XI 42-32) and II.vi.6-17 (OCM XI 195-200).

Recommended Secondary Literature:

11. November 8: Marcy Lascano Seminar

This year the department’s Distinguished Speaker is the early modern scholar Marcy Lascano, coming to us from Kansas University! She will be doing a workshop during the time-slot for our seminar, and we are all going to attend. She has worked extensively on Mary Astell, and so we should ask her any Astell questions that we have at this point!

Required Reading: Whatever Marcy asks us to read!

12. November 15: Mary Astell: A Serious Proposal to the Ladies

This week, we turn to what is perhaps Astell’s most famous work — A Serious Proposal to the Ladies. Astell is often interpreted as endorsing a broadly speaking Cartesian (or, according to Jacqueline Broad, Malebranchean) account of the self, according to which we are (disembodied) minds to whom our bodies are irrelevant/external/other/etc. My hypothesis is that this reading of Astell on the self can’t be quite right, and that she attributes more importance to the body than these commentators allow. As I’m reading this material, I will be testing this hypothesis. Same instructions as last week. Read as much as you can, in an exploratory mode.

Required Primary Texts:

Astell, Mary. A Serious Proposal (as much as you can — again, I will try to narrow this down — but I kind of think we should read the whole thing).

Required Secondary Literature:


Recommended Secondary Sources:


— No Class - Thanksgiving Break —


Same instructions as last week. I’m still going to be trying to understand Astell’s conception of self, and, the extent to which it is embodied (or not).

Required Primary Texts:

   Astell, Mary. The Christian Religion, focusing on pt. 4 “Of Our Duties to Ourselves”, and especially sections 305 ff. “What regard due to our bodies” (I suspect that this will be the place to look for material on Astell’s account of the self!). *** This is available, in a modern edition edited by Jacqueline Broad, via Temple’s Library system! ***

Required Secondary Literature:

   Nothing new here — but please dip into at least one of the recommended Astell pieces from the previous weeks.


We will workshop final papers! Please come to class with a handout for your paper that includes at a minimum (a) a clearly articulated thesis, (b) an outline of your argument, and (c) key texts, both primary and secondary. The better the handout, the more we can help you!