

Dalia Judovitz
Professor of French Literature
Emory University

Subjects of Meditation: Spiritual vs. Rationalist Passions

Syllabus

- Week 1 The Cultivation of the Self
 Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Books 1-6
- Week 2 Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Books 6-12
- Week 3 Transcending the Self
 St. Augustine, Confessions (selections)
- Week 4 St. Augustine, Confessions (selections)
- Week 5 The Limits of Human Reason
 Montaigne, Apology for Raymond Sebond (selections)
- Week 6 Montaigne, Apology for Raymond Sebond (selections)
- Week 7 Contemplative Visual Practices
 St. Ignatius Loyola, Spiritual Exercises (selections)
- Week 8 St. Ignatius Loyola, Spiritual Exercises (selections)
- Week 9 Spiritual Insight vs. Sight
 Georges de La Tour, “The Repentant Magdalene” (painting cycle)
- Week 10 Meditation as Self-Possession: Inaugurating Rational Subjectivity
 Descartes, Meditations (Parts 1-3)
- Week 11 Descartes, Meditations (Parts 3-6)
- Week 12 The Mastery of the Passions
 Descartes’s Passions of the Soul (selections)
- Week 13 Descartes’s Passions of the Soul (selections)
- Week 14 Conclusion: Towards a Critique of Modernity

Undergraduate Course Description:

This interdisciplinary course will examine contemplative meditation as a set of spiritual and physical practices as elaborated from Antiquity through the early modern period. At issue will be historical shifts in the development of notions of self later to become subject and the attendant concerns involved in its spiritual and secular cultivation. Starting with representations of introspection in secular (Marcus Aurelius) and religious traditions (St. Augustine), we will examine the development of meditation as an exercise through the 16th and 17th centuries in Montaigne's essays, Loyola's spiritual exercises, and La Tour's refigurations of spirituality. This course will show that while informed by these earlier traditions, the philosophical elaboration of rational subjectivity in Descartes will undermine the spiritual meaning of contemplative meditation. By challenging the rationalist account of modern subjectivity, this course will provide alternative models for embodied contemplative practices