

“The Gate was Opened to Me”: The Philosophy of German Mysticism

Start date	10 May 2019	End date	12 May 2019
Venue	Madingley Hall Madingley Cambridge		
Tutor	Dr Cecilia Muratori	Course code	1819NRX029

Director of Academic Centres Sarah Ormrod
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Tutor biography

Cecilia Muratori is a historian of philosophy, and currently Research Fellow at the University of Warwick. She studies the History of European philosophy (15th-19th centuries), with particular research interests in the role of mysticism in philosophical speculation, and in the human-animal differentiation between ethics and natural philosophy. Her first monograph is dedicated to the mystical philosopher Jacob Böhme and his remarkable afterlives in German Idealism, and especially in the reception of G.W.F. Hegel: *‘The First German Philosopher’: The Mysticism of Jakob Böhme as Interpreted by Hegel* (2016). She is interested in the mediation of philosophical concepts through the visual arts, and is co-curator of the first philosophical exhibition on Jacob Böhme: *All in All: The Conceptual World of the Mystical Philosopher Jacob Böhme* (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden 2017).

While she was Research Fellow at LMU Munich (2009-2013) and at Harvard-I Tatti (2013-2014) she developed an interest in Renaissance animal ethics: on this subject she has published several articles and edited two essay collections (*The Animal Soul and the Human Mind: Renaissance Debates* (2013), and *Ethical Perspectives on Animals in the Renaissance and Early Modern Period*, co-edited with Burkhard Dohm (2013)). Her second monograph (*The Renaissance of Vegetarianism: The Afterlives of Porphyry’s On Abstinence*) will be published with *Legenda* in 2019. Recently, she has also published a co-edited volume on philosophical historiography: *Early Modern Philosophers and the Renaissance Legacy* (2016).

Course programme

Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner
20:30 – 22:00	Session 1: What is Mysticism? Presentation of the course and discussion
22:00	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

Saturday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Session 2: Different Mystical Currents and Different Mystical Experiences
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Session 3: The Divine as Abyss and as Creator
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	Session 4: The Problem of Evil
18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	Session 5: The Path to God (with Film and discussion)
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

Sunday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Session 6: God in Nature
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Session 7: Mysticism and Alchemy
12:45	Lunch

Course syllabus

Aims:

The course will:

- introduce students to main thinkers and approaches within the German mystical tradition.
- guide the students in reading and interpreting mystical literature, with attention to recurrent concepts and the terminology in which they are expressed.
- provide the students with essential interpretative tools to understand German mysticism both in relation to religious exegesis and the Western history of philosophy and ideas.

Content:

Mystics often write that they have immediate understanding of the Divine, and sometimes they even add that the content of their insight cannot possibly be explained to those who didn't partake in it. But if this is the case, how can their writings be interpreted? After an introductory session to biblical and philosophical sources of mysticism, the course will introduce the main thinkers of German mysticism by focussing on conceptual areas that are key to understanding the character of this tradition. We will analyse the difference between the Divine as impenetrable abyss and God creator (considering in particular Meister Eckhart, c.1260-1328), the issue of understanding evil as coming from God (especially in Jacob Böhme, 1575-1624), and the way in which God mirrors himself in nature (as in the approaches of Paracelsus (1493-1541) and Valentin Weigel (1533-1588)).

Presentation of the course:

'Mysticism' is a category at the crossroads of various disciplines, especially philosophy and history of religion. In this course, we will study German mysticism mainly from a philosophical perspective, seeking to analyse main concepts and trace their use and variations in the texts considered.

The course will include lecture sections, together with guided discussions and small group work during which we will practice close reading and analysis of selected passages. We will also look at iconographic materials that relate to the topics under examination, and watch and discuss a short film on Böhme's mystical philosophy. Issues of translation could be considered if students are interested.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- reflect critically on various meanings of 'mysticism' in the texts under examination and beyond.
- actively deploy the main concepts and vocabulary associated with German mysticism
- understand a broad selection of texts belonging to the so-called German mystical tradition, locating them in their religious, historical and philosophical contexts.

Reading and resources list

Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk *

Selected material will be provided in a course pack.

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Jacob Boehme	<i>Aurora. Introduction & Commentary</i> , ed. A. Weeks	Brill 2013
Meister Eckhart	<i>Selected Writings</i> , ed. O. Davies	Penguin 1994
Paracelsus	<i>Essential Theoretical Writings</i> , ed. A. Weeks	Brill 2007
Valentin Weigel	<i>Selected Spiritual Writings</i> , ed. A. Weeks	Paulist Press 2003
Kurt Flasch	<i>Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity</i> translated by A. Schindel and A. Vanides	Yale U. Press 2015
Rufus Jones	<i>Spiritual Reformers of the 16th and 17th Centuries</i>	Macmillan 1914
online:		
	https://ia800203.us.archive.org/24/items/spiritualreforme00joneuoft/spiritualreforme00joneuoft.pdf	
Alexandre Koyré	<i>La Philosophie de J. Boehme</i>	Vrin 1929
Cecilia Muratori	<i>Böhme, Jacob in</i> <i>Encyclopedia of Renaissance Philosophy</i>	Springer 2017
online:	https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-02848-4_550-1	
Andrew Weeks	<i>Boehme: an intellectual biography of the seventeenth-century philosopher and mystic</i>	SUNY Press, 1991
Andrew Weeks	<i>Valentin Weigel (1533-1588): German Religious Dissenter, Speculative Theorist, and Advocate of Tolerance</i>	SUNY Press 2000

Editions in German:

Valentin Weigel	<i>Sämtliche Schriften</i> , ed. W.-E. Peuckert and W. Zeller	Frommann-Holzboog 1996-2015
Jacob Böhme	<i>Die Urschriften</i> ed. W. Buddecke	Frommann-Holzboog 1963-66
Jacob Böhme	<i>Sämtliche Schriften</i> , ed. W.-E. Peuckert	Frommann-Holzboog 1955-89
Meister Eckhart	<i>Die deutschen Werke</i> , ed. J. Quint et al.	Kohlhammer 1936-
Angelus Silesius (Johannes Scheffler)	<i>Cherubinischer Wandersmann</i> ed. L. Gnädinger	Reclam 1984

Other resources:

All in All – Jacob Böhme: free app for Android and iPhone (with texts by Lucinda Martin and Cecilia Muratori)

Website addresses

Main editions of Paracelsus' works are available online at <http://www.paracelsus.uzh.ch>

Website with resources on Böhme: <http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~janzb/boehme/>

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 12 October 2018