

The idea behind this assignment is to draw together your existing knowledge of the history and philosophy of concepts of space and extend that knowledge towards the present day. You will be choosing a particular theme or concept (or idea) that you will trace through from its origins before the Scientific Revolution (i.e. before Galileo, Kepler and Newton) through to the present day. The essay will introduce the concept and give several key arguments that illustrate how it has developed at the hands of the philosophers and scientists we have studied (and will study in the remainder of the course). This means that anything on the syllabus or that plays a key role in the history of space is fair game.

For the first part of the essay assignment I want you to generate a couple of ideas about a possible theme. Here are some very broad topics that you could choose from: vacuum, place, motion, inertia, relativity, gravity, relationism, empiricism, geometry, infinity. This is not an exhaustive list, and your essay must be more tightly focused—you will need to do more than just pick one of these words. In particular, your essay must show how the ongoing philosophical and scientific study of space affects (and initially gave rise to) the concept that you have chosen to study in more depth.

The first part of the assignment requires you to choose a theme and sketch how an essay on this topic might look. I want you to provide a question that your essay will answer. (Think of this like Jeopardy, with your essay playing the role of the answer given to you.) This question should be reasonably detailed, and can have more than one part. For example, if you wanted to write about gravity your question might be:

How did Aristotle's notion of natural motion lead to Newton's universal force of gravity, and what happened to the force of gravity in relativity theory?

This question will be subject to revision, and you are welcome to come up with more than one: we will narrow down the choice later on.