The Rationalists: Spinoza and Leibniz  
PHIL10086  
2020-21

Course Organiser Pauline Phemister  
Dugald Stewart Building, room 6.04  
Tel: 0131 651 3747  
Email: p.phemister@ed.ac.uk

Course Secretary Anne-Marie Cowe  
PPLS Undergraduate Teaching Office  
Dugald Stewart Building, room G.06  
Tel: 0131 650 3961  
Email: Philinfo@ed.ac.uk

Times and Locations  
Semester 1  
Information about class timing and format will be on the LEARN page for the course.

Assessment  
Mid-term essay (30%) to be submitted by 12 noon on Thursday 22\textsuperscript{nd} October. Word limit: 1,500 words

Final essay (70%) to be submitted by 12 noon on Thursday 10\textsuperscript{th} December. Word limit: 3,000 words

Participation (5%) judged by seminar attendance and Learn Discussion Board participation

Course Aims and Objectives  
The course will introduce students to the philosophical systems of the Dutch philosopher, Benedict de Spinoza and the German thinker, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Responding critically to, but still working within the framework of, Cartesian dualism, Spinoza and Leibniz respectively transformed the Cartesian philosophy in two radically different directions, resulting in (i) Spinoza’s absolute monism and, in critical response also to Spinoza, (ii) the dynamic, pluralist philosophical system of Leibniz. In this course, we will compare and assess the philosophical arguments that led each philosopher to hold similar but also radically divergent views on the nature of reality, mind and body, God, and the ethical life.

Lecture/Seminar Content: Provisional Outline  
Week 1: Introduction and Substance (Spinoza)
Essential Reading:
Spinoza, Ethics 1, Definitions 1-8, Axioms 1-7, Ethics 2, Postulates 1-4 (located immediately before Ethics 2, Proposition 14)
Spinoza, Ethics 1, Proposition 5 and Demonstration

Recommended further reading:
John Cottingham, *The Rationalists*, chapter 3;

Week 2: Proofs of God’s existence (Spinoza)

Essential reading:
Spinoza, Ethics 1, proposition 11 and demonstrations

Website
Mapping Spinoza’s Ethics website: [http://ethica.bc.edu/#/](http://ethica.bc.edu/#/)

Week 3: Spinoza’s Monism and Determinism (Spinoza)

Essential reading:
Spinoza, Ethics 1, proposition 14 demonstration and all the propositions and their demonstrations that are included in the proof.

Spinoza, Ethics I, Proposition 5 and demonstration (the no-shared attribute thesis)
Phemister, *The Rationalists: Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz*, chapter 4, pp. 91-99
Spinoza, Ethics I, propositions 26-33, including demonstrations of the component propositions.

Website
Mapping Spinoza’s Ethics website: [http://ethica.bc.edu/#/](http://ethica.bc.edu/#/)

Recommended further reading:
Lecture 4: Mind and Body (Spinoza)

**Essential reading:**
Spinoza, *Ethics* 2, up to and including Ethics 2, proposition 47
Della Rocca, Michael (2008). *Spinoza* (Routledge), chapter 3

**Recommended further reading:**

**Website**
Mapping Spinoza’s Ethics website: [http://ethica.bc.edu/#/](http://ethica.bc.edu/#/)

Lecture 5: Freedom: the intellectual love of God (Spinoza)

**Essential reading:**
Spinoza, *Ethics* 3, proposition 35 and Scholium, *Ethics* 4, proposition 46, plus all other propositions, corollaries and scholia, excluding their demonstrations, in Ethics 3 and 4.
Spinoza, *Ethics* 5, paying particular attention to Ethics 5, proposition 32 and all propositions that discuss eternity or the eternal part of the mind.

**Website**
Mapping Spinoza’s Ethics website: [http://ethica.bc.edu/#/](http://ethica.bc.edu/#/)

**Recommended further reading**
Susan James, ‘Power and Difference: Spinoza’s Conception of Freedom’, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 4:3 (1996), 207-228

Lecture 6: Substances (Leibniz)

**Essential reading:**
Leibniz, *Monadology*, §§ 1-30; 63-70
Leibniz, *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas*
Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §§ 8-15;
Leibniz, *Correspondence with de Volder, Leibniz to de Volder 20 June 1703*
Wilson, Catherine (1989). Leibniz’s Metaphysics: a comparative and historical study, chapter 3

Essential Video
Alonzi, Adam, The Life of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jib3WN5Wpps

Recommended further reading:
Anthony Savile, Routledge Guidebook to Leibniz and the ‘Monadology’, chapters 3 and 4

Lecture 7: Perfection and God (Leibniz)

Essential reading:
Leibniz, Monadology, §§ 31-59 [ 31-39 PSR] [40-52 God] [53-59 BPW]

Recommended further reading:
Voltaire, Candide

Lecture 8: Bodies (Leibniz)

Essential reading:
Leibniz, Monadology, §§ 60-77;
Leibniz, On Body and Force, Against the Cartesians
Leibniz, From the letters to Johann Bernoulli
Leibniz, Notes on Some Comments by Michel Angelo Fardella

Essential Podcast
Were my atoms once your atoms?
https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3cszv5r

Recommended further reading:

Lecture 9: Pre-established harmony (Leibniz)

Essential Reading:
Leibniz, A Specimen of Dynamics, part 2
Leibniz, A Brief Demonstration of a Notable Error of Descartes and others concerning a natural law. In Loemker, L (1959), G.W. Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters (Reidel), 296-298
Leibniz, Monadology; §§ 78-90
Leibniz, Correspondence with Arnauld, Leibniz to Arnauld, 9 October 1687
Leibniz, Postscript of a letter to Basnage de Beauval (1696)

Recommended further reading:
Leibniz, New System of the Nature and Communication of Substances, and of the union of the Soul and Body
Phemister, Pauline (2005). Leibniz and the Natural World: activity, passivity and corporeal substances in Leibniz’s philosophy, chapter 9;

Lecture 10 Rational Freedom and Contingency

Essential reading:
Leibniz, Discourse on Metaphysics, section 13
Leibniz, Monadology, sections 60-62
Leibniz, On Freedom and Possibility;
Leibniz, Remarks on Arnauld’s Letter about My Proposition That the Individual Notion of Each Person Includes Once and for all Everything That Will Ever Happen to Him
Leibniz, On Freedom
Leibniz, *Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas*
Spinoza, *Ethics* 1, propositions 16-33, *Ethics* 2, proposition 7

*Recommended further reading:*


Lecture 11: Overview and concluding debate

*Essential Reading*
Leibniz, *Comments on Spinoza’s Philosophy* (1707?)


Hicks, G. Dawes (1917-18). ‘The “Modes” of Spinoza and the “Monads” of Leibniz’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 18, 329-362

Laerke, Mogens (2017). ‘Leibniz’s Encounter with Spinoza’s Monism, October 1675 to February 1678’. In Della Rocca, Michael, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*

*Further recommended reading:*
Newlands, Sam (2010). ‘The Harmony of Spinoza and Leibniz’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 81(1), 64-104

------

**General Readings and other materials**

**Required media output**

Podcast
Were my atoms once your atoms? [https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3cszv5r](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3cszv5r)

Website
Mapping Spinoza’s Ethics website: http://ethica.bc.edu/

Video
Alonzi, Adam, The Life of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jib3WN5Wpps

**Required (Core Texts: Essential)**


**Recommended (Secondary Literature)**

**Books**
— on Spinoza

— on Leibniz


---

**Further reading (more advanced)**

**Books**

---

**on Spinoza**


---

**on Leibniz**


