The Rationalists: Spinoza and Leibniz
PHIL10086

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Times and Locations
Semester 2
Fridays, 14-10 - 16.00
7 George Square, room S37

Assessment
Mid-term essay (30%) to be submitted by 12 noon on Thursday 1st March 2018. Word limit: 1,500 words

Final essay (70%) to be submitted by 12 noon on Thursday 26th April. Word limit: 3,000 words

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
Lecture 1: Introduction and Substance (Spinoza)

Essential Reading: Spinoza, Ethics I, definitions, axioms and postulates
Lecture 2: Proofs of God’s existence (Spinoza)

*Essential reading:* Spinoza, *Ethics I*, up to Proposition 11


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

*Essential reading:* Spinoza, up to *Ethics I*, proposition 14, *Ethics I*, propositions 26-33


Lecture 4: Mind and Body (Spinoza)

*Essential reading:* Spinoza, *Ethics II*


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


*Recommended 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; *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §§ 8-15; *Correspondence with de Volder*, Leibniz to de Volder 20 June 1703

Lecture 7: Perfection and God (Leibniz)

*Essential reading:* Leibniz, *Monadology*, §§ 31-54


Lecture 8: Bodies (Leibniz)

*Essential reading:* Leibniz, *Monadology*, §§ 55-77; *On Body and Force, Against the Cartesians*


Lecture 9: Pre-established harmony (Leibniz)

*Essential Reading:* Leibniz, *Monadology*, §§ 78-90; *Correspondence with Arnauld, Leibniz to Arnauld, 9 October 1687; New System of the Nature and Communication of Substances, and of the union of the Soul and Body*


Lecture 10 Rational Freedom and Contingency

*Essential reading:* Leibniz, *On Freedom and Possibility*; 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; *On Freedom*


Lecture 11: Overview and exam revision
Readings

Required (Core Texts: Essential)


Recommended (Secondary Literature)

— on Spinoza


— on Leibniz


— general overviews

Further reading (more advanced)
— on Spinoza

— on Leibniz