The Rationalists: Spinoza and Leibniz
PHIL10086
2021-22

Course Organiser
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Seminar Time
Semester 2
Fridays 11:10 - 13:00

Assessment
Mid-term essay (30%) to be submitted by 12 noon on Thursday 3rd March 2022. Word limit: 1,500 words
and
Final essay (70%) to be submitted by 12 noon on Thursday 21st April 2022. Word limit: 3,000 words
and
Participation (5%) assessed by seminar attendance and Learn Discussion Board participation
Or
Coursework Dissertation (100%) to be submitted by Tuesday 19th April 2022 by 12 noon. Word limit: 5,000 words

Delivery
The course will be taught as a ‘flipped classroom’. Each week, you will be required to watch online lectures, read the recommended texts and complete a few associated tasks, all of which we will discuss in seminar at the end of the week.

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.
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/#

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/#

Recommended further reading:
Week 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/#/)

Week 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.
Nadler, Steven (2006). *Spinoza’s *Ethics*: An Introduction* (CUP), chapter 9

*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

Week 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

**Week 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  

**Week 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](https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3cszv5r)

**Recommended further reading**

**Week 9: Pre-established harmony (Leibniz)**

**Essential Reading**
Leibniz, *A Specimen of Dynamics*, part 2
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*

**Week 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, Letter to Coste, On Human Freedom (19 December 1707)
Leibniz, Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas
Spinoza, Ethics 1, propositions 16-33, Ethics 2, proposition 7

Recommended further reading:
Adams, Robert (1993). Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist (OUP), chapter 1

Week 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:

General Readings and other materials

Required media output

Podcast
Were my atoms once your atoms? 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
Further reading (more advanced)

Books

— on Leibniz

— on Spinoza

— on Leibniz
Nachtomy, Ohad (2019). Living Mirrors, Infinity, Unity, and Life in Leibniz’s Philosophy (Oxford: OUP)