

# PHL 402: Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy

University of Toronto, Spring 2020

*Instructor: Dr. Owen Pikkert, [owen.pikkert@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:owen.pikkert@mail.utoronto.ca)*

*Lecture hours: Thursdays 3:00 to 6:00 in BA B025*

*Office hours: Tuesdays 1:00 to 3:00 in JHB 433*

## Course description

This course is a seminar on the philosophy of Leibniz. We will focus particularly on his metaphysics and philosophy of religion. Some of the topics to be discussed include the principle of sufficient reason, the existence of God, the relation of God to the world, necessitarianism, the theory of monads, and Leibnizian ideas in more recent philosophy. Throughout the seminar we will also examine how Leibniz responds to ideas advanced by other early modern philosophers, such as Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza, Locke, Clarke, and Edwards.

## Logistics

*Evaluation:* A presentation at 20%, participation at 20%, a research paper at 30% (due 2 Apr), and a final exam at 30% (date determined by the Registrar's Office for Apr).

*Readings:* All of the readings will be available via Quercus. These include weekly handouts of relevant passages from Leibniz's works, links to secondary sources, and so on.

*Presentation:* Each student will have to lead a discussion on an assigned text for approximately half an hour. The manner of presentation is up to you, though it is probably a good idea to provide material for discussion on the blackboard, in a handout, or in some other format.

*Participation:* Participation is determined by attendance and engagement in class (including engagement with student presentations). This presupposes that you have done the readings and given them some thought. It might be a helpful practice to write down some questions about the readings before class.

*Research paper:* The research paper is to be 12 to 20 pages double-spaced. It may be on any topic on Leibniz's philosophy, though you will need prior permission if you want to write on some topic that was not covered in class. Further instructions will be posted to Quercus.

*Final exam:* The final exam is designed to make sure that you have a broad understanding of the course material. It does not require that you come up with original arguments on the spot.

*Attendance in the first class:* It is departmental policy that students in 400-level courses must attend the first class or explain their absence to the instructor. Otherwise they risk removal from the course.

*Late submissions and extensions:* Late papers will be penalized at 5% for each calendar day, and papers more than one week late will not be accepted. To request an extension, you must submit one of the following types of documentation deemed official by the University: a [Verification of Student Illness or Injury Form](#), a Student Health or Disability Related Certificate, a College Registrar's Letter, or an Accessibility Services Letter.

*Email:* Only use email for short logistical questions that are not already answered on the syllabus. Philosophical and textual questions are best saved for office hours.

*Turnitin.com:* Normally, students will be required to submit their papers to Turnitin.com (now incorporated into Quercus) for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their papers to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com website.

## **Academic integrity**

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, please reach out to me. Note that you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from me or from other [institutional resources](#).

## **Lecture schedule**

9 Jan Introduction and summary of Leibniz's system

Article Mates (1986: chp 2)

16 Jan The principle of sufficient reason

Presentation *On the Elements of Natural Science* (L 277-289)  
Handout The PSR before Leibniz, the grounds of Leibniz's PSR  
Article Look (2011: 201-209)

23 Jan The cosmological and ontological arguments

Presentation	<i>The Confession of Nature against Atheists</i> (L 109-113)
Handout	Other cosmological arguments, Leibniz's cosmological argument, the Descartes-Leibniz ontological argument
Article	Blumenfeld (1995)

30 Jan The rejection of Cartesian divine voluntarism

Presentation	<i>Discourse on Metaphysics</i> §1-9 (L 303-308)
Handout	Descartes' divine voluntarism, Leibniz's arguments against divine voluntarism, the argument from eternal truths
Article	Newlands (2013)

6 Feb The rejection of Spinoza's necessitarianism

Presentation	<i>Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas</i> (L 291-295)
Handout	Spinoza's necessitarianism, Leibniz's two theories of contingency, absolute versus decreed natures
Article	Adams (1994: chp 1)

13 Feb God's choice of the best

Presentation	<i>Two Dialogues on Religion</i> (L 213-220)
Handout	Other views on God's choice of the best, Leibniz's official argument, Leibniz on God's happiness
Article	Rescher (1996: 148-162)

20 Feb Reading week

27 Feb God's non-intervention

Presentation	<i>On Nature Itself</i> (L 498-508)
Handout	Leibniz's arguments against Malebranche's occasionalism, Locke's superaddition, and Newton's planetary theory
Article	Rutherford (1992)

5 Mar The rejection of Cartesian and Newtonian metaphysical physics

Presentation	<i>A Specimen of Discoveries</i> (MP 75-86)
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Handout	Leibniz's arguments against Cartesian metaphysical physics, Leibniz's arguments against Newtonian metaphysical physics
Article	Garber (2009: chp 2)

12 Mar The theory of monads

Presentation	Correspondence with De Volder (AG 171-186)
Readings	<i>New System, etc.</i> (AG 138-149), <i>Monadology</i> (AG 213-225)
Article	Jolley (2019: chp 3)

19 Mar Leibnizian ideas today (1)

Presentation	<i>On free will, On freedom and spontaneity, Conversation about freedom and fate</i> (SLT 91-103)
Guest lecture	Robbie Matyasi, topic TBD
Article	Dasgupta (2016)

26 Mar Leibnizian ideas today (2)

Presentation	<i>Reflections on the Common Concept of Justice</i> (L 561-573)
Articles	Adams (1972), Strawson (2019)

2 Apr Remaining presentations/Envoi, **Research paper due**

Presentation	<i>On the happy life, Happiness, A Dialogue</i> (SLT 166-173)
Presentation	Student-chosen text
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