

PH243-15 The Rationalists

22/23

Department

Philosophy

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Stephen Houlgate

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module will concentrate on the two greatest early modern rationalists, Spinoza and Leibniz, both of whom exercised a significant influence on later philosophers, such as Kant, Hegel and Deleuze. We will devote at least six weeks to studying Spinoza's major work, the Ethics, and then look at some of Leibniz's shorter works and letters (principally the Discourse on Metaphysics and the Correspondence with Arnauld). Among the topics we will cover are: the nature of substance, and the relations between God and the world, between body and mind, and between necessity and freedom. In particular, we will consider (by studying Spinoza) whether God should be understood as a transcendent being or as immanent within the world, and whether the mind and body interact with one another or are in fact expressions of the same thing. We will also consider (by studying Leibniz) whether individual differences between people can be reconciled with an ordered world, and whether we can be said to be free by necessity.

Module aims

At the end of the course students are expected to have understood, and be able to assess, some of Spinoza's and Leibniz's central philosophical contributions. The course is designed as a complement to PH201 History of Modern Philosophy.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

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Weeks 1-2: Spinoza's metaphysics of substance (Ethics, Book 1).

Weeks 3-4: Spinoza on the mind-body relation (Ethics, Book 2)

Week 5: Spinoza on the emotions (Ethics, Books 3 and 4)

Week 7: Spinoza on freedom (Ethics, Book 5)

Week 8: Leibniz's metaphysics (Discourse on Metaphysics)

Week 9: Leibniz on freedom and necessity (Discourse on Metaphysics and Correspondence with Arnauld)

Week 10: Leibniz on the mind-body relation (Correspondence with Arnauld and Specimen Dynamicum)

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Understand and assess critically and intelligently texts and arguments in this field;
- Present ideas and arguments in a clear and rigorous fashion, both orally and in written form;
- Students should have acquired knowledge and understanding of the key issues and disputes in early modern rationalism.

Indicative reading list

Primary Texts

Spinoza:

Benedict de Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader. The Ethics and Other Works*, ed. E. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), or

Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. E. Curley (London: Penguin, 1996) [this includes Curley's translation of the Ethics in the Princeton edition above, but contains no other texts by Spinoza], or Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics and Selected Letters*, trans. S. Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982).

Also helpful will be: B. Spinoza, *The Letters*, trans. S. Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995).

Leibniz :

G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Texts*, eds. R.S. Woolhouse and R. Francks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) [contains Discourse on Metaphysics, a selection from the Correspondence with Arnauld, Monadology and other texts], or

G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, trans. R. Ariew and D. Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989) [also contains Discourse on Metaphysics, Monadology and other texts, but includes a shorter selection from the Correspondence with Arnauld than the OUP collection]

Secondary Texts

A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy, ed. S. Nadler (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, 2008).

The Blackwell Guide to the Modern Philosophers: From Descartes to Nietzsche, ed. S. Emmanuel (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

R.S. Woolhouse, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz: The Concept of Substance in Seventeenth-Century Metaphysics (London: Routledge, 1993).
The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza, ed. D. Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) .
H. Allison, Benedict de Spinoza: An Introduction, revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).
E. Curley, Behind the Geometrical Method. A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
M. Della Rocca, Spinoza (London: Routledge, 2008).
S. Nadler, Spinoza's Ethics. An Introduction (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz, ed. N. Jolley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
S. Brown, Leibniz (Brighton: Harvester, 1984).
N. Jolley, Leibniz (London: Routledge, 2005).

Subject specific skills

Students should be able to express themselves using precise philosophical vocabulary, appreciate what makes some questions about decision making distinctly philosophical ones, and engage independently in philosophical debate.

Transferable skills

The ability to analyse, evaluate, criticise and apply complex information gathered from reading, reflection, reasoning or communication. The ability to effectively manage schedules and deadlines.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	18 sessions of 1 hour (12%)
Seminars	8 sessions of 1 hour (5%)
Private study	124 hours (83%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

No private study requirements defined for this module.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A2

	Weighting	Study time
1,000 word essay	20%	
2,500 word essay	80%	

Feedback on assessment

Essays will be returned with written feedback on Tabula, in line with the Philosophy department's policies and guidance on giving feedback to students.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- UHIA-V1V8 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
 - Year 3 of V1V8 History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
 - Year 4 of V1V8 History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V7 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)
- UPHA-VQ72 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature
 - Year 2 of VQ72 Philosophy and Literature
 - Year 3 of VQ72 Philosophy and Literature

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 4 of UPHA-VL79 BA in Philosophy with Psychology (with Intercalated year)
- UMAA-GV18 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year
 - Year 4 of GV18 Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year
 - Year 4 of GV18 Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V6 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad)