

PHIL 3310-001 – The Philosophy of Leibniz
Christopher P. Noble
T-F 2:30–3:50, ACE 237
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Office Hours: TBD and by appointment

This course is a detailed investigation of the philosophy of G.W. Leibniz. Leibniz sought to reconcile the best ideas of philosophical schools including Platonism, Aristotelianism, Epicureanism, Scholasticism, and the modern “mechanical” philosophy, and his thinking ranges over metaphysics, epistemology, natural philosophy, logic, mathematics, religion, history, and politics. This course reconstructs Leibniz’s philosophy by tracing its development in concrete philosophical controversies on topics including substance, nature, matter, space-time, knowledge, God, and freedom. Further, it examines Leibniz’s interactions with contemporary women philosophers and his interest in the Chinese intellectual traditions to shed light on the wider context of Leibniz’s philosophical activity. Cap of 15 students.

Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

Students will: gain an understanding of Leibniz’s philosophical views and how they relate to wider trends in seventeenth-century intellectual history; hone core philosophical skills such as the abilities to analyze arguments, critically reflect on the nature of reality, and engage in fruitful conversation with others; learn methods for conducting research in the history of philosophy.

Course Evaluation Criteria

Expectations for a “satisfactory” evaluation include regular attendance (no more than 3 absences during the semester), exhibition of an understanding of course material, participation in class discussion, and on-time completion of assignments.

Assignments:

Weekly written reflections posted on Canvas.

Students will be responsible for leading discussion at least once during the semester.

1 short paper (5–6 pages) thoroughly analyzing an argument or textual passage

1 longer research paper (roughly 3,000 words) that investigates one area of Leibniz’s philosophy. Students will develop their projects on the basis of feedback from both peers and the instructor.

Required Textbooks (available at the Bookstore):

Richard T. W. Arthur: *Leibniz* 978-0745653754

Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, eds: *Leibniz: Philosophical Essays* 978-0872200623 (AG)

G. W. Leibniz and Samuel Clarke: *Correspondence* 978-0872205246 (LC)

G. W. Leibniz: *Writings on China* 978-0812692518 (LWC)

Disability Services:

New College of Florida is committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its student body. Students are welcome to privately discuss any concerns related to barriers to both fully participating and learning in this course. I highly encourage students with accommodations to meet with me as soon as possible.

If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, you may contact the office of Student Disability Services (SDS) in order to request official accommodation(s). Students may contact SDS in-person (HCL3), at 941-487-4496 OR disabilityservices@ncf.edu. Additional information regarding SDS can be accessed here: <https://www.ncf.edu/student-disability-services/>

Academic Dishonesty Policy:

Students are expected to be familiar with the college's academic dishonesty policy, as described in the General Catalog. Any violation of this policy may result in academic sanctions, up to and including dismissal from the college.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments (Subject to Change):

Tuesday 8/27 – Introduction, Aristotle's Four Causes (distributed in class)

Friday 8/30 Selections from Plato, Aristotle *Physics* 2, Matter/Form (posted on Canvas)

Tuesday 9/3 Selections from Descartes and Spinoza (posted on Canvas)

Friday 9/6 *Catholic Demonstrations* (L 109–120, Canvas); *Studies in Physics and the Nature of Body* (L 139–145, Canvas); *Two Sects of Naturalists* (AG 281–284) (posted on Canvas)

Tuesday 9/10 *A New Method for Learning and Teaching Jurisprudence* (L 85–92, Canvas); *Preface to an Edition of Nizolius* (L 121–131, Canvas)

Friday 9/13 *Elements of Natural Law* (L 131–138, Canvas); Letter to Magnus Wedderkopf (L 146–147, Canvas); *The Other's Place* (AC 163–166, Canvas)

Tuesday 9/17 *Introduction to a Secret Encyclopedia* (AC 219–224, Canvas); *Preface to a Universal Characteristic* (AG 5–10); *Samples of the Numerical Characteristic* (AG 10–18)

Friday 9/20 *Meditations on Truth, Knowledge, and Ideas* (AG 23–27); *On Contingency* (AG 28–30); *Primary Truths* (AG 30–34)

Tuesday 9/24 *Discourse on Metaphysics* ¶1–16 (AG 35–49); Arthur Chapter 5

Friday 9/27 *Discourse on Metaphysics* ¶17–37 (AG 49–68)

Tuesday 10/1 Selections from the Correspondence with Antoine Arnauld (AG 69–90)

Friday 10/4 *A Specimen of Dynamics* (AG 117–138)

Tuesday 10/8 *A New System of the Nature and Communication of Substances* (AG 138–145);
Friday 10/11 *On the Ultimate Origination of Things* (AG 149–155); *De Ipsa Natura* (155–167)
Midterm Paper Due on Canvas at 5PM

Fall Break

Tuesday 10/22 Preface to the *Novissima Sinica* (LWC 45–59); *On the Civil Cult of Confucius* (LWC 60–65)
Friday 10/25 *Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion* (LWC 66–75); *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese I* (LWC 74–97)

Tuesday 10/29 *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese II–IV* (LWC 97–138)
Friday 11/1 Letter to Countess Elizabeth (AG 235–240); Correspondence with Electress Sophie and Sophie Charlotte (AG 186–192; Canvas)

Tuesday 11/5 Correspondence with Damaris Masham (WPEM 77–95, Canvas)
Friday 11/8 Leibniz on John Locke (AG 284–306)

Tuesday 11/12 *Theodicy* (TBD)
Friday 11/15 *Theodicy* (TBD)

Tuesday 11/19 *Theodicy* (TBD)
Friday 11/22 *Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason* (AG 206–213)

Tuesday 11/26 *The Principles of Philosophy, or, the Monadology* (AG 213–225)
Friday 11/29 – No Class/Thanksgiving Break

Tuesday 12/3 Leibniz/Clarke Correspondence: First Four Exchanges (LC 1–35)
Friday 12/6 Leibniz/Clarke Correspondence: Leibniz’s Fifth Letter (LC 36–66), optional Clarke’s Fifth Response (LC 66–87)

Final Paper due Friday 12/13 at 5 PM

Resources/Further Reading

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Features thorough entries with bibliographies on many of the philosophers and general philosophical themes that we will study in this course: <http://plato.stanford.edu>

Rules for Studying the History of Philosophy:

Guidelines on how to read/conduct research in the history of philosophy from Peter Adamson, host of the History of Philosophy Podcast (“History of Philosophy without any Gaps”): <https://historyofphilosophy.net/rules-history-philosophy>

Philpapers.org:

Database of published articles in philosophy.

Leibnizian Resources:

Markku Roinila's page on all things Leibniz:

<https://www.mv.helsinki.fi/home/mroinila/>

Leibniz Translations.com

Page featuring translations of Leibniz texts by Lloyd Strickland.

<http://www.leibniz-translations.com/index2.php>