

Philosophy 203

History of Modern Western Philosophy



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Class 9 - Introduction to Leibniz

Leibniz, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza

- ▶ All four philosophers provide responses to Descartes, who attempted to accommodate the new science and the orthodox, theological world view.
- ▶ Hobbes and Spinoza were eager to dismiss the religious orthodoxy.
- ▶ Leibniz rejects:
 - ▶ Hobbes's materialism
 - ▶ atheism (or at least naturalism) of both Hobbes and Spinoza
 - ▶ the view, found in both Hobbes and Spinoza, that everything is necessary

On Bodies

- Leibniz also rejects Descartes's account of bodies
- Descartes had argued that bodies are essentially extended, unthinking, divisible, individual substances.
 - Leibniz rejects infinite divisibility.
- He argues that the claim that bodies are unthinking leads to the impossibility of thought.
 - He believes that the ultimate constituents of the material world have within them a source of action.
 - For Leibniz, the fundamental components of the world are not inert divisible matter, but active, mind-like substances.
- “Each portion of matter can be conceived as a garden full of plants, and as a pond full of fish. But each branch of a plant, each limb of an animal, each drop of its humors, is still another such garden or pond” (M67, AW 281b).

Rehabilitating final causes

- According to Aristotle, there are four different kinds of causes:
 - C1. Efficient cause: the source of a change (basically our contemporary notion)
 - C2. Final cause: the goal, or telos, of an object or event
 - C3. Material cause: the constituent matter of the object
 - C4. Formal cause: what it is to be an object
- Galilean physics denigrated C2-C4, focusing on C1 alone.
- Leibniz, seeking a return to an admittedly anthropocentric view of God's role in the universe, looked to rehabilitate the notion of a final cause.
- Bodies act according to laws of efficient causation, but souls act, like God, according to laws of final causes.
- “It would be best to join together both considerations, for if it is permitted to use a humble comparison, I recognize and praise the skill of a worker not only by showing his designs in making the parts of his machine, but also by explaining the instruments he used in making each part, especially when these instruments are simple and cleverly contrived. *And God is skillful enough artisan* to produce a machine which is a thousand times more ingenious than that of our body, while using only some very simple fluids...” (D22, AW 237b-238a)

Our approach

The *Monadology* and the *Discourse on Metaphysics*.

1. Monads;
2. The Complete-World View of Substance;
3. The Mind/Body Distinction;
4. Theodicy; and
5. Freedom and Harmony.

Then, the controversy with Newton over space and time.