

Course offering, Spring Semester 2018, American University of Beirut
PHILOSOPHY 310: Special Topics: Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics*
Wednesday, 11:00 – 1:30 Fisk 141 (Philosophy Library)
Instructor: Dr. Chris Johns

This course will consist of a close examination of 17th Century philosopher Gottfried Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics*, a rather beguiling work due to its comprehensiveness and brevity. The work will introduce us to a number of key metaphysical topics, of both 17th century and contemporary interest: God, free will, immortality, morality, evil, the nature of matter, soul/mind, and their relation, the nature of "substance," of knowledge, of contingency, necessity, and the "best possible world." The argument is that all these positions are *supposed* to be consistent with each other—to form a systematic and comprehensive account of reality.

Class time will be spent reading and discussing the text and context of the *Discourse*. Outside class time you are expected to fill yourself with supplementary readings.

Student will be assessed on the basis of:

Class participation	10%	Show up and talk
Reading journal	20%	One single-spaced page per week.
Mid-term paper	30%	2.5 single-spaced pages on choice topic
Final paper	40%	8 single-spaced pages, incorporating supplementary readings and secondary sources

Complete description of the requirements and assessment criteria will be provided on Moodle.

The primary text will be:

G.W. Leibniz Philosophical Essays, ed., & trans., Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Hackett Publishing Company, 1989. (Available at AUB Bookstore) (Abbreviated 'AG')

Supplementary readings will roughly follow the sections of the *Discourse*.

G. W. Leibniz: *Discourse on Metaphysics and related writings*, ed., & trans., R. Niall D. Martin and Stuart Brown, Manchester University Press, 1988 (Abbreviated MB. I will provide pdf).

Recommended (or required) readings from AG will be:

On Freedom and Possibility
Primary Truths
Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas
*Discourse on Metaphysics (required)
*From the Correspondence with Arnauld (required)
Dialogue on Human Freedom and the Origin of Evil
A Specimen of Dynamics
New System of Nature

On Nature Itself
On the Ultimate Origination of Things
Principles of Nature and Grace
On the Possibility of God
Letters to DeVolder (Selections)
Monadology (don't read this until after you have finished the course)

Even more additional supplemental readings (provided by pdf)

Meditations on the Common Concept of Justice
Excerpts from Plato's *Phaedo*
Causation in Aristotle
Locke on Innate Ideas

Secondary sources (possible)

Leibniz and the *vis viva* controversy
Force and the Nature of Body in *Discourse 17 & 18*
Leibniz on the Contingency of the World (Rescher)
Substantial Forms as Causes: From Suarez to Descartes
Bayle's Dictionary: Buridan's Ass

And more, including those you may find for your research.

See next page for course schedule

COURSE SCHEDULE

The schedule will help us stay on schedule; however, the pace of the course will be dictated by our understanding. However, it will not be possible to understand all that we need to, or even much of it. So, just keep reading. We will make adjustments along the way. Keep in mind:

- Each section of the *Discourse* is usually no more than one page.
- Each of the supplementary readings in MB average 2-3 pages.
- The additional supplements (AG + pdfs) are longer: anywhere from 5 pages up to 20.
 - Bear in mind the occasional journal articles, TBA.

Week	Class reading	Supplementary readings (MB)	Additional (AG) + pdfs
1	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 1 – 2	Leibniz' announcement. Summary of the <i>Discourse</i> . On Descartes' Conception of God.	Meditation on the Common Concept of Justice.
2	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 3 – 4		
3	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 5 – 7	From 'Principles of Nature & Grace' From 'Theodicy'	
4	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 8 – 10	On the Distinction between God and His Creatures. On the unity of substance	On Nature Itself
5	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 11 – 13		
6	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 14 – 16	On the nature of 'expression'	
7	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 17 – 19	Two sects of Naturalists	Handouts on §17 (Mechanical philosophy) A Specimen of Dynamics
8	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 20 – 22	Excerpt from Plato's <i>Phaedo</i> The Importance of Final Causes	
9	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 23 – 25		Meditation on Knowledge, Truth, Ideas
10	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 26 – 28	On Malebranche's System	
11	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 29 – 30	Divine Foreknowledge and human free will	Dialogue on Human Freedom and the Origin of Evil
12	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 31 – 33	Accommodation of theology & physics	
13	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 34 – 35	The hypothesis of 'concomitance' Descartes' account of immortality	Primary Truths
14	<i>Discourse</i> , §§ 36– 37 (end)	Personal identity Other explanations	Correspondence with Arnauld (selections)
15	<i>Wrap up</i>		