

Reading Guide #3

G.W. Leibniz, *Monadology* and *Discourse on Metaphysics*

Isaac Newton, from *Principia* and from *Optics*

G.W. Leibniz, from *Letters to Clarke*

These questions are provided to assist you in your reading. I encourage you first to read the material through, then go back to answer the questions. You are not expected to hand in written answers. You are expected to have responses ready for class discussion. Page numbers refer to the Ariew and Watkins collection.

Leibniz covers much of the same material, with different emphases, in the *Monadology* and the *Discourse*. Thus, some of the questions have significant overlap. In the end, you should try to consolidate your answers, using material from both selections where appropriate. Also, some of the secondary readings on the syllabus will be helpful: “Letters to Arnauld” on minds, bodies, and freedom; “Primary Truths” on the Principle of Contradiction; and “New System of Nature” on parallelism.

*Monadology* (AW 275-283)

1. What are monads? How do we know that there are monads?
2. How do monads differ from composites?
3. Are monads all alike? Explain.
4. Distinguish perception from apperception. How does Leibniz criticize Descartes regarding perception?
5. How does Leibniz argue that machines (bodies) can not think?
6. How are human souls (minds) distinct from monads?
7. “The present is pregnant with the future” (§22). Explain.
8. What distinguishes humans from animals?
9. Describe Leibniz’s two basic principles of philosophy. (The brief selection *Primary Truths*, AW 265-268) will be helpful.)
10. How does reason depend on axioms (and postulates)? Characterize these primitive principles.
11. What is God? How, according to Leibniz, do we know there is a God?
12. Distinguish the a priori argument for God’s existence from the a posteriori argument.
13. Do monads interact? Explain.
14. How does Leibniz argue that this is the best of all possible worlds?
15. How does God maximize variety and order?
16. “Communication extends to any distance whatsoever” (§61). Explain.
17. Why, if each monad represents the entire universe, are we not omniscient?
18. How are living bodies distinct from machines?
19. What, for Leibniz, is what we ordinarily call death?
20. Describe Leibniz’s account of the relation between mind (soul) and body.
21. How does Leibniz’s view of the mind (soul)/body distinction differ from that of Descartes? How does Leibniz account for the difference?
22. How do rational souls (minds) differ from ordinary souls?

*Discourse on Metaphysics* (AW 224-247)

1. How does Leibniz define 'perfections'?
2. Contrast Leibniz's views on whether goodness and the eternal truths are products of God's will with those of Spinoza and Descartes. Why does Leibniz reject the claim that God makes the eternal truths true?
3. How does Leibniz argue that this is the most perfect world? Characterize this perfection.
4. What conditions are required for true predication? (Consider explicit and virtual containment.)
5. What is an individual substance? What makes the notion of a substance complete?
6. How does each substance express the whole universe? Describe the so-called paradoxes that follow.
7. How is the universe multiplied many times over?
8. What are substantial forms? Who denies their existence?
9. How do Leibniz's claims about monads undermine the possibility of human freedom? How does the distinction between certainty and necessity help him account for free will? Consider the Caesar example.
10. How does Leibniz account for error?
11. "Nothing can happen to us except thoughts and perceptions" (§14). Explain.
12. How does Leibniz account for what we ordinarily call change, or interaction?
13. Distinguish force from quantity of motion. How is this distinction relevant to Leibniz's philosophy, and his differences with Descartes?
14. Do we see because we happen to have eyes, or were eyes made for seeing? Explain.
15. What are final and efficient causes? How does Leibniz try to rectify them?
16. How does Leibniz criticize the ontological argument for God's existence? What does he claim it shows?
17. Distinguish confused, clear, distinct, adequate, and intuitive knowledge.
18. How does Leibniz assess Plato's doctrine of recollection?
19. Do we acquire knowledge from our senses? Explain.
20. Explain Leibniz's doctrine of the relation between mind and body.

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Newton selections (AW 284-293)

1. How does absolute time differ from relative time? Characterize each.
2. How does absolute space differ from relative space? Characterize each. What is the difference between place and space?
3. What is the relation between absolute space and absolute motion?
4. How do fluctuations in the solar day support Newton's argument for absolute time?
5. How do we measure space and time? Does this method support the relationalist or the absolutist?
6. How do basic facts about space and time conflict with Cartesian accounts of motion as relative to surrounding bodies?
7. Describe Newton's bucket experiment. What does it show, and how?
8. Is it possible to determine true motion from our observations? Explain, using Newton's example of the spinning globes.
9. How does Newton argue for the existence of God?
10. Why does Newton call gravity a hypothesis? What does he believe is the status of hypotheses?
11. How, according to Newton, do we arrive at general laws?

Leibniz, from *Letters to Clarke* (AW 294-303)

1. For Leibniz, what does it mean that space and time are “merely relative” (LIII.4)?
2. How does Leibniz use the principle of sufficient reason to object to absolute space? How does he use that principle to object to absolute time?
3. How, according to Leibniz, is gravity miraculous?
4. Is absolute space a substance or an attribute? Explain.
5. “Two states indiscernible from each other are the same state” (LIV.13). Explain.
6. According to Leibniz, is the universe finite or infinite?
7. How does Leibniz argue that the universe is a plenum?