

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy



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Class 9 - Leibniz's *Monadology*
On Monads and Theodicy

Leibniz, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza

- ▶ Everything is a response 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. Theodicy;
3. The mind/body distinction;
4. The Complete-World View of Substance; and
5. Freedom and Harmony.

Then, the controversy with Newton over space and time.

On to Monads

Substance

- Review
 - For Descartes, there are two kinds of substance, each with its own essential trait: mind (consciousness) and body (extension).
 - For Hobbes, there are only bodies.
 - For Spinoza, there is only one instance of a substance: God, or Nature.
- Leibniz accepts multiplicity.
- He adopts Spinoza's views on:
 - the ubiquity of mind; and
 - and that substance has to have an internal agency.
- Substance is an active unity, always perceiving, and which can will.

There must be simple substances

- *Discourse*: substantial forms, a soul or a haecceity, the thing which underlies or collects all its properties.
- *Monadology*: argument for simple substances on the basis of the obvious plurality of things.
 - ▶ Since there are composites, these must be made of parts.
 - ▶ A Cartesian piece of extended matter can be divided into further pieces of matter.
 - ▶ But, if there are no simple parts, there can be no composites.
 - ▶ Thus, there must be some basic elements, which he calls monads.
- The rainbow analogy
 - ▶ We think of bodies as coherent wholes, but they are really just accidental unities of real substances.

Monads and atoms

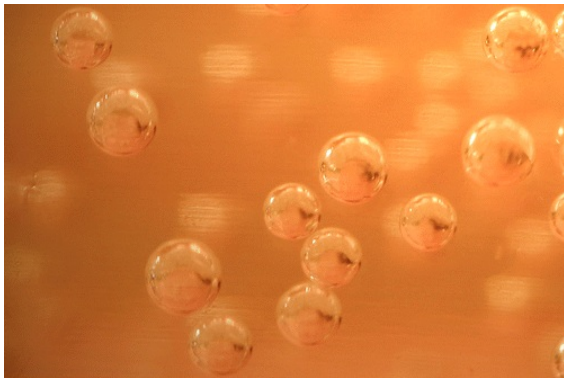
- Is Leibniz Democritus, or Gassendi?
- No! The difference between atoms and monads is striking.
 - ▶ For the atomists, the simple objects are essentially undifferentiable; they are all alike.
 - ▶ Leibniz denies the similarity of atoms.
- Two arguments against atomism
 - ▶ Each monad is an active, rather than passive, unity.
 - ▶ There can be no identical objects, on the basis of his principle of sufficient reason.

Machines can not think

- “*Perception, and what depends on it, is inexplicable in terms of mechanical reasons, that is, through shapes and motions*” (M17, 276b).
- Leibniz considers walking inside the mechanical parts of a thinking substance, like a brain.
- All we would see would be moving parts.
- We would see no memory, no thought.
- The Chinese Nation: we can, theoretically, create an artifact that looks and functions just like us with an artificial processing system made out of the people in China.
- Leibniz imagines just this sort of case, and concludes that such contraptions could not support thought.
- “When inspecting its interior, we will only find parts that push one another, and we will never find anything to explain a perception” (M17, AW 276b).

Monads are entelechies

- There must be some essentially active, essentially perceptive, component to the basic elements of the world.
- Perceptions of monads will distinguish them, thus denying the atomist's uniformity.



Leibniz's second argument against atomism

- There can be no two objects that do not have some internal difference: the identity of indiscernibles (II).
 - ▶ “It is also necessary that each monad be different from each other. For there are never two beings in nature that are perfectly alike, two beings in which it is not possible to discover an internal difference, that is, one founded on an intrinsic denomination” (M9, AW 276a).
- It follows, Leibniz argues, from his two great principles, contradiction and sufficient reason.

Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR)

- PSR states that nothing is without a reason.
- Alternatively, there is no effect without a cause.
- These reasons can be obscure, hidden from our view.
- PSR further follows from a more substantial thesis, his conception of truth as a claim in which a predicate is contained in a subject.
- We'll begin with Leibniz's theory of truth on Thursday.