

THE MCANULTY COLLEGE & GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

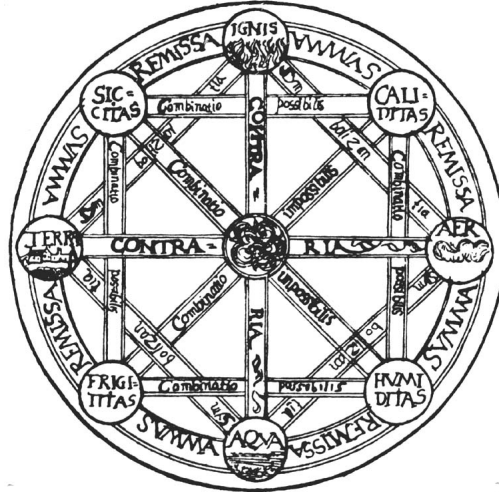
FALL 2019

LEIBNIZ

PHIL 605-01

Wednesdays 5:00-7:40 pm

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*Leibniz's incomparable insight... has been vindicated not only against Descartes but against everyone who philosophized before him: consciousness is a mere accidens of representation and not its necessary and essential attribute; in other words, what we call consciousness constitutes only one state of our spiritual and psychic world (and perhaps a pathological state)...*

– Friedrich Nietzsche

*Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock by which thinking crystallizes into a monad...*

– Walter Benjamin

Metaphysician, mathematician, physicist, biologist, political theorist, historian, rhetorician, inventor, cryptographer, librarian, and organizer of ridiculous public spectacle, G.W. Leibniz was one of the final and most influential of the early modern polymaths. While his reception in the analytical tradition is widely known (especially through Russell and Whitehead), his work has also been an important touchstone for Husserl, Heidegger, Serres, Deleuze, and many others. This seminar will engage in close reading of Leibniz's texts, ranging from his early dissertation on the art of combinations, through development of a philosophical concept of the 'differential' in his writings on 'the twin labyrinths' of freedom and of the composition of the continuum, to the mature metaphysics of his "Monadology" and "Principles of Nature and Grace." The seminar as a whole be organized around Leibniz's complementary concepts of the singular and the multiple, formulated through figures of ontological reflection (substances as perspectively individuated mirrors of the universe) and monadic inclusion (substances as self-enclosed expressions of force and drive, with volcanic atolls of conscious apperception appearing atop vast oceans of unconscious micro-perception). One locus for discussion under this rubric will be Leibniz's role in the transition from the 'mechanical' model of tactile impact that dominated 17th century natural philosophy to the 'dynamic' model of force-relations, responsiveness, and affectivity. Along with a transformation of physical and metaphysical accounts of 'extension' and 'matter in motion' and the development of a new model for describing infinitely complex variation within finite and determinate periods (the differential calculus), we will discuss the way this transition provokes Leibniz to develop an account of the living body as an 'organic natural machine', to be distinguished from the 'artificial machines' of human industry.

Requirements: seminar paper, work-in-progress presentation, protocol, active participation.

*This course fulfills the modern historical distribution requirement.*