

**PHIL 451W/854: The Principle of Sufficient Reason**

Spring 2018  
Tues., 4:30 – 8:20  
RCB 5118

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**Course Description**

The Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR) states that for every fact, F, there is (or must be) a sufficient reason why F, rather than  $\sim F$ , is true. Philosophers have appealed, sometimes implicitly, to versions of the PSR for centuries, but it was only in the early modern period that philosophers explicitly formulated and adopted the PSR as a guiding principle of metaphysical theorizing. After falling out of favor in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the PSR has seen a resurgence of interest among contemporary metaphysicians. The aim of this course is to consider the PSR in both historical and contemporary contexts: to see not only the way in which the PSR heavily influenced the course of the history of philosophy, but also to consider it and its consequences in their own right.

We shall begin by considering how historical figures understood the PSR and the (often controversial) metaphysical implications they took the PSR to have. We shall focus especially on works by Spinoza, Leibniz and Kant. Specifically, we shall consider the relationship between the PSR and a number of related philosophical questions that animated the rationalists: determinism, necessitarianism, contingency, the existence of God, human freedom, truth, modality, space, and the distinction between constitutive and regulative principles.

We shall then turn to the PSR as it is treated in a contemporary setting. We shall consider contemporary treatments of some old questions: whether there is a compelling argument for the PSR, whether the PSR entails necessitarianism, whether God exists, etc. But we shall also consider the relationship between the PSR and other pressing issues in contemporary metaphysics, especially including the nature of grounding and fundamentality. We shall read works by Della Rocca, Dasgupta, Van Inwagen, Fine, Pruss, Rowe, Amijee and others.

**Required Texts**

- Spinoza, *Ethics*. Hackett. ISBN: 9780872201309.
- Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays* (Ariew and Garber, eds.) ISBN: 9780872200623.
- Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Guyer and Wood (eds.). Cambridge UP. ISBN: 978-0521657297
- All other readings will be made available on Canvas or through the library website.

## Required Assignments

### All enrolled students:

- Six response papers (300 – 600 words) over the course of the semester. Response papers are due *via* email to *both* instructors 24 hours before the course meets for the week in which the assignment is to be counted. Only one response paper may be counted per week. Topics will not be assigned; response papers must critically engage with some issue that arises in the assigned reading for that week. (25%)

### Undergraduate students:

#### OPTION A

- One final term paper (4000 words minimum), revised from a required earlier draft. (75%) **Draft due: April 4<sup>th</sup>; Final paper due: April 18<sup>th</sup>.**

#### OPTION B

- One paper (1500 words minimum) due roughly halfway through the term. (25%) **Paper due: February 22<sup>nd</sup>, in class.**

**and**

- One paper (2500 words minimum) due at the end of the term and revised from a required earlier draft. (50%) **Draft due: April 4<sup>th</sup>; Final paper due: April 18<sup>th</sup>.**

### Graduate students:

- One final term paper (4500 words minimum), revised from a required earlier draft. (75%)

## Policies

**Academic Dishonesty:** Plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, use of another's material, or any other form of cheating will not be tolerated. It is wrong and it undermines your education, your peers' educations and Simon Fraser University. It is your responsibility to be aware of the SFU Academic Honesty and Student Conduct Policies. You may find them at: <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/student.html>. Ignorance of these policies is not an excuse for failing to abide by them.

### Completion of Course Requirements:

- Topics for all papers, including response papers, are up to the student. Topics for all final papers must be approved by an instructor during a scheduled meeting.
- Undergraduate students will automatically choose Option A unless a short paper is turned in by February 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- The deadline for drafts and final papers for undergraduates is firm. Exceptions will be made only in the case of genuine emergency (e.g., documented medical issues, family emergencies, etc.).

- Graduate students will, in consultation with the instructor, choose their own deadline for the final paper, which can be any day between the end of the term (**April 9<sup>th</sup>**) and the first day of summer term (**May 7<sup>th</sup>**). Once that date is agreed upon, it is firm: no extension will be given except in the case of genuine emergency. Drafts of final papers are automatically due a minimum of two weeks prior to the agreed-upon deadline, and so no later than **April 23<sup>rd</sup>**.
- Response papers may not be turned in late; response papers turned in after the deadline will be disregarded. Term papers will be docked one partial letter grade per day late.

### Tentative Schedule and Readings

\* = Recommended reading. Instructors may include recommended material in class discussion.

- Spinoza and the PSR: Monism and Necessitarianism
  - *Ethics*, Part I.
  - Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, Part I, §51 – 64 [Canvas]
  - Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, ch. 2. [Canvas]
  - \*Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, ch. 1 [Canvas]
  - \*[Lin, Martin and Yitzhak Melamed, “The Principle of Sufficient Reason.” \*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\*.](#)
  - \*[Garber, “Superheroes in the History of Philosophy: Spinoza, Super-Rationalist.”](#)
  - \*[Della Rocca, “Interpreting Spinoza: The Real is the Rational.”](#)
- Spinoza and the PSR: Mind and Body
  - *Ethics*, Part II.
  - Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, ch. 3. [Canvas]
  - [Lin, “The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza.”](#)
- Leibniz and the PSR: Substance, Truth and Identity
  - Leibniz, “Primary Truths.” AG, 30 – 35.
  - Leibniz, “Discourse on Metaphysics,” §1 – 13. AG, 35 – 46.
  - Leibniz, “The Principles of Philosophy, or the Monadology.” AG, 213 – 225.
  - Leibniz, “From the Letters to Clarke.” AG, 320 – 346.
  - Della Rocca, “Violations of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (in Leibniz and Spinoza).” [Canvas]
  - \*[Mercer and Sleight, “Metaphysics: the Early Period to the Discourse.” \*The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz\*.](#)
  - \*Look, Brandon, “Grounding the Principle of Sufficient Reason: Leibnizian Rationalism Versus the Humean Challenge. [Canvas]
- Leibniz and the PSR: Contingency and the Best of All Possible Worlds
  - Leibniz, “On Freedom and Possibility.” AG, 19 – 23.
  - Leibniz, “On Contingency.” AG, 28 – 30.
  - Leibniz, “On Freedom.” AG, 94 – 98.
  - Leibniz, “The Source of Contingent Truths.” AG, 98 – 101.
  - Leibniz, Letters to Arnauld. AG, 69 – 77.
  - Adams, *Determinist, Theist Idealist*, ch. 1. [Canvas]
  - [Lin, “Rationalism and Necessitarianism.”](#)
  - \*Adams, *Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, chs. 2 – 3. [Canvas]

- \*Leibniz, *Theodicy*, §1 – 54 & §377 – 417 [Canvas]
- Kant and the PSR: God and Modality
  - Kant, “New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition.” [Canvas]
  - Kant, “The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God,” §1. [Canvas]
  - [Stang, Nicholas. “Kant Argument That Existence is Not a Determination.”](#)
  - \*[Abaci, “Kant’s Only Possible Argument and Chignell’s Real Harmony.”](#)
- Kant and the PSR: Synthetic Judgment and Noumenal Ignorance
  - Kant, “Introduction,” *Critique of Pure Reason* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).
  - Kant, “The Transcendental Aesthetic,” *Critique of Pure Reason* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).
  - [Hogan, “Metaphysical Motives of Kant’s Analytic-Synthetic Distinction.”](#)
  - [Chignell, “Modal Motivations for Noumenal Ignorance: Knowledge, Cognition and Coherence.”](#)
  - \*[Hogan, “How to Know Unknowable Things in Themselves.”](#)
- Kant and the PSR: Causality, Freedom and Reason
  - Kant, “The Analogies of Pure Reason,” *Critique of Pure Reason* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).
  - Kant, “The Transcendental Dialectic” *Critique of Pure Reason* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (selections).
  - Watkins, Eric. *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*, ch. 3 (selection)
  - Wood, “Kant’s Compatibilism”
  - \*Watkins, Eric. *Kant and the Metaphysics of Causality*, ch. 5 (selection)
  - \*Longuenesse, Beatrice. “Kant’s Deconstruction of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.” *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 9.1 (2001): 67 – 87. [Canvas]
- Contemporary Arguments for the PSR I
  - [Michael Della Rocca, ‘PSR’](#)
  - Amijee, Fatema, “Why Metaphysical Inquiry Needs the Principle of Sufficient Reason.” [Canvas]
  - \*[Shieva Kleinschmidt, ‘Reasoning Without the Principle of Sufficient Reason’](#)
- Contemporary Arguments for the PSR II
  - Alexander Pruss, chapters 11 and 14 from *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Re- assessment* [Canvas]
  - [Jacob Ross, ‘The Principle of Sufficient Reason and the Grand Inexplicable’](#)
- Necessitarianism I
  - Peter van Inwagen, ‘Necessary Being: The Cosmological Argument’ from *Metaphysics* [Canvas]
  - [William Rowe, ‘Circular Explanations, Cosmological Arguments, and Sufficient Reasons’](#)
- Necessitarianism II
  - [Samuel Levey, ‘The Paradox of Sufficient Reason’](#)

- [Benjamin Schnieder and Alex Steinberg, 'Without Reason?'](#)
- The PSR and Grounding I
  - Kit Fine, 'Guide to Ground'
  - [Shamik Dasgupta, 'Metaphysical Rationalism'](#)
- The PSR and Grounding II
  - [Ricki Bliss, 'Viciousness and Circles of Ground'](#)
  - [Scott Dixon, 'What is the Well-Foundedness of Grounding?'](#)
  - [Gabriel Rabin and Brian Rabern, 'Well-founding Grounding Grounding'](#)