

Special Topics in the History of Philosophy: Leibniz and Kant
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The philosopher, polymath and universal genius Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) exerted a seminal influence on eighteenth century German philosophy, and on the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant in particular (1724–1804). The Sage of Königsberg harshly criticizes many of Leibniz’s most famous doctrines, including his Principle of Sufficient Reason (‘obviously false if applied to entities’), System of Pre-established Harmony (‘the strangest figment ever excogitated by philosophy’), and Monadology (‘a kind of enchanted world’). On the other hand, Kant writes that his own critical system was, “by no means intended to work against the Leibniz-Wolffian philosophy ... but rather to lead this philosophy through a roundabout route... to the same end, but only through the combination of theoretical philosophy with the practical” (11:186). We will seek to understand this fateful and ambivalent relationship by carefully examining how Leibniz—as well as both followers and critics including C. Wolff, A. Baumgarten and C.A. Crusius—served as inspiration and foil for Kant’s thought. Topics discussed will include Leibniz’s Principle of Sufficient Reason and his doctrine that all truth is analytic; Leibniz’s famous Pre-established Harmony and his theory of nature and grace; Leibniz’s account of contingency and its reception in Kant; Leibniz’s and Kant’s theories of space & time, and of the relation between mathematics and the material world. A general aim is to gauge the influence of substantive metaphysical disputes on Kant’s ‘Copernican revolution’ in philosophy, one of whose main targets is Leibniz’s enthusiastic practice of ‘transcendent’ metaphysics.