

Matthew Wurst

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EDUCATION

University of Toronto

Ph.D. in Philosophy, September 2019

Free Will in Malebranche and Leibniz

Committee: Marleen Rozemond (supervisor), Donald Ainslie, Martin Pickavé, and Elmar Kremer, Michael Rosenthal (internal reader), C. P. Ragland (external reader)

Texas A&M University

B.A. in Philosophy and English Literature, *magna cum laude*, 2013

AREA OF SPECIALIZATION

Early modern philosophy

AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Bioethics, medieval philosophy, philosophy of religion

PAPERS

“Physical Necessity and Leibniz’s Private Miracle of Freedom” (under review)

“Striving Possibles and Free Creation in Leibniz” (under review)

PRESENTATIONS

2019

“Why It’s Contingent Leibniz’s God Chooses the Best” (refereed)

NYC Workshop in Early Modern Philosophy: Freedom and Evil, Fordham University

2018

“Malebranche on the Ability to Do Otherwise” (refereed)

Berlin-Hamburg Workshop in Early Modern Philosophy, Humboldt University

“Leibniz on Physical Necessity” (refereed)

Canadian Philosophical Association Congress

2017

“Leibniz on Physical Necessity (refereed)
South Central Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy, Hendrix College

“Leibniz on Physical Necessity” (invited)
History of Modern Philosophy Research Group, University of Toronto

“Leibniz on Creation and the Doctrine of Striving Possibles” (refereed)
Atlantic Canada Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy, Dalhousie University

“Leibniz on Creation and the Doctrine of Striving Possibles” (invited)
Berlin-Groningen-Harvard-Toronto Workshop on Medieval and Early Modern
Philosophy, University of Groningen

2016

“Malebranche on Divine Freedom” (invited)
History of Modern Philosophy Research Group, University of Toronto

AWARDS

Doctoral Completion Award (2019-2020)
Donald Ainslie Graduate Scholarship (2015-16) and (2013-14)
Balzan Travel Award (2018)
Phi Beta Kappa (2011)

TEACHING

As sole instructor

At University of Toronto
Death and Dying (Summer 2018 and Summer 2019)
Bioethics (Summer 2017)

As tutorial instructor

At University of Toronto
Intro philosophy (2018-9)
Medieval philosophy (2016-7)
Early modern philosophy (2014-5)
Bioethics (2015)

LANGUAGES

Passed University of Toronto reading test
Latin (intermediate reading)
French (intermediate reading)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Humanist and Scholastic Roots of Early Modern Philosophy Masterclass, led by Lodi Nauta, March 2018, Rome.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

My dissertation explores two aspects of freedom in Malebranche and Leibniz. The first concerns the freedom with which God creates. Malebranche and Leibniz both think that God sees reasons to create a world, and that God freely decides to create a world in light of those reasons. They disagree, though, both about what the reasons are for why God creates and the sense in which God is free in creating. The second issue concerns their agreement that God and humans are free in the same sense, a controversial position in the period.

I argue that Malebranche's God creates a world with the purpose of glorifying himself. Furthermore, Malebranche's God's decision to create instead of doing nothing whatsoever involves the indifference of equilibrium. This is because God glorifies himself whether he creates a world or not. An implication of this position is that there is no contrastive explanation for why God creates a world instead of doing nothing whatsoever. A notoriously difficult question for Malebranche is how his account of human freedom is consistent with his commitment to occasionalism. I argue that recognizing that human freedom for Malebranche, too, involves an indifference of equilibrium allows an interpretation of Malebranche's account of freedom that does not undermine his commitment to occasionalism.

A problem for Leibniz is that it is unclear how the existence of the best possible world can be contingent if it is metaphysically necessary that God chooses whatever seems best to him. I deny that it is metaphysically necessary that God chooses whatever seems best to him. Instead, for Leibniz, God's decision to create the best possible world is free and contingent because it is founded on his free decision to set his will to always choose whatever is best. This decision is free because it is formally indemonstrable from God's nature. Recognizing that this decision is free shows how it can be that unactualized possibles strive for existence in their very nature, while also maintaining that the existence of the best set of them is contingent. Finally, I argue that, against what Leibniz's 1686 essay "On Necessary and Contingent Truths" may suggest, Leibniz maintains that there is a univocal sense in which all intelligent agents are free.

REFERENCES

Marleen Rozemond (supervisor)
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