LEIBNIZ ON BEING, UNITY, AND THE SPECIAL COMPOSITION QUESTION

Stephen Puryear
North Carolina State University

Thursday, January 30, 2020, 4:30 p.m.
Withers Hall, Room 331
Map: http://www.ncsu.edu/campus_map/north.htm

All are welcome

Abstract

The Special Composition Question asks: Under what circumstances do two or more things form a composite (van Inwagen 1990)? Many answers have been offered, ranging from the maximally austere (e.g., “under no circumstances”) to the maximally promiscuous (e.g., “under any circumstance in which the things exist”). Leibniz’s answer falls somewhere in the middle. To a first approximation, it would be that two or more things form a composite just in case they are conceived, imagined, or perceived as one by some mind. In this talk, I explore Leibniz’s arguments in support of this answer: one an argument by cases that prefigures van Inwagen’s own argument for a fairly austere answer (“organicism”), the other an argument appealing to the nature of relations and their role in composition. I then consider two bold implications that this answer has for the nature of bodies or physical objects, given certain auxiliary premises of Leibniz’s. The first implication is that composite bodies such as piles or flocks are not real beings but only phenomena or appearances in the mind. The second is that the same may be said of all bodies.

This lecture may not be recorded without written permission from both the speaker and the NC State Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies.