

Notice of Christia Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: Its Origin and Development*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.

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Christia Mercer's *magnum opus*, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: Its Origin and Development*, long awaited, is finally about to appear from Cambridge University Press. It was well worth the wait. The book is impressive in the wealth of detailed argumentation and historical background that fills the work. Mercer's general thesis is still that Leibniz's mature thought emerges from a view that Leibniz shares with his teachers, an eclectic philosophy that sees truth lurking in many places, and that he sees the task of the philosopher as mining the past for its truths, and showing how the different philosophies can be made consistent with one another and made into a single system. As in her earlier work, the resolution of the conflict between Aristotelianism and the new mechanism is important. But Mercer also claims to have discovered something else utterly unexpected, a strong Platonistic strain in seventeenth-century German thought. While Aristotelianism and mechanism may have dominated thought about the physical world, Mercer has discovered strongly Platonistic strains in the conception of God and the soul, both in the young Leibniz and in his teachers. Even more surprising, Mercer argues that the main tenets of Leibniz's mature thought emerged out of this mixture, and did so as early as 1670 and 1671. In particular, she argues that both the pre-established harmony and the idealism characteristic of his mature thought emerged in these years, as the result of an attempt to harmonize different elements of Aristotelian, Platonic, and mechanist philosophies, in response to particular problems in philosophy, theology, and even physics that gripped him at that time. If she is right (and she certainly has made a very interesting case for it), this will fundamentally alter our view of Leibniz.

I should emphasize here that the accomplishment is not narrowly historical. If Mercer is right, she has shown us not merely how, historically, Leibniz came to his views, but how, *philosophically* he came to them. That is to say, she has shown the philosophical (as well as theological and physical) problems that Leibniz was dealing with, and how their solution led him to some of his most distinctive (and difficult) doctrines. In this way, she helps us to *understand* Leibniz's thought, and to appreciate it as philosophy. Furthermore, her accomplishment is not merely to throw light on Leibniz's thought, though given its complexity and centrality in the period, that would be enough. In a way it opens up a larger re-evaluation of the

period.

This book will be read widely, and taken very seriously. Mercer's theses will not be accepted without argument. Her positions are in apparent conflict with some of my own pet theses, for example, and there will certainly be something of a brawl when the book is published. For example, I think that she is a bit too quick in seeing Leibniz as adopting an idealistic metaphysics; I think that the texts that she cites in that regard are somewhat more ambiguous than she acknowledges. (I realize that my own skepticism about Leibniz's idealism in his earlier writings is considered a somewhat extreme position by many.) I also think that she is not receptive enough to the possibility of fluctuations in Leibniz's views in these early years, nor does she take seriously enough the important changes that Leibniz himself claims happened in his metaphysics as a result of the fundamental change in his physics when he discovered the distinction between motion and force in 1679. But despite my disagreements, her position is one that must be reckoned with. Mercer's book will not be ignored; if I am right, it will be passionately debated for some years to come. This will not be just another Leibniz book.

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