

Andreas Blank, *Der logische Aufbau von Leibniz' Metaphysik*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001. pp. 170.

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Upon mention of the logical structure of *anything* in the title of a book, many of us will, no doubt, recall a certain strain of philosophy of a few generations ago, one that ascribed to logic a centrality it has seldom enjoyed before or since. Thus might one easily be steered off course in trying to guess Andreas Blank's primary thesis from the title he chose for his work. The reference to Carnap's *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* is only an apparent one: not only does the author of *Der logische Aufbau von Leibniz' Metaphysik* not believe that Leibniz's metaphysics is constructed from logic in the same way that Carnap took the world to be logically *aufgebaut*, but indeed, one gets the impression that it is the main purpose of this informative and well-argued new book to downplay the role of logic in the development of Leibniz's metaphysics.

To wit, Blank takes the metaphysical theory of simple substances as the starting point of Leibniz's thought, and sees this theory as in large part a consequence of Leibniz's analysis of the material world. Many aspects of Leibniz's principles of reason and of the fundamental ideas of his logic, in turn—such as the theory of complete concepts and the analytic theory of judgment—are seen as derivative of Leibniz's theory of simple substances. Blank's book, then, is not a further contribution to the tradition of commentary extending back to Russell and Couturat, that would have us see Leibniz as first and foremost a logician, while taking his sundry extralogical commitments as irrelevant or unfortunate deviations from his main purpose. Blank's Leibniz is, this reviewer thinks, much closer to the true Leibniz: eclectic and broad, as interested in theology and natural science as in logic, and as committed to the relevance of the former disciplines for metaphysics as he is to the relevance of logic.

Blank begins the book by appealing to Strawson's view that no 'actual philosopher' has ever left to the world a metaphysics that is either exclusively revisionist or exclusively descriptive. Revision is understood here as the effort to replace our everyday understanding of the world with a completely different one, while description is the project of revealing the implicit structures of our everyday understanding. With his work thus framed in view of the balance between revisionist and descriptive elements in Leibniz's metaphysics, the author proceeds to investigate various specific features of this metaphysics. The first chapter exam-

ines the enormous topic of the relationship between logic and metaphysics in Leibniz's thought, and most importantly the relationship between the metaphysical concept of substance and the logical one of the complete concept. It is with respect to this relationship that Blank thinks commentators are most inclined to see Leibniz as a revisionist. Scholars have often either been inclined to see the relationship as one of logical derivability of the substance from its concept, or of identity between the two.

It would, certainly, amount to a displacement of the everyday view of things to learn that things are in fact nothing other than the concepts of things. But Blank does not think that Leibniz is steadily committed to such a view. While Leibniz develops the notion of simple substance in "immediate connection" with that of complete concept, nonetheless, the thesis concerning the identity of individual substance and complete concept is, as Blank writes, "an explanatory hypothesis, which, due to the far-reaching structural parallels between the theory of simple substances and the theory of complete concepts can be connected with many aspects of Leibniz's theory of substance, but cannot be conclusively accounted for by Leibniz's texts, and in some respects even seems to run counter to Leibniz's intentions" (4).

Substances and ideas (among these, concepts), he argues, are very different things ontologically. Citing Leibniz's observation in a letter to Des Bosses that "aliud sunt Termini quam Entia, v.g., Triangulum et Trilaterum sunt idem Ens, sed sunt termini diversi differuntque, formaliter, non materialiter" (GP II, 471), Blank explains that, for Leibniz, concepts can be extensionally equivalent and nonetheless intensionally distinct, and thus that the description of concepts as 'substances' or 'things' is not to be taken in a literal sense. Substances are not concepts; rather, substances are *expressed* by concepts (25). Repeatedly, Leibniz emphasizes that the soul-substance is not an idea, but the source of ideas, that "Idea non agunt. Mens agit" (GP II, 184), clearly distinguishing the metaphysical notion of substance from logical ones such as concept or idea.

Blank similarly discerns problems with the understanding of the concept of substance as, not identical with, but rather logically derived from that of the complete concept. He proceeds to identify as "by far the most influential view of the system of Leibniz's metaphysics today" (36) the one that takes the theory of simple substances as a hypothesis forming part of a larger hypothetico-deductive methodology on the model of Euclid's geometry. This, Blank maintains, is a genuine element of revisionism in Leibniz's thought, but one to which Leibniz is not consistently committed; indeed, it is only discernible from around 1686 up until his first

encounter with Locke's *Essay*.

More typically, Blank argues, Leibniz's argument for our own substantiality (and at the same time our knowledge of the 'metaphysical categories' such as being, unity, substance, duration, change, action, perception), is grounded only in our inner experience, a thoroughly descriptive element of Leibniz's metaphysics, while his argument for the existence of infinitely many other simple, indivisible substances, also descriptive, is based in the analysis of matter. It is to the analysis of inner experience and of matter that the author turns his attention in the following two chapters.

In the second chapter Blank treats Leibniz's theories of innate metaphysical categories, which are 'methodologically concretized' by Leibniz within a theory of inner experience. According to Blank, inner experiences are for Leibniz 'propositions' [*Aussagen*] about our mental activities, while ideas are the "concepts... that are implied by these propositions" (150). The analysis of inner experiences thus leads to the necessary presuppositions of thought. Blank identifies a number of propositions belonging to inner experience, such as 'We are always aware of a certain activity of the mind', 'We can influence our thoughts at will,' 'We have sensual perceptions,' etc. The last of these implies, according to Blank's Leibniz, that 'Mental states stand in a regular connection with occurrences in the external world,' and it is from this implication that we obtain the concept of representation. In a way too complex to adequately outline here, Blank describes how Leibniz applies this concept, given in experience, to the relations in the material world, arguing that the law-governed causal relations among material bodies lead to the thesis of the representation of the universe in the material body.

The question remains as to how Leibniz comes to the conclusion that there are infinitely many, causally independent simple substances other than himself, animating the physical universe. What Blank takes to be the standard account, represented by Robinet, Rutherford, and Baxter, to name a few, is that Leibniz, starting from a rejection of Descartes' location of the essence of matter in extension — since that which is extended is subdivisible and thus not real— reasons that if matter is to be real it must be explicable in terms of something immaterial and thus indivisible. Blank finds this account, by itself, unsatisfactory. Among other points, he thinks that Leibniz must in addition argue that it is not physical atoms that form the indivisible unities at the ground-floor level of the material world, and thus that Leibniz's critique of atomism is an important prerequisite of his ultimate argument for the existence of (other) simple substances. In this respect, Blank writes, "physical considerations enter into an immediate foundational connection [*Begrün-*

dungszusammenhang] with the metaphysics” (90). Physical atoms, of course, could not really be atomic in the etymological sense, insofar as they could always be divided conceptually, if not by any actually existing force. And thus Leibniz comes to his theory of metaphysical atoms: simple, immaterial entities that can only exist in association with an organic body, but are not for that reason parts of the body. Blank does a fine job of explaining the fundamental features of Leibniz’s account of matter, in the process showing very clearly how it is that Leibniz’s metaphysics of simple substances is in large part a consequence of his meditations on physical questions.

The fourth chapter deals with the principles of reason in Leibniz’s thought. These include, most fundamentally, the principle of sufficient reason and the principle of contradiction, but also, equally, that of the identity of indiscernibles. (It is noteworthy that in the German name for the latter principle, ‘das Prinzip der Identität des Ununterscheidbaren’, ‘indiscernible’ is rendered in the singular- perhaps more appropriately, given that it is identity that is at issue.) Blank wishes to show, in line with his approach in the earlier chapters, that Leibniz’s principles of reason cannot be reduced to their logical formulations, and that certain aspects of these principles are to be seen as consequences of the theory of simple substances (which, again, is also not entirely reducible to logic).

Just as an important part of Blank’s argument for the independence of the theory of simple substances from logic was to show this theory’s distinctness from the theory of complete concepts, so Blank’s argument for the not-merely-logical nature of the principle of sufficient reason shows this principle’s independence from the analytic theory of judgment. ‘Every true proposition has a sufficient reason’, argues Blank, is a manifestly different claim than ‘All facts and occurrences have a sufficient reason.’ During the period surrounding the *Discours*, Leibniz does try to construe the principle of sufficient reason in terms of the logical theory of analytic judgments, but this, like the identification of substances with their concepts, is a strategy that would soon be abandoned.

Overall, Blank characterizes the 1680s as Leibniz’s most logic-oriented, indeed logically reductionist, phase of Leibniz’s career. Far from it being the case that Leibniz reduces the principle of sufficient reason to its logical formulations throughout the rest of his career, in fact, in Blank’s view, it is much more common for him to clarify the logical formulations of this principle in ontological terms. Leibniz is also inclined, as Blank shows, to describe this principle, as well as the principle of contradiction, as grounded in the theory of complete concepts, and to see this theory, in turn, as underlain by the necessary definiteness of ideas in the divine under-

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standing: only complete concepts make it possible to distinguish a possible substance from others (see GP II, 40). In similar ways with the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, Blank shows how it is that Leibniz's principles of reason can to some extent be understood as consequences of the theory of simple substances, which again, in turn, is based on the analysis of matter. Throughout his lucid argument for this structure, one can't help but think how far Blank's position is from the one suggested by his chosen title.

This work is largely a commentary upon commentaries. Being a good and thorough one at that, it provides a clear demonstration of both the strengths and limitations of such an approach. On the plus side, the book represents a thorough knowledge of the past century's accumulation of work on Leibniz. The author's arguments are clearly strengthened by his extensive knowledge of the positions of others on the same questions he is investigating. A quick survey of the index of names indicates the centrality of American commentary in the formation of the picture of Leibniz shared today by scholars throughout the world. Unlike younger American commentators, though, the author goes well beyond the treatment of the English-language secondary literature that has become standard fare, also taking into consideration Cassirer's neo-Kantian version of Leibniz, Aron Gurwitsch's 'panlogist' Leibniz, and, from the French side, the interpretations offered by Jacques Jalabert, Michel Serres, and, interestingly, Gilles Deleuze. Blank's work is not, for all this, just a contribution to the tertiary literature: it is precisely through the critical discussion of the positions of earlier commentators that Blank defines his own position with respect to Leibniz, the real subject of the book.

It seems to this reviewer, though, that even the best work of this sort can't but miss some of the important aspects of a historical figure's thought. Much of the secondary literature on which Blank relies in defining his own position—e.g., the work of Mates and, particularly, Russell—has been, to say the least, insensitive to the historical context in which Leibniz was working, and as a consequence has often misunderstood Leibniz's motivation for defending a particular doctrine. It seems that in order to determine whether a historical figure's metaphysical views are revisionist or not, one must first take into consideration the available positions on a given question at the time the views were developed. As mentioned, Blank describes revisionism in metaphysics as the effort to replace an everyday view with a wholly different one. And what, he asks, "could be further removed from the everyday understanding of the world than a universe built up out of simple substances: out of substances that have no extension and possess no parts, that can neither come into nor go out of being in a natural way?" (2). Certainly, Leibniz's

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particular theory of simple substances is, in its details, original; however, the equation of unity and substantiality, and of these with reality, was not nearly so far removed from the everyday vision of the world of one surrounded by Platonists since his student days in Leipzig, and versed in the teachings of the Church Fathers, as it is for many today. The theory of monads did not come to Leibniz out of nowhere. It has a long history, and any effort to argue for its independence from merely logical considerations in Leibniz's thought that does not take this history into account will not be as strong as it otherwise could be.

But this is just a small complaint of, perhaps, one who contextualizes too much. In all, this is a very thorough, well argued exposition of Leibniz's basic philosophical commitments. Since this book is a re-worked version of Blank's recently defended dissertation (under the direction of Jürgen Mittelstraß), we may assume that the author's contribution to Leibniz scholarship has only just begun, and so may look forward to further excellent work from him in the future.

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