

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Scritti filosofici*, edited and translated into Italian by Massimo Mugnai and Enrico Pasini. Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 2000. 3 vols., pp. 595, 533, 573.

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These three impressive volumes seem likely to be for some time the standard collection of Leibniz's writings in Italian translation. Replacing two volumes of 1967-68, with the same title and publisher, which were edited by Domenico Omero Bianca, the new translation by Massimo Mugnai and Enrico Pasini offers the Italian reader an outstandingly comprehensive selection of Leibniz's works in a presentation richly though unobtrusively illuminated by the latest scholarship (making extensive use of A VI,iv, for example). My chief aim in this review will be to give scholars working in English an idea of the lines of study suggested by this new product of Italian scholarship, and the resources available in it.

In contrast to the pattern prevailing in English translations of Leibniz, Mugnai and Pasini include in their three-volume set complete translations of the *New Essays* (which, with related matter, occupies the whole of volume 2) and of the *Theodicy*, minus a few of its appendices (which occupies three quarters of volume 3). What is left for shorter works is less than half of the set (all of volume 1 and the last quarter of volume 3), but still adds up to about six hundred pages. Taking into account differences in page format, I think these six hundred pages contain about three quarters as many of Leibniz's words as the *Philosophical Papers and Letters* translated into English by Leroy E. Loemker, and substantially more than any recent collection of Leibniz's writings in English.

The preference for complete, or almost complete, documents does not stop with the *New Essays* and the *Theodicy*. For example, the extremely judicious selection from the Leibniz-Arnauld correspondence includes all the philosophical letters actually exchanged by the two parties in 1686 and 1687, minus little more than the concluding civilities of most letters. And we are given virtually the whole Leibniz-Clarke correspondence, except for the response that Clarke wrote to have the last word after Leibniz's death. Some preference is manifested also for works that Leibniz actually put in form for publication or for transmission to a correspondent; thus we get none of the preparatory drafts of letters to Arnauld that Leibniz left in his papers. More broadly I think it is fair to say that Mugnai and Pasini give their readers proportionately more of the public face of Leibniz and less of his private

face than might be found in some collections in English—though they do include a number of papers written for his own eyes only. Their approach on this point is certainly defensible on historiographical grounds, though there are well known lines of interpretation that might suggest different principles of selection.

Most of the pieces one would expect to find in such a collection are here: the “Discourse on Metaphysics,” the “New System,” the “*Specimen dynamicum*” (though only the first half of it, which was actually published in Leibniz’s lifetime), “*De ipsa natura*,” the “Principles of Nature and of Grace,” and the “Monadology.” The most important single omission from the selections (to my mind) is the correspondence between Leibniz and De Volder, which is not represented in this collection except by a few quotations in the Introduction to the set. Parts of four letters from Leibniz to Des Bosses are included. Aside from the *Theodicy* and the *New Essays*, I think we get here somewhat less of the paper trail of Leibniz’s theories of freedom and contingency and of the nature of bodies than Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber give us in their deservedly popular collection of English translations. On the other hand Mugnai and Pasini translate some very interesting texts on ontology not usually found in English-language collections, including one on “The Abstract and the Concrete” that was first published in the original Latin by Mugnai in 1986 (vol. 1, pp. 390-96). On the whole I think Mugnai and Pasini sample more of the full range of Leibniz’s philosophical interests than any collection of English translations known to me except Loemker’s and the even older one by Philip P. Wiener. Unlike Loemker and Wiener, however, they give us none of Leibniz’s writings about ethics and jurisprudence, except insofar as those subjects come up in such works as the *Theodicy*.

The scholarly and interpretive apparatus provided by Mugnai and Pasini is extensive and exceptionally helpful, and is segregated in such a way as not to encumber heavily the pages of translation. Each of the three volumes begins with a historical note by Pasini which, with a remarkable combination of informativeness and economy, identifies the sources from which each of the selections in the volume were translated and summarizes what is known of their date of composition and historical and philosophical context. Even well informed scholars will find material of interest here, for instance in the discussion of the circumstances of composition of the “Principles of Nature and of Grace” and the “Monadology” (vol. 3, pp. 11-13). Additional editorial material, at the beginning of the first volume, includes a philosophical Introduction, a moderately full bibliographical note, and a ten-page biographical note, by Pasini, of a fullness and richness that is more characteristic of such features in Italian academic (and

even semi-academic) editions than of their American and British counterparts.

The Introduction, by Massimo Mugnai, occupying 72 pages, is more ambitious than is usual in such a context, constituting a substantial and sophisticated, and also quite readable, initiation into Leibniz's philosophy. It is a work of considerable originality—not least in its choice of a guiding thread to follow through the labyrinth of texts. As is now widely recognized, Leibniz has left us more than one central idea around which his system can legitimately be organized. Drawing on a rich background in his own prior researches, Mugnai focuses on Leibniz's conception of *ideas*, beginning with his early engagement with issues about nominalism and going on to the ontological role of God's ideas and their relation to our ideas. This leads to Leibniz's epistemology and philosophy of perception, and with them provides the context for introducing issues about sensible qualities, phenomena, substance, and monads, as well as the theories of possibility and necessity and the problem of free will. The focus on theories of ideas and knowledge leads naturally to the concluding topics of Leibniz's theories of natural and artificial languages. In an introduction of limited length such consistent adherence to an organizing principle may involve some sacrifice of balance. If Mugnai's introduction gives us much more on the ontology of logic than others might, it also gives us much less than others might on the importance of Leibniz's physics for his metaphysics.¹ Such sacrifice is probably justified, however, inasmuch as the student's first need in an introduction to Leibniz's philosophy is a perspective that helps to make sense of it as a rationally motivated and organized whole. The originality of the organization also helps to make this introduction one in which the knowledgeable as well as beginners will find illumination. It is a notable strength of this translation that it has such an introduction by an interpreter of international distinction.

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Notes

¹The larger canvas of a monograph (263 pages of text) allows more room for the latter theme (as well as for a richer and even more informative textual grounding)

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in Mugnai's *Introduzione alla filosofia di Leibniz* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), but the focus and organizing conception of Leibniz's system are much the same in the larger work as in the introduction to the translation.