

more careful and detailed attention than one can offer in the space of a review. This is an intelligent, first-rate piece of historical scholarship and interpretation, whose methods and claims will influence work on Leibniz much for the better.

***G.W. Leibniz, De l'Horizon de la Doctrine Humaine (1693); La Restitution Universelle (1715). Textes inédits, traduits et annotés par Michel Fichant, suivis d'une Postface Plus Ultra. Paris: J. Vrin, 1991.***

**Reviewed by Michael Latzer, St. Anselm College**

This fascinating and expertly edited little volume brings to light some hitherto neglected works, illustrating Leibniz's lifelong interest in the calculus of combinations, and in the problem of the progress of human culture. In fact both interests are united in these works in a characteristically Leibnizian way.

Leibniz's project in *De l'Horizon de la Doctrine Humaine* is well expressed in its lengthy subtitle: "Meditation on the number of all possible truths and falsities, enunciable by humanity such as we know it to be; and on the number of feasible books. Wherein it is demonstrated that these numbers are finite, and that it is possible to write, and easy to conceive, a much greater number. To show the limits of the human spirit [*l'esprit humain*], and to know the extent of these limits" (p. 39; my translations). Following in the tradition of the mathematical curiosities of Clavius, Mersenne, and Guldin, Leibniz offers a formula for the calculation of the number of possible words, significant or nonsignificant, pronounceable or unpronounceable, which can be generated from an alphabet of 23 letters. Even though the product of this calculation is prodigiously great, it is finite, and given a sufficiently lengthy lifespan of the species all truths would very likely be exhausted, and novelty give way to repetition. This observation yields the notion of a "horizon of human doctrine", an extrinsic limit to the number of truths storable in language, and confirms the "vulgar expression that 'nothing is said which has not been said already'" (p. 52).

Some of the implications of this notion are spelled out in the opuscles which follow in the book, and principally in Leibniz's two treatments of the theme of apokatastasis, or universal restitution. For instance, since "facts supply the matter for discourse" (p. 57), it would seem that events themselves must eventually exhaust all possibilities, and a recurrence of historical epochs (as in the "great Platonic year" of antiquity) could be expected. In his learned and richly documented *Postface*, "Plus Ultra", Fichant shows that although the term 'apokatastasis' carries with it Origenist

associations, in fact neither Origen, nor, ultimately, Leibniz himself, projects an eternal return of the *same*. Origen thought that creaturely freedom made strict repetition of events inconceivable, even within a cyclical pattern of fall and restoration; for Leibniz, even if written histories, and the events denoted therein, were to repeat, the infinite mass of confused, imperceptible, and unenunciative thoughts and sensations (to say nothing of the “world of an infinity of creatures” in each part of matter” [p. 73]) ensures that truths of fact “could be diversified to infinity” (p. 77).

An interesting related question: is Leibniz’s use of the term ‘apokatastasis’ meant to imply, obliquely, a sympathy with the heterodox doctrine of universal salvation? As Fichant points out, Leibniz is creatively ambiguous when treating of this doctrine in the *Theodicy*, and certainly does not condemn it outright (p. 200; cf. *Theodicy* §17, GP VI 111-112). The same suggestive tolerance for the doctrine can be seen in some of the works in this volume, particularly in the friendly review by Leibniz of J.W. Petersen’s *Mystery of the Restitution of All Things* (1701), a vigorous contemporary defense of universal salvation.

Leibniz is finally guided, in the question of perpetual recurrence, by considerations of what is “fitting”: “since it is not fitting to the dignity of nature that the antecedents merely repeat themselves, the consequence is that there will emerge intelligences made more perfect, who have other, more profound notions and who are capable of more full and more composite [*plus ample et plus composées*] truths; thus there could be infinite progress in knowledge” (p. 59). A parallel text: “it could also be concluded that the human kind will not always remain in this state, since it does not conform to the divine harmony always to strike the same chord” (p. 75). The demonstration of the finite number of the truths expressible by humans in their present state is thus employed, paradoxically, not as evidence for a tedious repetition of the same, but instead for an affirmation of perpetual progress, in the tenor of the ringing close of the *Ultimate Origination of Things* (GP VII, 308).

All the pieces in this volume (some of which are edited and some not) have appeared elsewhere, in varying degrees of completeness and accessibility; but it is a stroke of editorial brilliance on the part of Fichant to have recognized the underlying unity of these disparate works, and to have brought them together in such an illuminating way. In addition to the two works cited in the title there are included selections from relevant correspondence, and five smaller pieces developing the same themes; those in Latin are presented with facing French translation. Besides the lengthy *Postface*, other commendable features of the book are the introduction, extensive bibliography, and truly exhaustive notes.