

BOOK REVIEWS

***Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, by Robert Merrihew Adams. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 433 pp.**

Reviewed by R. C. Sleight, Jr., University of Massachusetts

The point of these brief remarks is to indicate some of the topics discussed in Robert Adams's book, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*. I have accepted an invitation to submit a detailed critical evaluation of the work to *The Philosophical Review*; I save detailed discussion for that occasion.

Adams began by intending to collect in a single volume some of his articles on Leibniz, published over the last seventeen years, supplemented by some new material. And, indeed, three of those articles, revised, reorganized, and rewritten, are prominently on display in the book: "Leibniz's Theories of Contingency," *Rice University Studies*, 63, No. 4 (Fall 1977) 1-41; "Predication, Truth, and Trans-World Identity in Leibniz," in *How Things Are: Studies in Prediction and the History and Philosophy of Science*, edited by James Bogen and James E. McGuire (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985) 235-283; and "Phenomenalism and Corporeal Substance in Leibniz," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 8 (1983) 217-57. In an article on the current state of scholarship concerning the history of modern philosophy entitled "History of Philosophy in Philosophy Today," (*The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 1, January, 1992) Margaret Wilson wrote as follows concerning articles mentioned above:

Robert Merrihew Adams, well known for his work in ethics, philosophical theology, and the theory of modality, has written two long papers on complex issues in Leibniz's philosophy that — a decade or two after their composition — are still dazzling in their combination of critical insight and total textual mastery.

The book that Adams has written, while utilizing the material noted, contains more new material than old. What Wilson wrote of the articles is true of the book — dazzling in its combination of critical insight and total textual mastery. As its title suggests, the book is divided into three parts on, respectively, determinism (including an account of Leibniz's views on contingency and identity — especially transworld identity); theism; and idealism (including an account of Leibniz's views on the structure of corporeal substance). Those familiar with Adams's seminal

paper “Leibniz’s Theories of Contingency” know that in that paper Adams outlined and clarified Leibniz’s use of the notion of “possibility-in-its-own-nature” and related that notion to more familiar aspects of Leibniz’s thinking about modality, e.g., infinite analysis, and reasons that incline without necessitating. This path-breaking work is continued in part I of the book. Publication of Adams’s paper raised discussion of Leibniz on contingency to a new level of sophistication. I am confident that Adams’s discussion of Leibniz on the ontological argument, which occurs in Part 2 of the book, will have the same outcome. Most of us are familiar with the idea that Leibniz took his fundamental contribution to the ontological argument to be a demonstration that it is possible that there is a perfect being. Once again taking us to texts that have not received their due, Adams carefully brings to light the extraordinary subtlety and depth of Leibniz’s work on this and related topics.

Part 3 of the book is devoted to Leibniz’s idealism. Most know his mature position, succinctly formulated in a letter to De Volder: “There is nothing in things except simple substances, and in them perception and appetite.” But recently scholars have utilized Leibniz’s efforts to rehabilitate Aristotelian/Scholastic conceptions of matter and form as evidence of a commitment to a more realistic position at the time of the composition of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and the correspondence with Arnauld. (See, for example, Daniel Garber’s brilliant article, “Leibniz and the Foundations of Physics: The Middle Years,” in *The Natural Philosophy of Leibniz*, ed. Kathleen Okruhlik and James Brown (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985) 27-130.) Adams argues for an idealistic interpretation of this material, as it was employed by Leibniz throughout his mature period—i.e., from 1686 to the end.

Each part of the book includes detailed remarks on topics crucial to Leibniz scholarship; these remarks are likely to set the agenda for future discussions.

***Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz: The Concept of Substance in Seventeenth Century Metaphysics*, by R. S. Woolhouse. London and New York: Routledge, 1994. 214pp.**

Reviewed by Michael J. Murray, Franklin and Marshall College

While a significant amount of work has been done in recent years on the notion of substance in the seventeenth century, much of this work is narrow in focus and addresses itself only to specialists in the field. With this text, Roger Woolhouse has remedied this deficiency. The book, aimed at an audience at the advanced