

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

undergraduate level, provides a clear, comprehensive, and appropriately compact study of the doctrine of substance as it is developed by Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz.

The book begins with individual chapters providing a general outline of each figure's position on the notion of substance. What does each figure take substance to be? How many types of substance are there? How are substances individuated? How does the view differ from the tradition of Aristotle or the other figures treated in the text? In answering these questions Woolhouse provides the reader with a judicious dose of textual support as well as numerous supporting references in the footnotes. After the introductory chapters, the remainder of the book contains chapters developed around themes rather than figures. Chapters four and five focus on the nature of extended substance and how the various positions underpin the mechanistic physics being pursued in the seventeenth century. Then, after a relatively brief discussion of issues in causation, the focus turns, in chapters seven and eight, to the nature of thinking substance and its relationship to material substance. In the final chapter Woolhouse addresses the paramount substance in the metaphysics of all three figures: God. In the course of his treatment Woolhouse integrates competing interpretations of disputed positions with an appropriately balanced measure of explanation and critical evaluation. In addition, he succeeds in pulling this off without allowing the currently fashionable issues to overpower the thematic progress of the text. It is worth noting however that, with a few exceptions, there is little in the way of new historical or philosophical analysis here.

In light of the intended audience, the text achieves a task that might seem at the outset quite impossible. Giving adequate treatment to such central issues in scarcely less than 200 pages of text is undoubtedly daunting. And while Woolhouse does this task as ably as it can be done, it is not done without some necessary expense. While the table of contents makes the discussion look invitingly wide-ranging, it becomes clear that Woolhouse's treatment of these topics is colored, not surprisingly, by his own scholarly interest in the history of the philosophy of science. The result is that the motivations that explain why these figures held the views they did is sometimes obscured. For example, in chapter six, "Causation, Occasionalism, and Force," Woolhouse's interest is in describing the position of each without telling us much about the motivation for the various views. We learn that Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz have differing views on causation, but are told little about why they take the position they do. No doubt, as Woolhouse tells us (p.140, 143), Malebranche thought it was impious to attribute active causal powers to created substances, while, on the other hand, Leibniz thought it demeaning to the divine character to

view God as actively bringing about each and every little event in the natural course (p. 143). But the motivations are surely much deeper than that. Among other things, Leibniz and Malebranche were driven towards the positions they adopted because of the combining force of two factors. First, they took seriously the claim that God was involved in each and every event in nature—the Bible teaches nothing less than that in God we live, move, and have our being. But, secondly, while they wanted to preserve this doctrine, they found the available metaphysical accounts of this divine activity (such as the “concurrentist” views of Dominicans and Jesuits) unworkable. As a result, they were driven to what seemed to them the only defensible accounts. When we leave aside considerations such as these, it is no wonder that later in the book Woolhouse puzzles over the fact that Malebranche thinks that the perfect efficacy of the divine will rules out the possibility of efficacious active causal powers of created substances (p.174). This view is thoroughly puzzling unless we have recourse to the considerations of natural theology that underpin it.

A further complication in the text arises from the fact that the book begins with a general overview of each figure and then proceeds topically. The result is that, on occasion, certain claims defended in the early overview are seemingly contradicted or at least ignored in the topical chapters. For example, in chapter four on Leibniz we learn that one of Leibniz’s motivations for the denial of inter-substantial causation springs from the fact that from early in his career he believed that properties are correctly attributed to that substance which causally produces them. Thus, Leibniz thinks that accounts which have created substances exhibiting properties or exercising powers that spring from God alone, are accounts which speak of properties of God, not of the created substance. These motivations have been well-documented by Daniel Garber and Christia Mercer. However in chapter seven, when discussing Leibniz’s view on occasionalism, Woolhouse does not tell us that this alone is good reason for Leibniz to reject occasionalism. In fact, he claims that Leibniz holds occasionalism to be a “perfectly possible relation between God and creation”(p.147).

Unfortunately, an accident of timing prevents Woolhouse from taking advantage of some very significant recent contributions to his subject. Daniel Garber’s *Descartes’ Metaphysical Physics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), Robert Sleigh’s *Leibniz and Arnauld* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), as well as forthcoming texts by Christia Mercer and Robert Adams, all make, or stand to make, significant advances in our understanding of the issues treated in this book. Such recent additions to the subject give us good cause for hoping that the book will

appear in a second edition.

However, while we are digesting this recent work, Woolhouse has provided those of us charged with teaching seventeenth century metaphysics with an excellent resource. Its breadth, readability, and scholarly sensitivity will make it a widely used course text for many years to come.

## DISCUSSION

### **Reply to Cover's 1993 Review of *Leibniz's Metaphysics* by Catherine Wilson, University of Alberta**

It is an honor to have been given the opportunity by the editor to reply to J.A. Cover's review of *Leibniz's Metaphysics* (LM),<sup>1</sup> and to have a chance to revisit, five years after the book's publication, the still-active battleground of intrinsic and extrinsic properties, the extensionality and intensionality of perception, and the reality of aggregates and to say more, a little informally perhaps, about about some methodological questions in Leibniz scholarship. Cover's review when it appeared gave me a great deal of pleasure because he addressed sharply and directly exactly the central issues, in a way which was not in the least *distanziert*, and defended several alternative critical positions concisely and eloquently.

My position throughout the book echoes in one way that of many of Leibniz's earlier critics. If one succeeds in carving out of the mass of Leibnizian texts a set of theses this set of statements is, technically speaking, inconsistent. But rather than attempting to somehow "fix" the system by showing how Leibniz might have responded to various difficulties — a practice which, in my view, never works convincingly in the case of deep, underlying conflicts — antinomies, really, — the critic should point to the origins, both philosophical and historical, of those conflicts and give some account of the author's failure to react to them as such. In LM, I concentrated especially on the problem of the extensionality of perception (or as one would say nowadays, the problem of internalism and externalism with respect to content.) And I looked for the historical origins (Malebranchian idealism, development of casual theories of perception) of those competing analyses. A second example: the philosophical problem of the continuum gives rise to Leibniz's simultaneous affirmation and denial of atomism (in the form of the affirmation of immaterial atomism, and the generation of material bodies from immaterial atoms.) Historically, that problem presents itself in the form of scholastic debates about what is *unum per se*, whether there are smaller and smaller animals to infinity, whether there could be an indivisible material particle or an