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),[1] 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

indivisible mathematical point and so on. What convinces a metaphysician that his system must somehow all fit together, that it is not a poor tattered patchwork of conflicting intuitions is, in my view, that he discovers motifs, images, patterns, analogies so overwhelming that he is convinced he has the key. The image of containment — replicated in Leibniz's logic of inclusion, in his theory of innate ideas, in Malebranchian idea-sequentialism, in the theory of preformation — was one of these irresistible ideas. My thesis is that classical metaphysics from Descartes to Kant is an attempt to negotiate one's way through conflicting intuitions under the spell of irresistible insights, an attempt which does not eliminate the underlying antinomies but deepens and elaborates them. (Compare the groundproblem of Cartesian idealism and skepticism vs. Cartesian mechanism and dogmatism; or the groundproblem of Kant's denial of our knowledge of the supersensible vs. his assertion of anti-empiricist theses.)

To return to the critical issues themselves, Russell argued that Leibniz's subject-predicate logic left him unable to deal with relations. This limitation is not *by itself* an inconsistency, and thus solutions to the problem of relations — including reduction of relational predicates like "is soluble in water" or "is wiser than Socrates" or "is the father of David" or even "sees a cat" into monadic predicates describing the molecular structure of x, or assigning it a specific degree of wisdom, or even the quality of being-a-David-father, or being-appeared-to-cattishly-when-in-the-presence-of a-cat — might or might not improve our opinion of the flexibility of Leibniz's logic, but they do not address the problem of inconsistency. Inconsistency enters the picture when we try to reconcile what R.C. Sleigh Jr. calls "world apartness" with Leibniz's apparent commitment to the relationality of perception, or when we try to reconcile what Leibniz says about the inseparability of souls and bodies and the dependence of experiences on the situation of embodied perceivers with his more radical statements about the isolation, immateriality, and indivisibility of monadic subjects. If each monad really is a world apart, the harmony of perceivers means simply this: God gives to each monad the experiences it would have if they were all embodied, spatially located beings perceiving a common external world. Note that the pre-established harmony, as applied to world-apart monads, explains nothing in the experience of each. Actually, it can function as nothing more than a production-rule for God. A strange production-rule, as the same effect could have been accomplished by creating a common world of interacting perceivers, etc. Attempts, then, to re-create this common world out of world-apart monads by offering various accounts of aggregation seem to me entirely misguided. Suppose that m, a world-apart monad, perceives a brown mouse (= m is appeared to brown-mously), and another world-apart monad, n,

perceives a brown mouse (= n is appeared to brown-mously) and, because of the (qualitatively-given) harmony of perception, they see the *same brown mouse* (in the opinion of God.) There is no possibility of going on to compose *that brown mouse,* e.g., as a hierarchy of dominant and subservient monads (more world-apart monads, p,q,r to infinity). We have here two entirely separate paradigms: a Malebranchian paradigm of experiential isolation and a casual theory of perception paradigm in which collections of small entities appear to an observer as such-and-such.

LM then tried to explain why there is what might be called systematicity in Leibniz without there being a system. (Note that it is open to question whether *the mature Leibniz himself* thought that his system included his logical theory, his theory of substance, space and time, his theory of pre-established harmony, his physics, his eschatology, etc.) The key to this non-systematic systematicity— which is the single feature of the book which has been the most commented upon — was my splitting of the *Discourse* into three semi-systems, or schemes, or philosophical pictures. The aim was to show how each emerged out of an independent nucleus of argument and insight, and yet gave the misleading appearance of ultimate convergence. Thus when Cover writes that forms are "causally active," moving rapidly from "form" in the sense of linguistic essence to "form" as inherent force, this slippage, in my opinion, only reproduces Leibniz's own. The alleged "consistency" of the A-metaphysics of predicates-in subjects and the B-metaphysics of forces-in-substances cannot amount to anything in my view except the reviewer's faith that Leibnizian subjects (Adam, Caesar) and Leibnizian substances (animals? animalcules? monads?) can be instantiated in the same world. And what is "causal activity" in this context? Similarly for Cover's suggestion that we ought to try harder to see the perceptual subject of a Malebranchean world and the *vis viva* of matter as aspects of a single theoretical insight, rather than as tied together only by their anti-materialistic function. Leibniz's metaphysics is a tissue of analogies, resonances, parallelisms—and arguments, too; these require work to discover and exhibit. But just why is unification the aim? What excesses of the Principle of Charity are required to support it?

Some reviewers of LM —and I think Cover is a little bit in this camp — manage to indicate that I have been perhaps overly diligent in tracking down minor sources, obscure influences, but perhaps also somewhat...lazy?...in not trying harder to get a consistent Leibniz, and somewhat...cynical?...in saying I did not think one was going to be produced. The unspoken assumption is something like this: the probability of *a famous logician and mathematician* having been guilty of serious, fundamental inconsistencies is *low,* while the probability of *one of a teeming mass*

of commentators lacking some crucial bit of textual evidence, or the logical and linguistic skills to decode it, or the insight to realize its significance is *high. I* think this assumption is incorrect. For first, it presupposes that Leibniz approached philosophy — all the subjects mentioned at the start of the last paragraph — with the same expectations and critical checks as the modern, professional, specialized, full-time metaphysician does when trying to articulate and defend against criticism a single isolated thesis or two! We commentators, on the other side, are not in such a bad position, for we can enjoy the cumulative benefits of each other's individually-limited labors and the occasional happy idea as well.

I want to borrow here an analogy from literary studies. "A standard critical assignment in my student years," says Stephen Greenblatt, "was to show how a text that seemed to break in parts was really a complex whole: thousands of pages were dutifully churned out to prove that the zany subplot of *The Changeling* was cunningly integrated into the tragic main plot, or that every tedious bit of clowning in *Dr. Faustus* was richly significant. Behind these exercises was the assumption that great works of art were triumphs of resolution, that they were...monological — the mature expression of a single intention."[2] Any threat to the "organic unity" (a Leibnizian concept, that!) was thought to be an insult to the memory of the dead and great.

What Greenblatt refers to as a "disabling idea of rationality" is, I believe, equally pernicious in the history of philosophy. Philosophical thought, like thinking in general, involves stalls, dead ends, reprises, obsessive, unprofitable brooding, self-corrections, and internal checks, balances and compensating moves, chance discoveries and interventions. These are all to be found in the written record and need to be recognized as such, not endlessly reworked and reconciled. My approach differs absolutely from that of deconstructive critics in that I recognize the existence of "genuine" philosophical problems: intentionality, content, and the composition of the continuum. It is these problems the investigation of which is time-consuming and complex and repays effort; and one may well be inspired in thinking about them by what Leibniz says. But it is a mistake to suppose that Leibniz himself thought farther into them, that the solution is there, only hidden. The arcane nature of the text, I have tried to show, does not derive from its hiding of philosophical secrets, but from its synthetic nature as a record of intellectual encounters.

---

[1] J. A. Cover, Review of *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, *Leibniz Society Review* 3 (1993): 7-12.

[2] Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in *Literary Studies Today,* ed. P. Collier and H. Geyer-Ryan (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990), p.78.