

Daniel Garber

Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad.

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There is a tendency (to my mind, a welcome one) among contemporary historians of philosophy and of science to contemplate in a synoptic view the two fields, which have been traditionally conceived as constituting two different canons with not much communication between them. Traditional histories of philosophy have been written without relevant engagement with works and controversies that have been taken to belong to the canon of the history of science—just as not many historians of science have been interested in whether philosophers had anything to contribute to how science developed. Daniel Garber's book is an important contribution towards bridging this traditional gap, one that has been significantly narrowed in the last couple of decades.

The book has been written with a primary focus on three themes in Leibniz, i.e. body, substance, monad, confessedly setting aside some otherwise central questions in other fields of Leibniz's interests like theodicy, necessity, logic, etc. (xv). The three chosen themes are of course eminently important in the context of the 17th- and 18th-century debates on the nature of matter and mind, in the context of heated controversies among Aristotelians, adherents to various versions of mechanical natural philosophies, and those who may perhaps be aptly called vitalists of different denominations, so they indeed deserve careful scrutiny in their own right.

Garber rejects reading Leibniz backwards, i.e. reading his *oeuvre* in the light of the doctrine he is most famous for: monadology (xix-xx). It is a popular strategy in certain pockets of philosophical historiography to approach bodies of work with the intention of rational reconstruction: the aim is to produce an interpretation that presents a given body of thought in its strongest, most defensible, and carefully argued form. This approach is inclined to sacrifice much of actual history for the sake of more refined philosophical content. And while this strategy may prove to be fruitful philosophically, it is questionable historically, and Garber is interested in the historical, flesh-and-blood Leibniz, so his strategy inclines towards contextualization. This brings along the problem of how much context is to be included, a problem of which Garber is very much aware (xviii). Mostly, the context presented in the background of Leibniz's intellectual development consists of arguments for and against positions directly relevant for Leibniz's intellectual development, with the more distant intellectual or sociological contexts set aside.

In this vein, instead of presenting Leibniz as a philosopher who gradually progressed toward a full-blown metaphysics founded on monads, Garber presents an evolutionary account of Leibniz's thought with an eye on the philosophical reasons for him changing his mind. Accordingly, the chapters of the book can be grouped into three, corresponding to phases Garber identifies in Leibniz's philosophical development.

In the earliest phase, i.e., from his earliest thoughts to the late 1670s, Leibniz is identified as an ‘heterodox Hobbesian’ whose metaphysics combined a standard mechanical philosophy of bodies with a commitment to incorporeal things responsible for motion in the world, i.e., non-extended minds distinct from extended bodies characterized in terms of shape, size, and motion. This is where Leibnizian heterodoxy enters the Hobbesian picture resulting in ‘a kind of Hobbesian mechanical philosophy to which Leibniz has added mind, not to *replace* body but to *supplement* it.’ (37) So the main lesson for Garber here is that Leibniz’s amendments to the Hobbesian picture do not gesture towards monadology; bodies are not reduced to minds.

Another facet of the young Leibniz’s heretic Hobbesianism is his rehabilitation of substantial forms, at least for theological purposes. Substance, understood in terms of substantial forms, allows us to explain miracles posited by Catholic theology like ‘the transformation of the host into the body of Christ’ (43). So, a body described in terms of its purely mechanical properties belongs to physics, but if treated as substance it belongs to the realm of theology.

From the late 1670s Leibniz’s metaphysical landscape begins to transform. At the second stage of his philosophical development, Leibniz introduces a metaphysics of substantial forms into physics itself, leading to a metaphysics of corporeal substance: this of characteristic of Leibniz’s middle years until about the late 1690s. Garber discusses two main philosophical reasons for Leibniz changing his mind: the first is unity, the other activity.

Unity becomes a central theme through the need to explain the difference between beings *per se*, i.e., ‘real unions’ like a man, and *per accidens*, i.e., mere collections of things, as for instance a pile of wood (see the quote on 293). The problem arises from the fact that real unions are themselves also aggregates and constantly changing ones at that: what is it then that ensures their genuine unity and persistence through changes? Leibniz’s answer is that it must be substantial form or soul uniting the parts of beings *per se*. Here again Garber convincingly argues against those competing interpretations, most notably Robert Adams’s ‘qualified monad conception’ (93–7), that try to assimilate these ideas to Leibniz’s subsequent monadology by downplaying the significance of corporeal substance talk in these middle years and emphasizing the continuity of this metaphysics with Leibniz’s latter thought. One may perhaps see an evolutionary path here, but Garber seems right that reading a kind of monadology into or out of these texts is far-fetched.

Beside unity, Leibniz thinks at this point in time, bodies must also contain active and passive forces. They must have passive forces to resist collisions with other bodies; and they must contain active forces, lest matter should be entirely homogenous (which would deprive us of the ability to discern any motion in matter or even to distinguish one body from another). These forces are all internal and not impressed forces on bodies, and in this sense they have nothing in common with Newton’s forces—except for Leibniz’s passive force, which is, with some important restrictions, very much like Newton’s ‘force of inertia’, *vis insita* (176–8).

The discussion of forces leads us quite naturally to the questions of causation in Leibniz’s middle years. Given his views on active and passive forces, ‘all of the activity of a corporeal substance derives from its own internal states’, and therefore ‘there is no genuine causal communication between substances’ (175). This doctrine emerges in the first years of the 1680s,

having been preceded by the idea Leibniz entertained in the 1670s, namely that ‘an effect envelops its cause’ (60-2). Despite the thesis of causal non-communication Leibniz holds that there is an extended sense in which substances can be said to interact, namely by ‘expressing’ one another (211-12). Garber insists that this account of causal connection in the middle years should not be taken as an anticipation of his later monadological metaphysics, mainly because this view on Garber’s reading does not imply that substances are mind-like entities.

In chapter 6 Garber explores the role final causes play in Leibniz’s middle years. After he had given up on the search for a geometrical demonstration of the relation of cause and effect that he had pursued before, Leibniz found its foundation nowhere else than in divine wisdom. If viewed from this angle, cause and effect are naturally understood in terms of final causes that accompany the mechanical understanding of the world.

Garber next turns to the problem of phenomenalism. It seems that Leibniz in his middle years accepts a kind of phenomenalism according to which bodies are just phenomena, and it seems to conflict with his corporeal substance metaphysics. Garber denies this conflict by drawing a distinction between four kinds of phenomenalism, only two of which (human-mind phenomenalism and extended-mind phenomenalism) conflict with his own interpretation of Leibniz’s middle years in terms of corporeal substance metaphysics: neither of these, however, according to Garber were actually held by Leibniz. The kinds of phenomenalism Leibniz endorses, namely that aggregates without substantial form are mere phenomena and that extension and its modes are mere phenomena (293), do not conflict with Garber’s reading. These phenomenalisms are rendered unproblematic for his interpretation by characterizing their main point as making ‘salient the contribution that mind makes to the constitution of bodies ... inanimate bodies really are phenomenal in the sense that the mind contributes unity, extension and its modes onto the physical world.’ (300)

The two closing chapters of the book turn to Leibniz’s later thought. While in the metaphysics of the middle years ‘what is foundational are corporeal substances, unities of soul, and organic body’ (345), here Garber explores the introduction of mind-like substances, i.e., monads into the picture. These differ from substantial forms primarily through being simple and foundational. This addition to the picture proves to be problematic because, as Garber argues, Leibniz fails to develop a settled position on the relation of monads and bodies. This in Garber’s view is also the final reason why one should not read Leibniz’s *oeuvre* as a thoroughgoing dogmatic monadologist gradually elaborating his idealist metaphysics.

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