

Recensione

**F. Beiderbeck, W. Li, S. Waldhoff
(eds.), *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.
Rezeption, Forschung, Ausblick***

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Hannes Amberger

This volume analyses the 'reception' of and the 'research' on Leibniz and provides an 'outlook' on possible future research. It attempts a systematic approach to all the relevant fields of Leibniz's work, often embedding the review of the secondary literature in an overview of the topic from the author's own perspective. In this way, the volume constitutes a useful first approach to Leibniz's life and work, like a German cousin of the Oxford Handbook (with which it shares some of the authors) or the Cambridge Companion. Unlike those works, the present volume focusses on the non-philosophical aspects of Leibniz's work and offers a refreshing perspective on the «last universal genius» all too often reduced to his philosophical works. Waldhoff's *Quellenkunde*, Antoine's contribution on poetry, and Li's final chapter on Leibniz's public image are three examples of topics we do not find in other comprehensive works on Leibniz.

The first and longest (137 pp.) chapter is authored by co-editor Stephan Waldhoff. Under the title *Quellenkunde*, it provides detailed information on the various sources that offer access to Leibniz's writings, namely Leibniz's own publications, the manuscripts and the later editions and the value of each of them for today's research. Authorship, we learn from this chapter, is a problematic concept in Leibniz's baroque environment: He rearranged and modified other authors' manuscripts for his own use, but also drafted letters and memoranda then rewritten and signed by other members of the Hanoverian court hierarchy. With respect to the editions, Waldhoff limits his survey to the older editions of the 18th-early 20th century and the Academy edition and excludes alternative critical editions and translations. An edition as widely used as Gerhardt's *Philosophische Schriften*, however, might have deserved more than the brief paragraph dedicated to it (p. 129). The final, very useful section deals with auxiliary resources for the Academy edition, such as the *Arbeitskatalog*. Waldhoff's chapter gives us a glimpse behind the scenes of various editions and

research and offers a practical guide to Leibniz's texts; it should be obligatory reading for all aspiring Leibniz scholars.

Nora Gädeke's contribution *Princely Court and Republic of Letters* traces the development of a specific motive in the biographical literature on Leibniz: the relationship between court and scholarly community – a subject whose depiction changed considerably over the course of centuries, due both to the sources available and the historical contexts. Only after the fall of the house of Hanover in 1866 could the narrative of the «genius whose wings had been clipped by an ignorant court» (p. 191), and the biographical topos of the «travel ban», be established. And only by contextualising Leibniz within his cultural environment, Gädeke suggests in her concluding remarks, does it become clear what was ordinary or particular about his personality, and what relationship he had with the court.

Stephan Luckscheiter provides a detailed survey of the secondary literature on Leibniz's academy project from the 18th century until the present day, with a particular focus on the Berlin academy, the only one to be realized in his lifetime. All in all, he states, research has been concentrating rather on Leibniz's programmes than on their realization (and the possibility and possible implications of this realization), but only the latter approach would satisfactorily «deliver a historical judgment» on the project (p. 244).

Margherita Palumbo deals with Leibniz as a librarian at the courts of Hanover and Wolfenbüttel. Historically, Leibniz's activities as a librarian, the author states, have been both over and underrated, while recent research allows for a more balanced judgement. Leibniz's approach to library classification becomes clearer, and we understand better how deeply his work as a librarian was connected to his network of correspondents.

Matthias Armgardt's contribution on the research on Leibniz's jurisprudence begins only in the 1960s and focuses on the last few decades. The author notes considerable research progress in the fields of logic, civil law, public law, and the relationship to other contemporary philosophical approaches. Desirable, in his view, would be a comprehensive perspective which unites all these fields and their relationship to Leibniz's metaphysics.

Co-editor Friedrich Beiderbeck contributes an extensive chapter on politics, in which he embeds the survey of the secondary literature within his own overview of Leibniz's political writings and actions. Quoting Scheel and Gädeke (p. 297), Beiderbeck characterizes Leibniz's role at the court as that of a «consultant» for juridical and historical questions and observes that the indirect character of his involvement in Hanoverian politics renders his actual influence hard to determine. «It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that some clear traces of his activities can be found» (p. 295). In his political plans, Leibniz had to overcome moments of scepticism on the side of the dynasty: against the law of primogeniture implied by the electoral status, the disinheritance of the Stuart pretenders to the British throne, and the parliamentary system in Britain. The author underlines Leibniz's self-image as a «solicitor-general of the public

good» (p. 198 / *A I*, 18, 377). This approach makes a clear distinction between the public and private sphere impossible (p. 326, with Dreitzel). For Leibniz, therefore, private economy and culture (most of all the language, p. 328) are important aspects of politics. The state has its roots in the natural inclination of humans to offer mutual help as well as in smaller communities such as the family (*A IV*, 3, N. 139); Leibniz's enthusiasm for powerful monarchs as promoters of public welfare "is not necessarily in contradiction to this" (p. 300, with Luckscheiter).

Gerd van den Heuvel's chapter is dedicated to the reception of Leibniz's historiographical work. Until the mid-18th century, Leibniz's successors in the office of the Hanoverian court historiographer worked with the material Leibniz had left behind, while neglecting his universalist approach to history. Paradoxically, therefore, it was precisely the rise of a school of thought more akin to Leibniz's perspective, namely Gatterer's enlightenment historiography, which ended the tradition that began with him in the first place. His work on the *ius publicum* and his source editions, however, continued to be relevant until the late 18th and early 19th century, respectively. It wasn't a coincidence that it was a medievalist and source editor – *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* contributor Pertz – who recognized Leibniz's value as a historian and published his *Annales* for the first time in the 1840s. However, the late 19th century historiographical *Zeitgeist* was not favourable to the reception of historians of the early modern age, and the author sees traces of this attitude for a whole century: From Dilthey and Meinecke to Koselleck (1975), authors who might also have been interested in Leibniz's historiographical work neglected and denied its relevance and focused on Leibniz as a philosopher. The historiographical series V of the Academy edition, accordingly, began as late as 2019.

Cristina Marras contributes a chapter on Leibniz's linguistics work and its reception. While in his own century his views on the German language were widely discussed, the research on Leibniz – apart from a few pioneering studies – discovered the subject matter only in the second half of the 20th century. The author underlines, as decisive research topics, the relationship between language and thought, the study of the role of metaphorical speech, and language history and etymology. In her view, still more research is needed on the relationship between language and politics and on Leibniz's multi-layered philosophical terminology and its functions in different contexts.

Annette Antoine's chapter analyses the reception of Leibniz's poems. In Latin, French, and German, he wrote congratulation, panegyric and religious poems, epigrams, pieces on modern inventions and satires. Unlike other fields of his work, his poems were discussed immediately after his death. While the German-born Duchess of Orléans had praised his German poems but remarked that his French pieces «sentient l'étranger» (p. 403), the early biographers usually preferred the French over the German poems. Since Lessing, scholars have also alluded to the «poetical» qualities of Leibniz's philosophical prose tracts.

Stephan Meier-Oeser first needs to justify the scope of his chapter, Leibniz's «epistemology»: The existence of an «epistemology» in Leibniz has been enthusiastically affirmed by some researchers but denied by others. The most important text in the early reception were the *Meditationes de cognitione, veritate et ideis*. The distinction between *cognitio symbolica* and *intuitiva* – though often with significant semantic changes – was frequently discussed in the Wolffian school and had still not lost its relevance in Cassirer and Husserl's time. While today's debate on Leibniz is characterized more by historical research on Leibniz than by the actual reception of his ideas, the author notes, systematic interests can still be noted in the background. That applies to the «Leibniz renaissance» of the early 20th century, when Couturat, Russell, and Cassirer almost simultaneously published their influential studies, but it also applies to the present, when proponents of a «naturalized theory of mind» (p. 481, with Jorgensen) see Leibniz as one of their philosophical ancestors.

Hanns Peter Neumann deals with the *Theory of Monads and Monadology*. As an example of the reception of the theory of monads, the author presents a debate initiated by the Prussian Academy of Sciences. Both Euler's text against the theory of monads and Plouquet's plea in its favour, the author shows, illustrate a key problem of the interpretation of Leibniz's theory of monads: the question of how bodies can emerge from non-physical simple substances. This same problem, the author continues, is still relevant in the Anglo-American debate of the last few decades on Leibniz's 'idealism', 'realism' or 'phenomenalism'.

Volker Peckhaus dedicates a chapter to Leibniz's contribution to formal logics. In contrast to the topics discussed in the two preceding chapters, the reception of Leibniz's thought in this field started only in the 19th century, most of the relevant texts being published only in Erdmann's and Couturat's editions. Based on Trendelenburg's 1857 analysis, however, fathers of modern mathematical logics such as Frege, Schröder, and Boole could already discuss Leibniz as a significant predecessor to their own approach.

The next chapter deals with the reception of Leibniz's contributions to theology: Ulrich Becker and Hartmut Rudolph begin with a section on the protestant reception of Leibniz, Klaus Unterburger deals with the catholic reception. Mediated by Wolff, Leibniz's emphasis on rational Natural Theology had a strong influence on 18th century theology both in the protestant and the catholic traditions. In Protestantism, the opposition to this approach was one of the few aspects which the antagonistic schools of orthodoxy and pietism had in common: Leibniz, they held, limited God's freedom, ranked rational philosophy higher than divine revelation, and with his doctrine of the «best of the possible worlds» denied the importance of the salvation by Christ. It was precisely these arguments that were so often employed by Leibniz's critics in the 19th and 20th centuries: adherents of the evangelical revival movement, «Luther Renaissance» and Dialectic Theology. Proponents of Liberal Theology, on the other hand, – notably Ernst Troeltsch – followed the enlightenment theologians in their appreciation of Leibniz. The catholic reception, from the 19th century on, was

chiefly interested in Leibniz's commitment to Christian unity. Some authors saw Leibniz as a secret convert to Catholicism or a precursor of their own liberal and ecumenist views, while others criticised him heavily. The emphasis on ecumenism after the Second Vatican Council, Unterburger states, sparked new interest in Leibniz among catholic theologians.

Eberhard Knobloch then gives a summary of the research on Leibniz's contributions to mathematics. Until Gerhardt's 1846 edition, there were no posthumous publications whatsoever; even today, only about 20% of his manuscripts have been published. Many of Leibniz's single mathematical contributions have been evaluated; what is still missing, the author concludes, is a comprehensive profile of Leibniz as a mathematician.

Hartmut Hecht contributes a long chapter (98 pp.) on Leibniz's physics and dynamics and their reception. The few texts that Leibniz published on this matter in his lifetime, the author shows, were indeed able to leave deep traces on the development of modern physics until Planck. A detailed analysis of research contributions on Leibniz's physics from the last half century follows: Leibniz's thought, the author concludes, can still be discussed within the contemporary realm of the philosophy of science. The author then proceeds to other fields of physics Leibniz dealt with: The mechanical paradigm, movement in a resisting medium, breaking resistance, acoustics, celestial mechanics, optics, space, time, and force. Everett even tried to apply his theory of possible worlds to quantum mechanics. A last section is dedicated to Leibniz's contributions to experimental physics. Particularly fruitful for Leibniz's reception until today, the author concludes, is the connections he makes between metaphysics and physics.

Justin E. H. Smith provides a chapter on life sciences. He sketches Leibniz's ideas on medicine and the research done on them, culminating in his own thesis that the concept of organism is the key to understanding Leibniz's system. «Without exaggeration it can be stated that Leibniz during the whole of the 18th and far into the 19th century was seen *first and foremost* as a thinker on biomedicine» (p. 771, original emphasis): While the examples he names (Bourguet, Vallisneri, Bonnet) might not be enough to prove this strong thesis (which the author, a page later, limits to the «specifically French» context), the author has proven in his 2011 monography how fruitful this perspective is.

Friedrich-Wilhelm Wellmer and Jürgen Gottschalk's chapter deals with mining and geology – fields that in Leibniz's intellectual development are closely connected. Ever since the 18th century, the reasons for his failure in the Hartz mining and the validity of his inventions have been discussed. Later generations have often reintroduced his ideas into practical use (in some cases until today), perhaps unaware of the fact that Leibniz had had the same ideas. In geology, as well, Leibniz was in many respects «ahead of his time» (p. 783).

The volume closes with a chapter by co-editor Wenchao Li on Leibniz's public 'image'. Unlike the other chapters, this one focusses not on the scholarly but on the public reception of Leibniz. As early as the 18th century the author observes a patriotic, later nationalistic perspective on Leibniz which found its

climax during the Nazi regime. In 1910, we see Leibniz's skeleton exhumed to permit a «so-called anthropological survey» (p. 801) supposedly confirming his Slavic ancestry. The end of the Second World War and the 1946 tercentenary celebrations, which depicted Leibniz from a humanistic, pan-European perspective, obviously constituted a «cesura» (p. 809, with van den Heuvel) which brought an end to this approach.

The *fil rouge* in many of the chapters is the strong impact that the progress of the edition of Leibniz's huge *Nachlass* – primarily the progress of the Academy edition – has on the development of research: A complete and meticulous edition of the sources is the decisive precondition for deeper insight into Leibniz's multifaceted work.