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Leibniz's Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles

by Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra (review)

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Journal of the History of Philosophy, Volume 53, Number 4, October 2015,
pp. 787-788 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2015.0064>



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My quibbles are few. On the minor side is the absence of an index of quotations from Buridan, which makes it difficult to make full use of Biard's impressive command of the primary sources. More substantive is Biard's tendency merely to reference recent interpretations on controversial topics rather than join in the controversy—which, I suppose, is to be expected in a piece of exegetical scholarship. But there are places where I wish the consequences of Buridan's views had been more fully explored. For example, Buridan states that on the question of the inherence of the human soul in its body, the philosopher should, in the absence of revealed truth, subscribe to the materialist position of Alexander of Aphrodisias. But Buridan himself rejects the Alexandrian position in favor of the immaterialist position of the faith, to which he finds himself still capable of assenting (even though it is less evident to him) because the Alexandrian position is not *absolutely* evident, or such as to make the Christian and Averroist alternatives impossible. I think Biard is right that this argumentative tactic is not to be found elsewhere in Buridan's writings (362), but all the same, as used here it surely impacts what Buridan can say about the science of psychology: on the one hand, if intellectual cognition is continuous with the rest of nature along Alexandrian lines, Buridan should not be so quick to deny higher cognitive powers to brute animals; on the other, if there is a sharp division between human and natural psychology, there is the problem of how the former counts as a natural science. Why should not a human psychology based on faith "slide beyond the field of the scientific," as in the case of rhetoric (223)?

All in all, this book is a significant achievement. It will take its place as a source that must be consulted not only by Buridan scholars, but by anyone studying his influence on late medieval and early modern philosophy.

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Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra. *Leibniz's Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. viii + 215. Cloth, \$65.00.

Leibniz's Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles is both an important and an excellent addition to the literature. The goal of the author is to demonstrate that the principle of identity of indiscernibles is a central but inessential component in Leibniz's thought. To accomplish this task, Rodriguez-Pereyra draws on material from the early 1670s to the end of Leibniz's life, encompassing crucial texts such as the *Confessio Philosophi*, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, and the correspondence with Samuel Clarke, as well as lesser known resources such as Leibniz's letter to the mathematician and physicist Ludovico Casati (which is translated here in its entirety). Remarkably, the depth of the material does not suffer because of the breadth of the analysis.

Due to the brevity of this review, I cannot comment on and summarize the wide-ranging claims made in each of the fifteen chapters from the text. However, the content of the book can be summarized into three sets of major claims made by Rodriguez-Pereyra: the meaning of the identity of indiscernibles, its modal status, and the way in which the principle is connected to other components in Leibniz's metaphysics. I will briefly summarize the content of these three sets of claims.

The principle of identity of indiscernibles states that there cannot be numerically distinct but perfectly similar things. However, over the course of Leibniz's career there is wide disparity about the sorts of things to which the principle applies. It is generally agreed that the principle is supposed to be universally valid, that is, the principle should apply to all entities. However, it is uncontroversial to state that the entities contained in Leibniz's ontology seem to vary at different times and to different audiences. At certain points in his career, he attributes the principle to "substances in general, simple substances or monads, corporeal substances, men, bodies, both organic and inorganic, souls and minds,

and entelechies" (20). Rodriguez-Pereyra does a marvelous job showing how Leibniz's metaphysical commitments at different points in his life change the scope of the principle of identity of indiscernibles.

Perhaps one of the strongest parts of the text is the analysis of the modal status of the principle of identity of indiscernibles. Typically, the principle is taken to be a necessary truth in Leibniz's philosophy because he often derives it from other necessary truths. However, in a move not yet found in the literature, Rodriguez-Pereyra argues that there is a distinction, not argued by Leibniz, between strong and weak necessity, which helps to elucidate the modal status of the principle. In short, the difference between strong and weak necessity amounts to whether we quantify over possible *worlds* or possible *things* (28). Rodriguez-Pereyra claims that Leibniz is never absolutely clear about which proposition he thinks is necessary. He concludes that while there are certain texts that imply that the principle is strongly necessary, the principle is at least weakly necessary.

An additional strength of the text is that in analyzing the historical context and philosophical content of the principle of identity of indiscernibles, Rodriguez-Pereyra also examines how the principle is connected to other crucially important elements in Leibniz's thought such as the principle of sufficient reason and the concept-containment theory of truth. Moreover, the principle is connected to other metaphysical issues that distinguish Leibniz's views from those of his contemporaries. In particular, Rodriguez-Pereyra connects the identity of indiscernibles to Leibniz's broader critique of the Cartesian conception of matter, Clarke's arguments for empty space, and Locke's arguments against innate ideas.

Despite the immense strength of the text, there are two potential weaknesses with the presentation of the material. First, Rodriguez-Pereyra utilizes many of Leibniz's writings, but it is unclear why he chooses to focus on certain texts rather than others. For instance, it is unclear why relatively obscure texts such as the letter to Casati receive an entire chapter's worth of attention, but much more robust texts such as the *New Essays* are only described in passing. Second, while Rodriguez-Pereyra narrows his attention to the identity of indiscernibles alone, there are closely related issues that beg for more analysis. For instance, Rodriguez-Pereyra argues that certain texts eliminate the possibility of two entirely similar individuals, whether or not they belong to the same possible world (66), but he stops short before connecting this to Leibniz's alleged necessitarianism. Since Rodriguez-Pereyra includes connections between the principle and other facets of Leibniz's thought, this is an unfortunate missed opportunity.

Nevertheless, there is much to admire in the thoughtful historical analysis and the compelling interpretations offered by Rodriguez-Pereyra. It is not only superbly argued, but also extremely clear, despite the difficulty of the material. I highly recommended it for both specialists and students trying to grapple with such an immensely important part of Leibniz's metaphysics.

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Courtney D. Fugate. *The Teleology of Reason: A Study of the Structure of Kant's Critical Philosophy*. Kantstudien-Ergänzungshefte, 178. Berlin-Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014. Pp. xvi + 433. Cloth, \$182.00.

No one doubts that Kant is a systematic thinker. He hopes to achieve what he calls unity of the faculty of reason, which has various meanings: reason unifies appearances into a coherent natural system; theoretical and practical reason are the same reason, applied differently; the unity of nature and freedom is demonstrated in the three *Critiques*; all knowledge is related to the ends of human reason, especially the highest good; among other things. In *The Teleology of Reason*, Courtney Fugate claims that Kant achieves systematicity in his philosophy through teleology, and specifically his appeal to the aims of theoretical and practical reason (knowledge and moral perfection, respectively).