

# Review of: "Modern Monads: Leibniz, Continuity, and the Stream of Consciousness"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Leibniz's *Monadology* is a work that Russell compared to a fairy-tale, and it has mesmerised as often as it has repelled. The question arises: did Leibniz ever intend it to be taken seriously? As Russell said later in the *History of Western Philosophy*, there were two Leibnizian philosophies, a public one and a private one: 'one, which he proclaimed, was optimistic, orthodox, fantastic, and shallow; the other, which has been slowly unearthed from his manuscripts by fairly recent editors, was profound, coherent, largely Spinozistic, and amazingly logical.' But on this account the *Monadology* has to be counted as in the latter camp, for it was not made public (though some friends did manage to see drafts) and the whole only came to light after Leibniz's death. These were German and Latin translations from the French draft manuscripts. So is the *Monadology* serious and profound, or is it an optimistic, fantastic fairy-tale of indenumerable non-interacting, indivisible, extensionless minds being coordinated by a unifying monad, God?

If monads are simple then how can any one of them be superior to all of the others; in what does its superiority lie? If the subordinates are different in what does the difference lie? they can't even be differentiated by a difference in spatial position because they are not in space --- space does not exist here. If they do not interact then how would Leibniz even have grounds to postulate more than one of them? And how does God coordinate them without interacting with them? If the monads have some kind of mentality, including changing perceptions --- which are not perceptions at all since they are not perceptions *of* anything --- then how is this change represented in them, since they have no moving parts, because no parts of any kind? Russell concludes 'His philosophy of the empirical world is now only a historical curiosity...'

And yet it is just this part of Leibniz's *Monadology* that the author Edwards in the present article wants to take with the utmost seriousness, and to represent as compatible with modern physics. He is not the only recent author to have this ambition. What we must expect from this is a certain amount of flexibility in the understanding of monads, and also disagreement with Russell's reasons for rejecting the scheme in its totality. His view is that the monads can be identified with particles, and particles are in turn identified with field excitations. On this view consciousness is a component of the very small --- as small as the cellular level. The essence of these reinterpreted monads is that they do interact --- and indeed this interaction, and the mediating forces, is of their essence. But while this is true of elementary particles it is certainly not how Leibniz envisaged his monads.

To make his case more persuasive the author pulls in references to Leibniz's other writings where the concept of a monad doesn't appear, and of course doesn't note those aspects of a monad that contradict his case.

Did Leibniz plagiarise/borrow the idea from other philosophers, such as Anne Conway (Viscountess Conway)? it has been

argued that he might have done. His concept of a monad more resembles hers than it does the neo-Platonist concept --- which it very explicitly contradicts. And, most oddly, Leibniz does *not* use the term monad earlier than 1695, which is three years after Conway's book on the subject was published in english. What Leibniz does, it seems, is wrap an epistemological view derived from Berkeley in the garb of metaphysics, where, all elbows and knees, it hardly fits. Nevertheless many have been attracted to the task of making it fit --- including, I might note, the mathematician Eric Kähler (he who gave his name to Kähler manifolds).

I give the last word to Russell: `... he [Leibniz] had a good philosophy which (after Arnauld's criticisms) he kept to himself, and a bad philosophy which he published with a view to fame and money.' It is still moot into which group the *Monadology* falls.