

**Jeanne Roland, *Leibniz et l'individualité organique*, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, Vrin, 2012, pp. 380, € 36.50, ISBN 978276062268**

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In the same vein as Michel Fichant or François Duchesneau, Jeanne Roland belongs to the French-speaking philosophers who develop a realistic reading of Leibniz's philosophy, as do Pauline Phemister or Justin Smith in the English-speaking literature. In this realistic approach researchers consider that, depending on the expressive relationship they have with monads, physical entities have a different ontological fundament; each physical entity has its own ontological weight, from a rainbow that is a pure phenomenon to an organic body that is, with the monads that sustain it, a real corporeal substance. Thus, in this realistic approach, organic bodies are not phenomena but, with the monads, compose corporeal – or composite – substances. In that sense, Jeanne Roland's belonging to this approach is quite obvious regarding the title of her book, *Leibniz and the "organic individuality"*. Indeed, this concept of "organic individuality" implies there are two things to consider at the same time: (1) the individuality issue that supposes a focus on the metaphysical question of what is an individual and the question of whether an individual may be understood on the *I model*; and (2) the organic issue that strongly links a mechanical explanation of how things work to an organized, structured understanding of matter informed by monadic expression. In other words, speaking of organic individuality supposes a crossover between (1) a metaphysical field – individuality – and (2) an operative concept that harmonizes metaphysical and physical processes. In that sense, speaking of organic individuality invites us to speak of organic bodies because, as Jeanne Roland highlights (p.12), organic bodies are at the same time what permits the individual embodiment and what permits it to be in contact with other individuals.

Thus, in this questioning area, the guiding question that Jeanne Roland asks is: How is corporeal reality permitted to constitute one of the necessary objects of the investigation on substantiality (p.15)? In other words, how is the body issue used in order to clarify what constitutes individuality for Leibniz? With no suspense, we may claim that the full answer is in the

“organic” concept. Indeed, as Jeanne Roland asserts from the Introduction to the Conclusion, the mind/body duality does not work for Leibniz. More precisely, as she notes on p.358, the secondary literature has emphasized that the substantial status of bodies causes problems, but it highlights less that it is not obvious that there are spiritual substances. In other words, the mind/body dichotomy is not useful in Leibniz’s approach; there are only living entities, and those entities are organic. So organicness is the answer to the individuality issue because “organic” includes all the derivative forces which express metaphysical tendencies; “organic” is a corporeal mechanism as much as a perceptive agency expression; thus organicness is always ordered to an individual life (p.358).

Therefore, in other words, corporeal reality constitutes one of the necessary objects of the substantiality issue because bodies that are ontologically founded are organic. Organicness, in comprehending corporeal mechanisms sustained by perceptive agency expression, is symptomatic of Leibniz’s refusal of mind/body dualism and, above all, is symptomatic of Leibniz’s investigation on individuality. In that sense, in being organic, corporeal reality plays a major part in the substantial investigation because it contributes greatly to understanding the individuality issue.

In order to develop her reasoning, Jeanne Roland establishes three parts that match more or less with the chronological development of Leibniz’s thought. In the first part, focusing on the *Discours de Métaphysique* and the correspondence with Arnauld, Jeanne Roland examines how Leibniz’s conceptuality was drawing down and distinguished itself from Descartes’s and Aristotle’s own conceptualities. In the second part, Jeanne Roland studies in detail some passages of *A New System of Nature and The communication of Substances*, of the *Nouveaux Essais*, and correspondence with Lady Masham and Stahl in order to show how the Leibnizian concepts of organicness, organic body and organism were elaborated at the same time as an individuality thinking. Then, in the last part, focusing on the monads and the dominating relationships they imply, Jeanne Roland shows how the kind of anonymity and of subjectivity decentring – very far from the historical personality of the individual substance – that the monads convoke may develop the individuality issue.

Thus, in the first chapter, the general goal is to re-examine the

context in which the concept of individual substance emerges. To do so, Jeanne Roland shows how Leibniz refuses Cartesianism and uses, in adapting for his own thought, the Aristotelian concepts. This conceptual redistribution questions the bodies issue in a new way and, correlatively, sets a new approach to reality. Thus, what is real is in accordance with the phenomenal series in a determined moment, which is coherent and suitable with other past and future events. Correlatively, all that happens results from an individual singular expressive way that founds an individual substance. Therefore, each individual substance develops its expressive content and makes the whole world in harmony with the expressive development of other substances. The complete notion of an individual substance founding its own individuality, and this individuality has to be embodied (p.87). Indeed, the singular existence of an individual substance needs a body with a changing-parts force that permits it to respond to the expressive change. But how does one consider this individual substance's body? How do we understand its divisibility, its multiplicity? Jeanne Roland develops those questions through a very delicate study of the correspondence with Arnauld. It is in this correspondence, in answering Arnauld's questions, that Leibniz begins to think that the corporeal agency has to be organic in order to express properly the perceptive fluctuations, from the more confused to the more distinct one. However, the organic issue is not established and Leibniz has to cope with an individuality model based on (1) the *I model* – and so I centred model – and (2) a body model with qualities – like indestructibility, potentially infinite divisions... – that introduce a decentring model of individuality.

The second chapter opens on those issues, analysing the very details of *A New System of Nature and The communication of Substances*. In particular, Jeanne Roland examines in depth what machines of nature are and the bodily given multitude they imply. This analysis permits her to highlight the fact that the distinct *I model* of the *Discours de métaphysique* does not work anymore; the substantial form is modelled on another kind of unity, on force centres. This new approach justifies the identification of substantial form of force, and this force constitutes a new principle of individuation (p.156). In addition, this fine examination of the machine of nature concept opens with a detailed study of what organic means, depending on the

written context. It is identified a being synonymous of organized; a second matter issue; principles of corporeal substance; what it gives the soul its action means; an expressive figure of individuality; a quality of the living beings' bodies; a quality of the entire creature,... the "organic" concept is depicted through all of the contexts it is used in. This plurality of meaning permits the author to leave the organic concept unclassified – neither metaphysical nor phenomenal – (p.223) and contributes to the complete decentring of individual criteria. However, in a monadological context that achieves the subjective decentring, how can any kind of individuality be determined and what part does organicness play? This is the issue of the last chapter. Jeanne Roland examines in detail the content of the "monadological thesis" – to use Michel Fichant's phrase. This study highlights that the mind/body duality is not perceivable anymore: there are only infinite forms of organic compositions (p.289); in other words, we face an active and living organic world. In that sense, the monadological thesis is deeply organic: organic bodies are the condition for the possibility of monadic expression; organic bodies' composition is adequate for monadic expressive fluctuations; organic bodies are the expressive area of a dominant monad. In this *entr'expression* between the dominant monad and the subordinate ones, each perfection degree is understood as an individual perceptive unity and, in considering that the dominance always works in a composite but never changes the rapports between different beings, the dominance fluctuations correspond to fluctuations in an individual. In other words, individuality is directly related to dominance in a considered organic composition. Finally, in order to examine the relationships between the monadic dominance and the substantial link concept developed in the correspondence with Stahl, Jeanne Roland analyses the indivisibility of the individual composition unity, beyond the corporeal modifications. Thus, all the analyses coincide to conclude that organicness simultaneously adjusts the monadic expression, its corporeal conditions of realisation and its individual condition.

Here, such a concise review does not do justice to the depth of Jeanne Roland's book. Jeanne Roland examines in detail numerous quotations and long passages and those developments are precious references for their exactitude and their precision. Those developments are also highly contextualised and

compared to other interpretative claims. However, maybe this exactness will sometimes prevent the author from getting straight to the point. In a sense, in this book, Jeanne Roland tries to maintain both the detailedness and generality goals of Leibniz's own work. This interpretative subtlety makes this book a reference both for general Leibnizian studies – the book traces the Leibnizian evolution about metaphysics' main issues in full, in relation to specific developments about individuality, personality,... – and for specific studies – such as, for instance, Ohad Nachtomy's work that develops, in particular, the nested individuality concept.

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