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(1600 bis 1770)* by Hanss-Peter Neumann
(Review)

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Monaden im Diskurs. Monas, Monaden, Monadologien (1600 bis 1770) by **Hanss-Peter Neumann (Review)**

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Hanns-Peter Neumann, *Monaden im Diskurs. Monas, Monaden, Monadologien (1600 bis 1770)*. Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa, 37. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2013. Pp. 559. Cloth, €79.00.

In this rich and detailed study, Hanns-Peter Neumann traces the development of the concept of *monad* from Pythagorean thought as interpreted by philosophers and scholars from the early part of the seventeenth century through the writings of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Christian Wolff and concludes with a discussion of late eighteenth-century interpretations of various “monadologies.” To contemporary students of the history of philosophy, of course, monads are most closely associated with the thought of Leibniz. And for obvious reasons: monads are the fundamental beings of the universe in the mature expression of his philosophy; his *Monadology* has become a canonical text in the history of philosophy; and most subsequent philosophers who engaged with the philosophy of Leibniz have focused on the doctrine of monads. But the story of monads—that is, the history of the concept monad—did not begin with Leibniz, nor did it end with him. ‘*Monas*’ or ‘monad’ was, in fact, a relatively common philosophical term throughout the early modern period, which is not to say, however, that it had a consistent connotation for all in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Above all, the notion of a simple metaphysical atom that somehow grounds all being was considered part and parcel of the thought of the most mysterious pre-Socratic figure, Pythagoras. And in eighteenth-century German philosophy especially, monads, as the ultimate metaphysical units of being, were on display in the most influential textbooks in the philosophical curriculum, that is, principally in the writings of Wolff and Alexander Baumgarten. While these philosophers have traditionally been thought to be followers of Leibniz, there are many crucial distinctions between them, especially concerning the nature of monads.

As readers of this journal know, there was a great diversity of philosophical views among philosophers and thinkers in the early modern period, far greater than might be gleaned from the crude presentation of the history of philosophy as being a contest between “rationalists” and “empiricists.” While there were many attempts to reject features of Scholastic thought, there were also attempts to recover various ancient traditions. The Platonist and Neo-Platonist inspirations of the Renaissance did not end there but continued into the early modern period as well. And, as Neumann shows in the first part of his monograph, Pythagoras was also seen as a powerful source of philosophical inspiration, as he was thought to have unified metaphysics, mathematics, physics, cosmology, theology, and ethics in a system. Given that no texts of Pythagoras are extant, this meant that the ideal was known, the details, less so. But it was thought that Pythagoras advocated some kind of system of simple beings, monads, that grounded reality; he was a kind of “religious atomist,” as opposed to the “atheist atomist,” Democritus; such is the view advanced by the (now) best-known sympathizer of Pythagoras, Ralph Cudworth.

Neumann’s presentation of the early modern uses of Pythagoras and Pythagoreanism by Cudworth and others (Johann Christoph Heilbronner, Colin Maclaurin, Gottfried Plouquet) is interesting and extremely helpful. Perhaps more worthy of praise, however, is his analysis in the weighty second part of the book of the nuances inherent in the systems of Leibniz and Wolff and his presentation of the important differences between the two thinkers. While both made monads, simple substances, fundamental in their metaphysical systems, their conceptions of these monads were quite different. This fact was not always obvious at the time, and present-day historians of philosophy often oversimplify the relation between Leibniz and Wolff by repeating the old saw that Wolff merely systematized Leibniz’s thought. For Leibniz, obviously, all monads were essentially mind-like insofar as they were individuated by their representative states. For Wolff, monads were not essentially representative; they were essentially active forces. Now, for Leibniz, the representational activity and forces of simple substances amounted to the same thing, and it is for this reason that his thought is closer to the idealized version of Pythagoras. Even a so-called Wolffian, Andreas Clavius, calls Leibniz “the German *Pythagoras redivivus*.” This second part of the work concludes with two interesting, shorter chapters: one dealing with eighteenth-century interpretations of

Leibniz's *Monadology* by Michael Gottlieb Hansch, Johann Jakob Brucker, and Louis Dutens; the other containing a fascinating account of Andreas Clavius and his heretofore forgotten entry, *Monadologiae Sciographia*, in the Berlin Academy essay competition of 1747 on the nature of monads (thankfully transcribed and contained in the appendix).

Neumann's story is also helpful insofar as he picks up on the social and political features of the Leibniz-Wolff relationship—that is, how each sought to place himself in the Republic of Letters and in the German and European cultural milieu. Indeed, Neumann makes this point even more general: Pythagoras, first, and then the Leibnizian monadology, were instrumentalized by different thinkers. The importance of this argument is that it lifts the history of the *concept* of the monad from the realm of pure philosophical dialectic and situates it also in its human and historical setting.

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Sébastien Charles and Plínio J. Smith, editors. *Scepticism in the Eighteenth Century: Enlightenment, Lumières, Aufklärung*. International Archives of the History of Ideas, 210. Dordrecht: Springer, 2013. Pp. xxvii + 381. Cloth, \$129.00.

This volume is another instance of the enduring influence of Richard Popkin's pioneering work on the history of modern skepticism. Moreover, although he initially maintained that skepticism had a negligible impact on eighteenth-century philosophy, he eventually came to adopt the opposite view. The aim of the collection is to show that skepticism played a more important role in the eighteenth century than is usually thought, either because a number of thinkers adopted a skeptical stance or because the main rationalist systems must be regarded as responses to skeptical challenges. For this reason, the editors (i) criticize Popkin's early judgment and those who still accept it, and (ii) remark repeatedly that the real impact of skepticism on the eighteenth century has begun to be appreciated only recently. Nevertheless, in chapter 1, in which he discusses Popkin's successive views on the influence of skepticism in the Enlightenment, Charles claims that Popkin was mistaken in changing his mind and coming to view the Enlightenment as a skeptical era highly preoccupied with a mitigated form of skepticism. And (ii) is a bit of an exaggeration: suffice it to consider the several works by, for example, Keith Baker, Daniel Breazale, Ezequiel de Olaso, Robert Fogelin, Michael Forster, Giorgio Tonelli, and even Popkin published in the 1970s–90s and cited by the editors themselves. This is not to deny that this volume will broaden our knowledge and deepen our understanding of its topic.

The book consists of five parts in twenty-three chapters, eighteen in English, five in French. Although each has a bibliography, the volume includes a global one. It also contains an *index nominum*, but no *index rerum*. Two positive features are the international provenance of its contributors and that both major and minor figures are discussed. There are a number of typos and infelicities of style. As often happens, the contributions are not of equal value or equally stimulating, but the volume as a whole is a welcome addition to the literature on modern skepticism. Since a reviewer must be selective, I will limit myself to providing an overview of the volume and describing some of the chapters.

Part 1 explores the presence of skepticism in the early eighteenth century. Smith examines Pierre Bayle's skeptical method of antinomy as displayed in his *Dictionary*, contrasting it with that of Sextus Empiricus. Smith makes no mention of secondary literature except for a paper of his, which is unfortunate given the considerable number of valuable recent works dealing with Sextus's Pyrrhonism and with Bayle's not always clear stance on skepticism. Anton Matytsin's chapter analyzes the responses to Bayle's Pyrrhonism by Jean-Pierre de Crousaz and David-Renaud Boullier.

Parts 2–4 address the influence of skepticism on, respectively, British, French, and German philosophy. Part 2 opens with Peter Kail's succinct analysis of the connection between moral skepticism and the moral sense theories of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.