



Divine Machines: Leibniz and the Sciences of Life

Justin E. H. Smith

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Though it did not yet exist as a discrete field of scientific inquiry, biology was at the heart of many of the most important debates in seventeenth-century philosophy. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the work of G. W. Leibniz. In *Divine Machines*, Justin Smith offers the first in-depth examination of Leibniz's deep and complex engagement with the empirical life sciences of his day, in areas as diverse as medicine, physiology, taxonomy, generation theory, and paleontology. He shows how these wide-ranging pursuits were not only central to Leibniz's philosophical interests, but often provided the insights that led to some of his best-known philosophical doctrines.

Presenting the clearest picture yet of the scope of Leibniz's theoretical interest in the life sciences, *Divine Machines* takes seriously the philosopher's own repeated claims that the world must be understood in fundamentally biological terms. Here Smith reveals a thinker who was immersed in the sciences of life, and looked to the living world for answers to vexing metaphysical problems. He casts Leibniz's philosophy in an entirely new light, demonstrating how it radically departed from the prevailing models of mechanical philosophy and had an enduring influence on the history and development of the life sciences. Along the way, Smith provides a fascinating glimpse into early modern debates about the nature and origins of organic life, and into how philosophers such as Leibniz engaged with the scientific dilemmas of their era.

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