

Samuel Clarke, a whole battery of arguments against Newtonian philosophy  
an extent that this controversy has become a classic reference in the history  
entific and philosophical thought.

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During this exchange of letters, Leibniz was writing *Discours sur la théologie  
naturelle des Chinois* (Discourse on the natural theology of the Chinese), also known  
as *Lettre sur la philosophie chinoise* a



philosophy and religion. It was asserted that Chinese philosophy and religion consisted, in the end, of materialism, atheism, or at most idolatry, and therefore it would not be possible to find an equivalent of the Christian concept of God, that is, a God governing the World. In short, it was believed that Chinese concepts reduced everything to matter.

Leibniz is opposed to these dominant opinions. They are the opinions held, for example, by Longobardi and Antoine de Sainte-Marie, whose treatises are criticized throughout the *Discours*.<sup>10</sup> The *Discours* is also a critical reply to a treatise of similar

<sup>11</sup> And finally, the *Discours* should be seen as the culmi-

Leio pinions by Malebranche.



Clarke's response is also placed in this general context; he also criticizes mate-

formula *Deus ex machina*. On the contrary, in the *Discours* he claims that the Chinese escape from this error:

Thus one can even find satisfaction with modern Chinese interpreters, and commend them, since they reduce the governance of Heaven and other things to natural causes and distance themselves from the ignorance of the masses, who seek out supernatural miracles—or rather super-corporeal ones—as well as seek out Spirits like those of a *Deus ex machina*.<sup>28</sup>

The God that Rules without Interposing

As I have said, the Leibniz-Clarke controversy could be characterized as the confrontation between two caricatures of God: the clockmaker God (which is the criti-

defended in the controversy with Clarke.<sup>31</sup> In the Discours Leibniz does not explic-

Matter and Spirit





every portion of matter is animated by a governing principle, and that matter has to be seen inseparably from both sides, active and passive.

It is precisely the active character of matter, the impossibility of separating it

I would imagine that he means to say that the Li is, so to speak, the quintessence, the very life, the power and principle being of things, since he has expressly distinguished the Li of the air from the matter of the air.<sup>50</sup>

There are other similar quotations.<sup>51</sup> The basic idea is that an internal principle (force, Li) is distinguished from matter—even in the case of more subtle matter, like





first edition of 1735; see C. Kortholt, ed.,

sont point sa production. Monsieur Newton, et ses sectateurs, ont encore une forte







5-6 of Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957) accusation aimed at the materialists.

teristic concept of the Confucian tradition. On this base Zhu Xi builds his dialectic of li and qi, this being the latent reference in the Discours. The first



37 – Leibniz affirms this in the controversy: "I don't say that matter and space are the same thing. I only say, there is no space, where there is no matter; and that space in itself is not an absolute reality. Space and matter differ, as time and motion. However, these things, though different, are inseparable" ("Je ne dis point que la matiere et l'espace est la même chose; je dis seulement qu'il n'y a point d'espace où il n'y a point de matiere; et que l'espace en luy même n'est point une realité absolue. L'espace et la matiere différent comme le tems et le

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50 – Discours, § 14:

Je m'imagine qu'il veut dire que le Li est, pour ainsi dire, la quintessence, la vigueur, la force et l'entité principale des choses; puisqu'il a expressément distingué  
de la matie