

**Reply to Ohad Nachtomy**  
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**L**et me begin by thanking Ohad Nachtomy for a stimulating review of our thematic issue on Nicolas de Cues and Leibniz.

I would like to address two points: first, our methodology; second, Nachtomy's very fruitful proposal concerning the development of my main hypothesis about the interpretation of perception.

Nachtomy is correct in saying that we did not intend to establish any causal connections from Cues to Leibniz. It does not, however, result from this that we compare these two powerful systems of thought while abstracting from their historical context. Let me be more precise. When we encounter a profound homology between main metaphysical themes in the philosophies of Cues and Leibniz—what I have in mind here is what we term an expressive ontology, a metaphysics of the infinite, and a strong emphasis on singularity and the relation it upholds to the first principle—, then how are we to explain this? At the outset, we wanted to reconstruct the missing connections between them. We began looking for references to Cues in Leibniz's texts, studying the transmission of Cues's philosophy, and considering the inevitable transformations that Cusian themes would undergo when introduced into the Leibnizian philosophical framework. We embarked on this research with a kind of curiosity and excitement, convinced that we would be able to find a genealogy allowing to explain, in a classical historical way, the reception of Cusean metaphysical themes in Leibnizian context. We quickly present the main results of this approach in the introduction to the issue. The fact is that the text by and about Cues that Leibniz had access to do not suffice to explain the disturbing force of the homology. Taking another point of view, one that I am only too familiar with from work I have done elsewhere, one can then try and follow, genetically, the internal conceptual elaboration of Leibniz's thought. When adopting this method, one can show very precisely when a conceptual network appears and which theoretical problem it is designed to answer. One can situate the place of a concept, the conditions of its appearance, and its function in an economy of thought. That is for example how we can assign a function to the rehabilitation of substantial forms within the particular explanatory framework for bodies that Leibniz has at the end of 1670s, and which is not the same as the one that motivates the introduction of the entelecheia in 1691, which serves to explain the same bodies

but within a different metaphysical framework, namely the dynamic one.

Our interpretive suggestion is, however, quite different from either of these approaches. We wanted to address the homologies suggesting that they are not coincidental, but that they in fact constitute answers to the same metaphysical problem. At the same time we wanted show how, despite the apparent proximity of their thought, this common problem resolved by means of different conceptual agents in Leibniz and Cues. But our comparatism has a historical ambition. Comparing is a means to construct an alternative history of metaphysics. It seems to us that the homology helps discerning the differences better. It allows specifying a real singular approach to an apparent proximity.

The second point I would like to address concerns the fruitful suggestion that I extend further my interpretation of the notion of perception to the “intra-relations that define the very nature of Leibnizian substance,” and particularly that, thanks to dynamical conceptualisation of action, I extend my reading in such a way as to make perception the expression of the level of reality, thus allowing for a better understanding of what Nachtomy himself terms “nested individuals.” It was my point that perception is a means to think, within one and the same theoretical framework, singularity and the expression of perfection. The little difficulty I have with Nachtomy’s stimulating suggestion is the following : I am convinced that action, in a dynamical sense, is the key to explaining the activity of substance as perception. Hence, if “the activity of substances is to be understood not only as perception but also in terms of domination and subordination relations, according the individual’s place within the structure,” then this does not challenge the idea of a dynamical core if we choose to explain substance, on the one hand, through the notion of dynamical action and, on the other hand, through the theme of domination which stresses the hierarchy of substances, or more precisely, the hierarchy “of activating and activated individuals”? I would like to return to the notions of degree of perfection and reality seen in relation to the activity produced by an entelechy.

In my view, Leibniz’s changes in an important way the Aristotelian notion of entelechy, and this transformation relates to the place occupied by perfection. In Aristotle, perfection is in the realization of the thing: the completed action is a perfect action by reason of its very completion. But Leibniz places perfection in the actualization itself. The perfection—a perfection which can receive degrees—is placed in the action itself, as a middle term between active power and completed action. We know the important role that the notion of entelecheia plays in Leibnizian dynamics, beginning with his 1691 letter to Pellisson. From this point of view, it

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is possible to explain the relations of domination and subordination of monads by considering their differences in degree in perfection and their ability to “actualize” the degrees of perfection. Consequently, the degrees of reality can be understood as providing the conditions of intelligibility for relations of domination and subordination of substances.

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