

## Why Simples?: A Reply to Donald Rutherford

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In my essay in the *Leibniz Review* of 2007, I asked why Leibniz holds that reality consists in *simple* substances—what his reasons are for it—and considered two lines of thought by which he might have come to that view, one an extension of what we might call the ‘principles of unity’ argument and the other an extension of the ‘borrowed reality’ argument.<sup>1</sup> Both of these arguments proceed from Leibniz’s analysis of the composition of bodies and arrive, in different ways, at the conclusion that there must be incorporeal simple substances everywhere in matter. I argued that it is the extension of the principles of unity argument that constitutes the actual basis for Leibniz’s doctrine of the simplicity of substance, in that it is both what leads Leibniz to the doctrine and what justifies the doctrine within his metaphysics.

In his new article, Donald Rutherford offers a third, quite different possibility.<sup>2</sup> He proposes that the theory of monads as simple substances owes most of all to Leibniz’s views about soul-body union and pre-established harmony. Like my own account, Rutherford’s is developmental. He sees Leibniz as moving away from a theory that includes composite corporeal substances and to a theory of monads alone in order to resolve a basic tension between the idea that the soul and body together form a substance and the idea that their union consists in nothing more than harmony. Harmony is not sufficient for the “true” or *per se* unity required for substances, and once this is taken fully into account a choice has to be made between irreconcilable elements in Leibniz’s thought. Leibniz’s choice, as Rutherford sees it, is to jettison a commitment to composite, corporeal substances as *per se* unities: there will be only the monads.

In contrast to the more narrowly focused arguments for simples addressed in Levey 2007, Rutherford stresses the holistic character of the support offered to a theory of monads on his reading. An ontology of monads is justified not primarily by a targeted proof of the existence of simple substances as such but by its being the ontology that fits best with the greater constellation of Leibniz’s philosophical and theological commitments. Even more sharply in contrast to my account is Rutherford’s claim that “all along Leibniz recognizes the soul as a substance—and necessarily, given its immateriality, a simple substance” (215). Thus the changes in Leibniz’s position concerning the ontology of substance do not involve adopting a new category of being so much as abandoning an old one.

Is the theory of monads as simple substances derived from the analysis of matter, or is it a result of reconciling ideas about soul-body union and pre-established harmony? Is it something that Leibniz argues for directly from prior principles, or is its support holistic? Those are not necessarily forced choices. Still, the difference between our interpretations is not only a matter of emphasis, and I think reasons can be marshaled for resisting elements of Rutherford's account and for defending my own against some of his objections. Here I shall be mostly concerned with the defenses, offering my main reasons for resisting Rutherford's account only rather briefly at the end of the paper.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. *Reductio* or Conditional Proof?<sup>4</sup>

The principles of unity argument occurs in many texts from about 1679 to 1694 or later. Leibniz uses it to criticize the Cartesian thesis that bodies consist in extension alone. He often sums up the result as a conditional or, equivalently, a dilemma:

Unless there were a soul, i.e. a kind of form, a body would not be a being [*ens*]. (1678-9. A VI,4,1988-9/Ar 233-5)

[I]f there were only matter in body, there would be no reality or perfection in it. (1678-80/1. A VI,4,1399/Ar 247)

Hence it follows that either bodies are mere phenomena, and not real Beings [*Entia*], or there is something other than extension in bodies. (1682-3. A VI,4,1464/Ar 259)

If there were nothing but extension in bodies, there would not be corporeal substances, nothing of which we could say 'Here truly is one substance'. . . .

Thus bodies would be reduced to pure appearances if they had in themselves nothing but extension or multitude, and nothing in which there was a principle of true unity. (1694. G VII,444)

If the argument is sound, one must choose between taking bodies to be mere phenomena and admitting that there is something beyond extension in bodies, i.e. forms or souls. What conclusion does Leibniz draw from this critique?

As I see it, Leibniz intends his analysis of the Cartesian thesis to be coupled with the premise that bodies are substances and not mere phenomena—as he does explicitly in a draft of the 28 November/8 December 1686 letter to Arnauld—and thus to yield a *reductio* of the Cartesian thesis. The Cartesian view of corporeal substance is refuted by being shown to fall into contradiction with the very idea that corporeal substances exist.

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Rutherford interprets Leibniz more modestly as stopping with the conditional or dilemma itself. Leibniz, he says, “is focused on understanding what would have to be the case for such [corporeal] substances to exist” (DR6). In particular, Leibniz is not committing himself to the existence of corporeal substances. When Leibniz makes the argument in the draft letter to Arnauld (G II,71f.), for instance, Rutherford sees Leibniz’s explicit premise that bodies are substances as being “difficult to read as anything more than a concession for the sake of examining what consequences follow from it” (211).

For the purpose of understanding the logic of the argument, it does not matter whether the premise that bodies are substances is an assertion or only a supposition. The critique of the Cartesian thesis is equally sharp whether it is framed as a *reductio* or as a conditional proof in which a Cartesian cannot accept the conditional. Still, I think the evidence is very strong that Leibniz is doing more than just spelling out the consequences of the Cartesian thesis. For in text after text he goes on to assert the existence of incorporeal forms in bodies.<sup>5</sup> The principles of unity argument is being advanced as an argument for forms, and not merely as an analysis of the Cartesian view. When Leibniz argues for the proposition ‘if *p*, then there must be forms in bodies’, or ‘either not *p*, or there must be forms in bodies’, and goes on to claim that there *are* forms in bodies—and to develop that claim at length and across a wide variety of texts—it seems clear that Leibniz is detaching the consequent of the conditional or the disjunct of the dilemma precisely by holding that *p* and drawing the inference.

It is also worth noting that it is characteristic of Leibniz’s style to sum up his arguments modestly as dilemmas in which it is nonetheless clear which horn is to be accepted. In his 1676 dialogue *Pacidius Philalethi*, he has the interlocutors work their way through a Sorites argument for the claim that one becomes rich or poor by the gain or loss of a single penny. The argument is being used to prepare the way for a parallel, more general conclusion that motion and change occur by the addition or subtraction of indivisible units or “minima.” The interlocutors sum up the initial result here:

*Pacidius*: Do you admit, then, that either nobody ever becomes rich or poor, or one can become so by the gain or loss of a single penny?

*Charinus*: I am forced to admit this. (A VI,3,539/Ar 155)

Despite the strangeness of the view Pacidius is promoting, no one is going to accept the alternative that nobody ever becomes rich or poor. Likewise, in the more general case of motion, even when the analysis ends in a dilemma it is not

up for negotiation whether anything moves or changes.<sup>6</sup> “Who would deny it?”, says Charinus (A VI,3,538).

So I think the modesty of Leibniz’s style in framing the principles of unity argument should not lead us to think he means to leave the conditional undischarged or the dilemma in equipoise. It is a lemma in his critique, not his final conclusion. His demonstration of it forces his interlocutors to admit that they face a choice—a choice between his own favored view of bodies and an unacceptable alternative, not a choice between equally live options.

Still, as Rutherford points out, Leibniz puts his premise that bodies are substances cautiously to Arnauld, in the language of supposition. Why the caution? In my view Leibniz is conceding the absence of an epistemically compelling defense of the premise against a kind of skepticism about the external world. He cannot be “certain” that bodies are not “merely true phenomena like the rainbow” (G II,71/M 88). In later passages to Arnauld, Leibniz makes a perhaps different concession: he cannot “declare with absolute certainty” which bodies are substances rather than mere aggregates or machines: perhaps the sun and the moon are not, though perhaps plants and animals are (cf. G II,77, 92). In a similar vein in “On the Present World” (*De mundo praesenti*, 1684-86) he notes,

[I]n most cases it is debatable whether a body is only a machine and conglomeration of parts, or whether it is really endowed with a form or soul.

This is a matter of controversy concerning animals themselves and much more so still concerning plants and stones and metals, but most of all concerning stars and the world as a whole. (A VI,4,1580/Ar 283).

The worry seems not to be about whether any bodies at all are substances, but about how to resolve specific cases; for any given gross body it is open to question whether it is a corporeal substance or only an aggregate.<sup>7</sup> In any case, the remainder of the correspondence with Arnauld as well as the related texts of the surrounding years indicate that Leibniz accepts the premise that there are corporeal substances to be true, epistemic difficulties in settling the extension of the term notwithstanding. The theory of corporeal substances he develops in those writings is not Leibniz’s account of a merely possible world, it’s his account of the actual world. If he cannot claim to have a demonstration of the premise that some bodies are substances, neither is it something that he merely supposes for the sake of examining its consequences. It is an unproved assumption of his inquiry—though one he argues to be presupposed by the idea that there exist any bodies at all—and one that he expects his interlocutors to accept along with him.

## 2. Just What Claim about Bodies is the Premise of the Argument?

Rutherford also raises a second important issue concerning how to understand the principles of unity argument. The view of bodies to which Leibniz says the Cartesian thesis is committed is one that ends up reducing bodies to “mere phenomena.” In order to run the critique of the Cartesian thesis and oppose this reduction of bodies to mere phenomena, however, it may not be necessary to assume that some bodies are substances, but only that bodies are “real” in some weaker sense. And indeed Leibniz often foregoes saying that bodies are substances and instead couches the relevant claims in terms of the “reality” or “being” of body, as is evident in some of the passages quoted above. Are corporeal substances dispensable to the principles of unity argument after all?

Here we can distinguish two questions. The first is how we are to understand the argument itself, or the corresponding version of it, if it proceeds from a weaker claim about the reality of bodies. The second is how Leibniz intends the argument, in particular whether he intends it as carrying the stronger or only the weaker interpretation of bodies as more than mere phenomena.

On the stronger interpretation of the premise, which holds that some bodies are substances, the argument concerns how something with many parts could constitute a single being, a unity *per se*. The difficulty is that every body is divided into smaller bodies, and the material relations that bodies bear to one another seem insufficient to support *per se* unity. If bodies consist in extension alone, there could be nothing in virtue of which a body divided into parts can be a single being. But since every body is so divided, there will then be no body that can truly be called ‘some one thing’—i.e. no body will be a substance, and thus there will be no bodies at all. Therefore if bodies consist of extension alone, they will be mere phenomena. On the other hand, if some bodies are substances, then they must contain something beyond extension in virtue of which they can constitute *per se* unities. This principle of unity for composite beings is a soul or form.

On the weaker interpretation, the argument does not focus on the composition of a bodily substance as ‘some one thing’ despite having many parts. Rather, it concerns only how bodies could be more than mere phenomena despite the fact that every body is divided into parts. The difficulty of the division of bodies into parts has a somewhat different character in this case. No body will qualify as a unity *per se* because of its division into parts, for we are not supposing that an

incorporeal principle of unity for corporeal substances will come to the rescue. Or, more neutrally, it cannot be supposed that any body will qualify as a substance. So the worry now must be that if there is nothing beyond extension in bodies, there will be nothing in them—body or otherwise—that has *per se* unity; and if there is nothing with such unity in bodies, there cannot be any reality in them either. Therefore the source of reality for bodies must be sought outside of extension in incorporeal things that have *per se* unity. These incorporeal things will provide the “substance of” bodies but without necessarily providing corporeal substances. Call these incorporeal things souls or forms. They are what makes bodies real, *either* by unifying some bodies into substances *or* by serving as substances themselves.

So on the stronger reading, to deny that bodies are mere phenomena yields the claim that there are corporeal substances unified by incorporeal substantial forms. The weaker reading does not have this implication, but allows a pair of options: either some bodies are substances with incorporeal forms or there are incorporeal substances in bodies.<sup>8</sup> Does Leibniz intend only the weaker interpretation, arguing for the reality of bodies without meaning also to argue that some bodies are substances and unities *per se*? Again I think the weight of the evidence is clearly in favor of the stronger interpretation. In many of the texts Leibniz is explicit in casting the argument in terms of corporeal substances and not only in terms of the reality of bodies. The texts in which he writes of the “being” of bodies would seem to be implying the *unity* of bodies, given Leibniz’s principle that being and unity are reciprocal (cf. G II,97, G IV,24); and of course unity is the key criterion for substantiality in the context of the argument. Moreover, in virtually all the relevant texts he is expressly promoting a theory of corporeal substances as form-matter compounds. It seems doubtful that his argument intentionally falls short of the thesis he uses it to motivate.

So I think in the texts in which the principles of unity argument is on display, the talk of bodies being more than mere phenomena is intended by Leibniz not as trying out a weaker alternative but as glossing the state of affairs in which there are no corporeal substances with other words.<sup>9</sup> For instance, when the argument occurs in “Specimen of Discoveries of the Admirable Secrets of Nature in General” (*Specimen inventorum*, 1686-88), Leibniz writes:

It also follows either that there are no corporeal substances and bodies are only true or mutually consistent phenomena, such as a rainbow or a perfectly coherent dream; or that in all corporeal substances there is something analogous to the soul, which the ancients called form or species. (A VI,4,1622/Ar 315)

The forced choice here is explicitly between the existence of corporeal substances and the reduction of bodies to mere phenomena. If Leibniz were leaving open a third possibility of the reality of bodies in the absence of corporeal substances, he would be posing a false dilemma in that passage (and some equivalent fallacy in every case in which he presents the argument as a yielding a theory of forms). It seems to me more plausible that in these texts he sees the existence of corporeal substances and the reality of bodies as two sides of the same coin and that the weaker interpretation of the argument is not what he has in mind.

### 3. Two Assumptions about the Corporeal Substance Theory

Rutherford notes that my account of the basis of the doctrine of simple substances depends on (*inter alia*) two assumptions about Leibniz's theory of corporeal substances. First, corporeal substances are composite entities whose bodies are subdivided into further corporeal substances *ad infinitum*; the apparent "resolution of matter into forms" depends upon this scaling structure. Second, souls are not understood as substances in their own right in the initial development of the theory of corporeal substances but only in a later elaboration of the theory; on this depends my claim that the theory of corporeal substances provides the grounds on which Leibniz comes to hold a theory of simple substances. Rutherford challenges both of those assumptions.

#### 3.1 Two Conceptions of Corporeal Substance

The challenge to the first is the prospect of a rival theory of corporeal substances, in Leibniz's thought, according to which they consist of passive and active forces: form is the active force and matter is the passive force. If this analysis drops the idea that corporeal substances are composites with an infinity of parts, then it seems my account of the ontology of simple substances in Leibniz's thought would rest that ontology upon a theory to which Leibniz himself is not deeply committed.

Although Rutherford is right to distinguish these two conceptions of corporeal substance (what he and Brandon Look elsewhere call the 'Composite View' and the 'Unity View'<sup>10</sup>), I think it would be a mistake to consider them as rivals in Leibniz's thought. They develop in tandem in his writings and are put forward together in the texts with no indication that they are regarded as anything other than complementary aspects of a single theory. Rutherford mentions that in at least

one passage, from a letter to Arnauld, Leibniz suggests that he may see the two conceptions as consistent. But the text is not exceptional; it's more like the rule. In fact the very passage Rutherford quotes from *De mundo praesenti* to display the Unity View is followed immediately in the same piece by a statement of the Composite View, in a clear reference to the principles of unity argument:

This substantial form is necessarily found in all corporeal substances, which are one in themselves. So if beasts are not machines, it is necessary for them to have substantial forms, and these are called souls. Other bodies that lack substantial form, on the other hand, are mere aggregates of bodies like a woodpile or a heap of stones. (A VI,3,1508/Ar 287)

The woodpile and the heap of stones are stock examples of the subdivision of matter into parts and hallmarks of the principles of unity argument. The point of saying that beasts must have forms if they are not machines is not to deny that their bodies are subdivided into smaller parts, but to claim that they must have souls in order to be corporeal substances despite this division.

Likewise in the slightly earlier document, "Metaphysical Definitions and Reflections" (1680-1), we find Leibniz laying out both the principles of unity argument that presupposes the Composite View and the idea that form and matter are principles of activity and passivity which is characteristic of the Unity View. After claiming "every body is organic, i.e. actually divided into smaller parts endowed with their own particular motions" and, further, "every body is animate, i.e. has sensation and appetite," Leibniz writes:

For since we have said that body is actually infinitely divided into parts, each of which is agitated with a different motion, and since for the same reason each part is again divided, then certainly if we consider matter alone, no point will be assignable that will remain together with another, nor a moment at which a body will remain identical with itself; and there will never be a reason for saying that a body is a unity over and above a point, and the same for longer than a moment. And since points and moments themselves are not things but bounds, i.e. modes of things, it follows that if there were only matter in body, there would be no reality or perfection in it. But if there were only form in body, there would be nothing changeable and imperfect in it. (A VI,3,1398-9/Ar 245)

And then just a few lines later

*Body* is a substance that can act and be acted upon.

*Matter* is the principle of passion, i.e. of being acted upon.

*Form* is the principle of action. (A VI,3,1399-1400/Ar 247)

We can of course ask whether the two conceptions of corporeal substance are as comfortably integrated as Leibniz seems to take them to be. To identify them as different expressions of the same metaphysical reality is, to say the least, to advance a substantive thesis. But it appears that his idea that form and matter consist in active and passive forces is not understood by Leibniz to be in tension with his commitment to the view of corporeal substances as entities whose bodies are infinitely subdivided into parts. The idea of corporeal substance as a form-matter compound may well change and evolve during the period in which Leibniz promotes it most actively in his writings, say from 1678 to 1694 or so. Yet so far I see no reason to think that it does not always include the Composite View in this same period. In the subsequent years with a theory of simple substances coming sharply into focus—a transition that appears to take place between about 1695 and 1701—Leibniz’s views about composite substance may evolve even further. But by that time, as I see it, the work of the Composite View in driving Leibniz’s ontology is done: it has fixed the premises for a theory of simple substances as the elements of all things in his thought.

### *3.2 Soul as Substance All Along?*

But might Leibniz already have accepted the existence of at least some simple substances as a fixture of his metaphysics from much earlier on? Rutherford argues that for Leibniz the human soul is understood to be a substance in its own right all along. If so, this would cast Leibniz’s philosophical development in quite a different light.

It is strikingly difficult to find Leibniz saying whether the soul is a substance in texts of the “middle years” or earlier. My own inclination is to think that this is because his steadfast support for the thesis that the soul is a substantial form, in the face of the Cartesian alternative, speaks for itself about the status of the soul: it is the form or essence of a substance, but not itself a substance. When later on he thinks the soul is a substance, he says so explicitly. Others might hold, however, that for Leibniz it goes without saying the soul is a substance, even in this earlier period, and so he does not say it. One would like a clearer resolution of the question.

Rutherford presents textual evidence in favor of the view of the soul as a substance, highlighting especially the following passage from Leibniz’s letter to Arnauld of 23 March 1690:

[T]here must be everywhere in the body indivisible substances, which cannot be engendered or corrupted, having something corresponding to souls. That all these substances have always been and will always be united to organic bodies capable of being transformed in various ways. That each of these substances contains in its nature the law by which the series of its operations continues, and all that has happened and will happen to it. That all its actions come from its own depths, except for dependence on God. . . . That the union of soul and body, and even the operation of one substance upon another, consists only of that perfect harmony deliberately set up by the order of the first creation. (G II, 135-6/M 170-1)

Rutherford says of Leibniz’s mention of indivisible substances in the first line that “we can only take those substances to be souls or soul-like entities” (217). I would have said the opposite. Notice that Leibniz describes these indivisible substances not as souls themselves but as ‘having something corresponding to souls’ [*ayant quelque chose de répondant aux âmes*]. This is not what would be said of the soul itself: the soul does not have a soul. A corporeal substance, by contrast, is precisely something that has a soul or something corresponding to a soul. It’s hard to see how else to take Leibniz’s meaning here. The indivisible substances in question are not souls but soul-body compounds.

Still, Rutherford points to the next sentence in the passage, in which Leibniz describes the same substances as always being “united to organic bodies” [*unies à des corps organiques*]. Certainly it would be natural to describe the soul as united to the organic body on Leibniz’s view, and so Rutherford’s reading makes good sense of this piece of the text. But it’s not clear that the only way to take the passage is to interpret the substances in question as souls and not corporeal substances. It is open to a philosopher to distinguish between a substance *x* and *x*’s organic body without adopting a Cartesian view of *x* as a separable soul. If the substance is understood primarily as the subject of a certain functional or causal unity, it can be quite natural to individuate the body by its organization into functional subsystems and then to hold that the substance remains the same through transformations of the body — i.e. changes of shape, changes of motion, turnover of constituent matter, etc. — without allowing that the substance itself could exist apart from an organic body. Aristotle, under certain interpretations, was one such philosopher.<sup>11</sup> Defenders of a corporealist interpretation of Leibniz (of at least this period) will see him as another.

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It should be noted that even on this Aristotelian picture of individual substances, the identity of a substance through change is accounted for by the continued existence of the same soul or form; the soul takes priority in explaining the sameness of substance and so in this respect the soul is tied more closely to the substance than is the body. The soul is the “essence” of the substance in that it is in virtue of the soul, and not the parts of matter in which it is embodied, that the substance is the very individual that it is. This is why, in a phrase that Leibniz uses elsewhere to a somewhat different purpose, the body “belongs to us without, however, being attached to our essence” (A VI,4,1582/AG 64-5). But this is not to say that the substance is nothing but its soul, or strictly speaking only its soul, for the soul has to be incorporated in matter in order to constitute a whole substance (apart, perhaps, from some miraculous activity of God). The substance is thus by its own nature corporeal even if its essence is its incorporeal soul. Turning back to the letter to Arnauld, when Leibniz writes that “these substances have always been and will always be united to organic bodies capable of being transformed in various ways,” it is not so difficult to see this as conforming to the Aristotelian frame rather than presenting a Cartesian (or perhaps Platonic) conception of the soul as an independent being in its own right that is only, as it were, contingently connected to a body at all.

So I don't agree with Rutherford's reading of the passage from the 23 March 1690 letter to Arnauld. The passage strikes me as corroborating a corporeal-substance interpretation rather than implying a soul-as-substance rival. Still, others may read it differently, and perhaps a wiser counsel here would be to find in Leibniz's words unresolved ambiguity or even the expression of competing ideas on the question of whether the soul is a substance. Yet there may be another reason for favoring the corporeal-substance reading of the passage. For it is also worth pointing out the context in which this letter to Arnauld was composed. Leibniz has just completed his Italian journey of 1689-90, and his remarkable, and now often-cited, notes on his conversation with Michelangelo Fardella had been written up only a week before.<sup>12</sup> If the usual dating is to be accepted, Leibniz composed the Fardella memo, in Venice, on 15 March 1690. The brief description of substance, soul and body Leibniz offers subsequently to Arnauld is quite similar to what one finds considered at length in the Fardella memo, and it reflects something of a development from his thoughts in the previous letters to Arnauld. According to the memo, Fardella apparently had pressed Leibniz on the question of how substances are related to matter, and had characterized Leibniz as holding that souls are substances and

that bodies were composed of souls. In response, Leibniz denies both elements of Fardella's characterization: "I do not say that the body is composed of souls, nor that the body is constituted by an aggregate of souls, but that it is constituted by substances. Moreover, the soul, properly and accurately speaking, is not a substance, but a substantial form" (A VI,4,1701/AG 105). So here, at least, we do have a completely explicit text concerning whether the soul is a substance in its own right, and Leibniz unambiguously asserts that it is not. This does not dictate how we are to read the passage in the letter to Arnauld, but it would be surprising, I think, if Leibniz were presenting to Arnauld on March 23 as his "private thoughts" what he had so flatly denied in his own notes on the same question on March 15.

There is, of course, a complication in evaluating Leibniz's views at this moment in time, for as commentators have observed, in notes and emendations made to the Fardella memo Leibniz appears to be articulating an ontology of simple substances. The dating of those changes to the texts is unclear, but it is certainly possible that they represent changes in his ideas about substance that occur between the original composition of the memo and the letter to Arnauld a week later. I suggested in my previous essay that it may be in those very changes that Leibniz is discovering the extension of the principles of unity argument to a thesis about the resolution of matter into forms, and thus into simple substances. If so, it would be less surprising to find signs of a doctrine of simple substances also coming to light in the letter to Arnauld. But if such changes of mind really do start to occur in that week before he writes the letter to Arnauld, then it will also be in order for us to separate the theoretical commitments of the view Leibniz expresses in the letter from those of earlier documents; and in that case the text of the letter to Arnauld will not support an ascription of an ontology of simple substances to Leibniz in prior writings.

### ***3.3 Are the Immortal Minds Substances?***

Yet even if the remarks in the 23 March 1690 letter to Arnauld do not provide strong evidence of a commitment to souls as substances in Leibniz's early or "middle years," one might point to other documents of the same period. Among the passages that are most tempting to read as illustrating such a commitment are those in which Leibniz describes a select class of beings he calls *minds* or *spirits*, to be distinguished from other substances. Minds are capable of self-reflection and memory of a sort that qualifies them for fellowship with God in a way that exceeds the capacities of lower souls. Minds express not merely the state of the whole universe—which

every substance does through its body—but God, and God is not merely their principle, but their prince. Minds alone are “true immortals,” Leibniz says, not only persisting in some form or other but also retaining an understanding of themselves as the same through change forever. This distinction can be found, for example, in several places in the later sections of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* (DM), and in the title for DM 23 Leibniz even uses the term ‘*substances immaterielles*’, though it does not occur in the text that follows, in which he chooses instead to describe his topic as “a return from bodies to immaterial natures [*natures immaterielles*], in particular to minds, and to say something of the means which God uses to enlighten them and act on them” (A VI,4,1566/AG 55).

All by itself the theological distinction between minds and other souls does not impose any specific demand on the theory of substance, but it is notable nonetheless because it so often accompanies Leibniz’s treatment of soul-body union and his thesis of the causal autonomy of substances, i.e. of the pre-established harmony of the states of things. The question of soul-body union appears to be foremost in Leibniz’s thought when he is also focused on the status of the human soul, and so it is unsurprising that these two theology-laden issues tend to come up for discussion together. In a few paragraphs from DM 32, the causal independence of the human soul and its immortality are linked together with the idea that a substance is like a world apart:

We also see that every substance has a perfect spontaneity (which becomes freedom in intelligent substances), that everything that happens to it is a consequence of its idea or of its being, and that nothing determines it, except God alone. And that is why a person of very exalted mind, revered for her saintliness, was in the habit of saying that the soul must often think as if there were nothing but God and itself in the world.

Now, nothing gives us a stronger understanding of immortality than the independence and extent of the soul in question here, which shelters it absolutely from all external things, since the soul alone makes up its whole world and is sufficient to itself with God. And it is as impossible that it should perish without annihilation, as it is that the world (of which it is a perpetual living expression) should destroy itself; hence, it is impossible that the changes in this extended mass called our body should do anything to the soul or that the dissolution of this body should destroy what is indivisible. (A VI,4,1581/AG 64)

If anywhere Leibniz paints a picture of the human soul as a being capable

of existence in its own right, it is in these sorts of descriptions of the soul as autonomous, immortal and in individual communion with God.<sup>13</sup> In a passage in *Specimen inventorum*, there is at least a passing reference to the idea of post-mortem existence of minds “released from the body”:

But minds must be excepted from the fate of other souls, for not only are they created by God, but it is in accordance with divine wisdom that when released from the body they have their own particular operations, so that they are not pointlessly agitated by the countless alterations of matter. For as God is the King of Minds as well as the cause of things, and since he himself is a mind, he cultivates a special fellowship with them. In fact, since every single mind is an expression of the divine image (for it can be said that whereas other substances express the universe more, minds express God more), it is manifest that minds are the most important part of the universe, and everything has been established for their sake. (A VI,3,1624/Ar 318-9)

I see no way to read this except as saying that minds can, and will, exist apart from their bodies, with the natural implication that minds as such are substances. The only question is whether in this respect it is representative of Leibniz’s view of mind and soul all along, or whether it is a departure.

I am inclined to think that it is a departure. Leibniz’s distinction between minds and other souls is most often presented in his writings with all the same theological drapings but without the extra suggestion that minds can exist apart from bodies altogether. In at least some occurrences, the context makes it clear that minds are not conceived as distinct in ontological kind from the souls that are substantial forms of corporeal substances. For instance, in “Conspectus for a little book on physics” (*Conspectus libelli*, 1678-9), the treatment of minds comes directly on the heels of the principles of unity argument for souls as forms of bodies:

Unless there were a soul, i.e. a kind of form, a body would not be a being, since no part of it can be assigned which does not again consist of further parts, and so nothing could be assigned in body which could be called this something or some one thing. That it is the nature of a soul or form to have some perception and appetite, which are passions and actions of the soul, and why; namely, because souls result from God thinking of things, that is, they are imitations of his ideas. All souls are inextinguishable, but precisely those are immortal which are citizens in the Republic of the Universe, i.e. those of which God is not only the Author, but King. For joined to these is a particular kind of reason, these souls are called minds, these never forget themselves, these alone think

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of God, and they have a distinct conception of things. It is foolish to want to attribute perception to man alone, for all things can have some perception in proportion to the measure of their perfection. (A VI,3,1988-9/Ar 233-5)

Minds are a subclass of souls, and souls are forms. The distinction between them is a matter of cognitive ability that yields a distinct psychological, moral and theological class of souls, but not, it seems, a difference in ontological category. Even in passages in which Leibniz stresses the superiority of minds to other souls in far stronger terms, the difference continues to be described in the language of memory and sameness of self rather than separability of the mind from its body; for example, here in “The Origin of Souls and Minds” (1681):

Inssofar as God relates the universe to some particular body and regards the whole of it as if from this body, or what is the same thing, thinks of all the appearances or relations of things to this body considered as immobile, there results from this the substantial form or soul of this body, which is completed by a certain sensation and appetite. For there is in all things a certain sensation and appetite which does not at all detract from the laws of mechanism; for the latter is not so much a cause as an occasion for God’s acting.

Minds, on the other hand, arise when God considers the whole universe not merely as a system of things but as a community of which he is king. So minds differ from souls not merely in perfection but in their whole nature or genus. For God granted minds that they should think about themselves, which gives rise to memory, which brings it about that the mind always remembers itself to be the same thing as before. From this, immortality also follows, for the mind cannot begin to forget itself, and one thought always attracts another. But in souls there is no cause for us to say that they remain the same, although they are distinct from body. For true conservation consists in a sense of one’s conservation, and if this is absent, it is exactly as if I were extinguished, and another person created instead of me; for one cannot be discerned from the other; and so it would have to be regarded as the same. (A VI,3,1460-1/Ar 261)

What comes through clearly in such passages is Leibniz’s commitment to a memory-continuity account of personal identity of the sort that is also on display in the well-known “king of China” text from DM 34. Minds are made extraordinary — immortal citizens of God’s republic — by being centers of reflective psychological experience. Are they also then substances in their own right? Leibniz again gives no signal of intending this further idea. Still, he does not deny it here either.

Perhaps as close to a denial as we find in the texts from this period comes in “Wonders Concerning the Nature of Corporeal Substance” (1683), when Leibniz writes:

Every created thing has matter and form, i.e. is corporeal. Every substance is immortal. Every corporeal substance has a soul. Every soul is immortal. It is probable that every soul, indeed every corporeal substance, has always existed from the beginning of things. A pile or entity by aggregation such as a heap of stones should not be called a corporeal substance but only a phenomenon. ...There are as many souls as there are substantial atoms or [*seu*] corporeal substances. (A VI,3,1466/Ar 265)

If every created thing is corporeal, having both matter and form, it follows that no created substances are minds apart from bodies. The distinction here between ‘substance’ and ‘corporeal substance’, then, separates only God from all the rest, and there is no third category of finite but incorporeal substances for minds on their own to occupy.

In any case, the weight of the texts seems to me to indicate that the passage from *Specimen inventorum* contemplating the soul existing “released from” the body and the few hints of a similar flavor in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*—two documents that are nearly alternative drafts of one another’s content—are outliers rather than canonical examples of Leibniz’s thinking about souls and minds during this period. If minds are elevated from the status of intelligent souls to substances in their own right in the passages from those two documents, and not merely for the sake of hyperbole or superficial conformity to orthodox ideas about the afterlife, it seems not to represent a clear, long-standing commitment on Leibniz’s part.

### ***3.4 Reply to An Argument for Understanding Souls as Substances by Leibniz’s Criteria***

There remains, however, the argument Rutherford proposes—and a similar one by Robert Sleight before him—for regarding souls, or at least human souls, as substances in Leibniz’s account.<sup>14</sup> Souls, Rutherford notes, have assigned to them in Leibniz’s texts “the essential properties of *per se* unity, spontaneity and completeness that he takes to define a substantial nature” (216). If Leibniz does not say in so many words that the soul is a substance, isn’t it enough that he attributes to them the defining characteristics?

In short, no.<sup>15</sup> There is no denying that Leibniz presents the soul as the seat of

those features that constitute the essence of substance on his view, and I have little to add to Rutherford's and Sleight's analyses of those features. I demur from the argument, however, because it appears not to take into account the distinction noted above between the essence or nature of a substance and the substance itself. The soul or form is the essence of an individual substance, and having such a soul or form explains why the substance has precisely those properties that constitute it both as a substance, rather than an aggregate or mere phenomenon, and as the very same individual through time and change. But this does not mean that the human soul is a substance taken on its own and apart from the body, any more than the essence or nature of a horse is something to be regarded as substance in itself apart from the flesh and bones in which it is incorporated.

We should expect the soul to carry all those properties that define substances insofar as they are active, autonomous, enduring unities. It is the principle of unity and action for substances, i.e. that in virtue of which substances have those characteristics. Still, substances, as Leibniz repeatedly says, have both form and matter. "Substantial form, or [*seu*] soul," he writes, "is the principle of unity and of duration, matter is that of multiplicity and change" (A VI,3,1398-9/Ar 245); "*Matter* is the principle of passion, i.e. of being acted upon. *Form* is the principle of action" (A VI,3,1399-1400/Ar 247). Does Leibniz hold, or mean to hold, that a finite being might be a substance without a principle of multiplicity and change, without a principle of passion? Does he hold, or mean to hold, during this period that souls have such material principles even without material bodies? I do not see that he does. In later writings, we find the form-matter distinction being drawn within individual monads, so principles of passion are eventually accommodated within simple substances or souls taken alone (cf. G II,252/AG 177). In the years prior to the fully emerged theory of monads, though, it is far from clear that he has anything like this in mind.

#### **4. Soul-Body Union, Pre-established Harmony and Simplicity of Substance**

Rutherford's own account of the origin of the theory of monads as simple substances in Leibniz's thought is a tempting one. If the union of soul and body is nothing more than a matter of the harmony of their states, it is hard to see how the resulting unity can be anything more than unity *per accidens* rather than unity *per se*, and so hard to see how the composite could truly be a substance. If this is the general model for all form-matter compounds, as it seems to be, the category of corporeal

substance will be hard to defend, and there is much to like in the idea that Leibniz in time comes this same conclusion himself. The worry raised here for the soul-body union is closely akin to what I had called ‘the Construction Problem’, and it is one that Leibniz clearly does entertain at various points, most clearly in a few of his letters to Bartholomew Des Bosses and also, if with more indirection, in his reply to René-Joseph Tournemine in their published exchange in the *Journal de Trévoux*.<sup>16</sup>

When the worry includes the premise that the soul is a simple substance, it is especially clear how a theory of monads alone could arise as a consequence of denying the *per se* unity of any soul-body union founded only in harmony. Once composites are dropped from the field, the soul remains as the only unproblematic case of a (created) substance. The body, by contrast, has already been admitted by Leibniz not to be a substance when taken apart from its soul (cf. G II,73, 75). An ontology of souls, or soul-like simples, is the only remaining option. I have recorded my reservations about the idea that the soul was always a substance for Leibniz, and if indeed he did not take the soul to be a substance all along, the route to a theory of monads from the problem of soul-body union may be less direct than this argument suggests. Nonetheless, it may not be necessary to suppose in advance that the soul is a substance. If the body is admitted not to be a substance apart from the soul, and the union of soul and body is also admitted not to be a substance, we are quickly left with the conclusion that the soul is the only candidate for substance. Thus the argument does not need to assume the substantiality of the soul; it can establish this as a lemma on the way to a theory of souls alone—and thus on the way to a theory of monadic simple substances as the elements of all things.

Perhaps the most dramatically satisfying version of Leibniz’s development along these lines would identify the criticism by Tournemine, published in 1703, as a pivotal moment.<sup>17</sup> In his essay Tournemine puts the difficulty of soul-body union for Leibniz’s account with great clarity. Leibniz’s subsequent response concedes that pre-established harmony can do no more for the union of soul and body than was already accomplished by the Cartesian account (cf. G VI,595f.)—and the deficiency of the latter was something that Leibniz had previously used as a motivation for his own view. In answering Tournemine’s criticism, then, at last the penny drops and Leibniz is led by considerations of his own account of union and pre-established harmony to break away from a theory of corporeal substances and to embrace instead a theory of monads. (Although Rutherford has rightly put the exchange with Tournemine into the spotlight, it should be noted that he does not

commit himself to this dramatic version of events.)

In the abstract, the account makes sense of the move from Leibniz's earlier ontology to his later one. But in a key concrete respect, it turns out to be less satisfying than one would like. For although in time Leibniz does see the worry about the unity of the soul-body union given only harmony, it is not clear that he sees it in time to explain his move to a theory of simple substances. The reply to Tournemine, published in 1708 and probably written in 1706, comes at least five and perhaps as long as fifteen years after Leibniz starts to articulate a doctrine of simple substances existing everywhere in nature. There is likely no definite first moment at which the idea of an ontology of simples hardens into a commitment, and it would be difficult to establish a most preferred date in any case. But very strong hints appear by 1690; some thesis about simple substances is certainly being defended at length by 1695; and very characteristic descriptions of the theory of monads are in play by 1701 or so.<sup>18</sup> Tournemine's challenge comes too late to explain Leibniz's shift to an ontology of simple substances as the elements of all things.

Of course it may be that the penny had dropped for Leibniz about the ontological limits of the soul-body union given his commitment to pre-established harmony well before his exchange with Tournemine. But as yet I do not see the textual basis for holding that the problem of soul-body union was in fact driving Leibniz's metaphysical thought toward the theory of monads at the time he actually adopted it. By contrast, considerations from the analysis of matter—whether about principles of unity or about borrowed reality—are most often directly at hand in the familiar passages in which Leibniz announces the existence of simple substances. Such considerations about matter and the infinite division of bodies appear to be presented explicitly by Leibniz himself as his reasons for favoring an ontology of simple substances, in the few places in which he is explicit, and his engagement with such considerations is clearly active at the times, and in the texts, in which that ontology is being developed and promoted. In any case, if an account giving primacy instead to the problem of soul-body union is to be accepted, an inquiry into its appearance in Leibniz's thought is in order.

It would also be in order to document those texts—however few or many they may be—in which Leibniz clearly appeals to the problem of soul-body union in defense, or support, of his theory of monads. As Rutherford is right to note, even if the problem of union were not the original ground for the theory of monads, it might nonetheless become an important one for Leibniz. It is plausible to read

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a number of statements he makes to Des Bosses as making such an appeal, but they come in letters from 1712 (cf. G II, 438, 444, 517f.), surely well after the theory of monads would have been considered by Leibniz to be still waiting for a solid justification. The later the arrival of the problem of union to his thinking about fundamental ontology, however, the less compelling it will be to assign it an important role in answering the question ‘Why simples?’<sup>19</sup>

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Levey 2007. Here I follow Rutherford's suggestion of the label 'principles of unity argument'.

<sup>2</sup> In this journal: Rutherford 2008b. All unadorned parenthetical page references are to this article. Rutherford develops suggestions he had made earlier in Rutherford 1995: 266-76.

<sup>3</sup> I do not take issue with Rutherford's points about methodology. The divergence in our readings, I think, is due most of all to disagreements about a few, key, local matters of interpretation and not so much to differences over principles of approach, as I hope will become clear from the details of the discussion below.

<sup>4</sup> In this section and the next I am indebted to discussion with Tyler Doggett. He offers nuanced criticism of my reading of the principles of unity argument, as it appears in Levey 2003 and 2007, in his paper "Why Leibniz Thinks Descartes Was Wrong and the Scholastics Were Right" (unpublished).

<sup>5</sup> The passages are too numerous to review in detail; for a sense of Leibniz's adherence to the theory of forms in texts in which he also presents some version of the principles of unity argument, see, for example, *Conspectus libelli* (A,VI,4 N. 365), "Metaphysical Definitions and Reflections" (A,VI,4 N. 267), "Wonders Concerning the Nature of Corporeal Substance" (A,VI,4 N. 279), *De mundo praesenti* (A,VI,4 N. 301), *Specimen inventorum* (A,VI,4 N. 312), and the correspondence with Arnauld.

<sup>6</sup> "*Pacidius*: Therefore we hold that either there is no way for something to become

near properly and of its own accord, or something turn from being not-near to near by the addition or subtraction of a minimum, so that there are minima in reality.” (A VI,3,540/Ar 157)

<sup>7</sup> And not any gross body whatsoever: Leibniz seems to think it beyond question that “man” is a substance, evidently meaning an embodied being; if there are no “animate machines whose soul or substantial form creates substantial unity independent of the external union of contact,” Leibniz says, it will follow that “apart from man there is apparently nothing substantial in the visible world” (G II,77/M 95). Martha Bolton once noted to me the strangeness of the scenario. It is not a duplication of Descartes’s disembodied meditator at the mercy of a deceiving God, for example.

<sup>8</sup> The weaker reading thus allows a claim for the reality of matter as grounded in substances without supposing that any individual bodies are themselves substances. For an interpretation of Leibniz as holding a “body realism” that does not include corporeal substances, see Loftson and Arthur 2006; for a “matter realism” that does not accord reality even to individual bodies as such, see Rutherford 2008a.

<sup>9</sup> I do not mean to deny that Leibniz makes use of a distinction between “substance” and “reality”; he does so in many discussions, especially in later writings. The question is whether that distinction is being put to use in the context of his principles of unity argument to achieve a weaker reading of “not merely phenomena.” I do not think that it is.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Look and Rutherford 2007: xxxviii-xlix.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle’s account of substance is far more developed and nuanced than Leibniz’s, and it is subject to widespread dispute in interpretation; I do not mean to assimilate them too closely. For discussion of matter in the body of a substance, in Aristotle, related to the distinction I draw above, and also for the distinction below between a substance and its essence, cf. Irwin 1988, esp. Chs. 10-13, Gill 1989, esp. Ch. 4, and Whiting 1992.

<sup>12</sup> For discussion of the Fardella memo, see Garber 1985 and 2004; Adams 1994: 274-77; Levey 2007; Rutherford 2008a.

<sup>13</sup> Note the tenor of St. Teresa’s suggestion: “*as if* there were nothing but itself and God.” Leibniz later explicitly characterizes his “world-apart” description as fictional in replying to Bayle’s criticisms: “When I said that the soul would still feel all that it feels now even if there were only it and God in the world, I was only employing a fiction. In order to show that the feelings of the soul are only a consequence of what is already within it, I was imagining something which could

never happen naturally” (G IV,519/WFP 188). The causal independence of the soul’s states from external actions claimed here thus does not automatically amount to the independence of the soul’s existence *per se*.

<sup>14</sup> See Sleigh 1990: 104-110.

<sup>15</sup> The ascription of *per se* unity to the soul might be good support for the claim that for Leibniz the soul is a substance. But does Leibniz ascribe *per se* unity to the soul itself in the relevant period? Rutherford cites a passage from a draft of the letter of 30 April 1687 noted by Sleigh: “I admit that I cannot demonstrate absolutely that there are substances with a true unity other than spirits. It is possible that bodies are only regulated phenomena. But that seems to me scarcely reasonable nor sufficiently in conformity with the perfection of God’s operations” (LBr 78v/Sleigh 1990: 106). Leibniz likely equates spirits with minds, and thus this passage seems to fall into line with a few others, noted above, in which minds are described in ways suggesting they are substances in their own right. It is also reminiscent of his reference in the final version of the same letter to “those substantial forms endowed with a true unity”—a reference he then corrected to read: “those substantial forms or rather those corporeal substances endowed with a true unity” (G II,97/M 122). Even more than the remarks about minds being released from their bodies at death, it is hard to know how to interpret Leibniz’s commitment here, since the suggestion of true unity for spirits is striking both for its difference from his usual presentation and for the fact that he clearly steps back from that suggestion in correcting the final draft. I would take this as evidence of Leibniz following at a few points a certain natural temptation in describing the soul rather than see the evidence as supporting Rutherford’s stronger claim that “Leibniz never wavers in his conviction that spirits or minds are substances” (224, fn. 12).

<sup>16</sup> See Rutherford 1995: 273-76 for discussion of the exchange with Tournemine.

<sup>17</sup> Published as “Conjectures sur l’Union de l’Ame et du Corps,” *Journal de Trévoux*, vol. III (1703), 896f. Leibniz’s reply appeared in vol. VII (1708), 488-91.

<sup>18</sup> See Levey 2007 for details. Daniel Garber, in unpublished work, tracks Leibniz’s development on this point very closely and suggests that the key elements of the later theory of monads as simple substances are expressed already in letters to Sophie from 1700 and 1701; cf. A1.18.113-14 and A1.20.74-75.

<sup>19</sup> My thanks to Ric Arthur, Tyler Doggett, Jeff McDonough, Don Rutherford and Christie Thomas for discussion of various of the topics treated in this paper.