

## Garber's Interpretations of Leibniz on Corporeal Substance in the 'Middle Years'

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### Abstract

In 1985 Daniel Garber published his highly influential paper "Leibniz and the Foundations of Physics: The Middle Years". In two recent articles, Garber returns to these issues with a new position - that we should perhaps conclude that Leibniz did not have a view concerning the ultimate ontology of substance during his middle years. I discuss the viability of this position and consider some more general methodological issues that arise from this discussion.

It is twenty years since Daniel Garber published his highly influential paper "Leibniz and the Foundations of Physics: The Middle Years" (Garber 1985). In that paper Garber advocated an interpretation of Leibniz's views concerning body and substance that has been subject to much discussion and debate. As a result of that discussion, Garber's position has changed somewhat and in two recent articles, "Leibniz and Fardella: Body, Substance and Idealism," (Garber 2004) and "Leibniz and Idealism," (Garber 2005), he has returned to these issues with a fresh and, what I imagine will be, an equally provocative approach. Garber 2004 is partly autobiographical and I'll rely on Garber's account of his own progress when providing my analysis of the debate and the lessons that we can learn from its current state. I'll suggest that some elements in Garber's characterization of the debate may not be entirely accurate and clarification will certainly be one of my aims. But I want to discuss two further issues. As will become clear, a feature of Garber's current position is that we should perhaps conclude that Leibniz did not have a view concerning his ultimate ontology of substance during his middle years. I will be interested in the viability of this position. But I'll also explore some more general methodological issues that arise from Garber's willingness to embrace this kind of agnosticism on Leibniz's behalf (albeit tentatively). Finally, I want to return to an important and perennial aspect of Garber's views on body and corporeal substance that is somewhat downplayed in his most recent articles. I think this deserves greater attention and that such attention may lead to more

interesting results than those which would be precipitated by continuing to focus on the issues that have divided Garber and his opponents up till now.

### **1. Idealism and realism about body and corporeal substance**

At the heart of Garber's conception of the debate over body and substance is a difference of opinion about the extent to which Leibniz's views on the nature of body and substance should be regarded as 'realist' or 'idealist' during his middle years. As a first approximation, Garber suggests that Baumgarten's characterization of idealism as "admitting only spirits in the world" (1739: sec. 402) is one that captures at least some of Leibniz's pronouncements (Garber 2005: 95) - for example, the following famous passage from the correspondence with De Volder: "considering the matter carefully, we must say that there is nothing in things but simple substances, and in them, perception and appetite" (GP II, 282/AG 185). However, Garber notes that there are two important caveats. First, Leibniz's category of simple substances, or monads, includes an infinite number of entities which are so imperfect that no one would want to characterize them as having genuine minds; second, and, more importantly for the current discussion, to use Garber's words:

Though everything, in a sense, reduces to these nonextended entities and their perceptions and appetitions, it is important that they be structured into complexes with dominant and subordinate monads, which structures continue to infinity. (2005: 95)<sup>1</sup>

As Garber presents it, idealism is incompatible with realism, which comes in both a strong and a weak flavor. The common feature of strong and weak realism is their commitment to the existence of corporeal substances which "have a kind of reality that is of the same order" as the reality of simple substances (2004: 134). Garber thinks "there is no question about Leibniz's later interest in idealism" (2004: 138). However, he has been resistant to the idea that Leibniz should be regarded as an idealist in earlier writings, in particular those dating from roughly the time of the correspondence with Antoine Arnauld (i.e., 1686-90).

But although he has been consistently resistant to an idealist interpretation of Leibniz's writings from the middle years, Garber's resistance has taken various forms. In 1985 he favored a strong realist interpretation<sup>2</sup> and in 1996 a weak realist one. Now he appears to have weakened his position still further. Rather than rejecting the claim that Leibniz was an idealist on the grounds that a realist

interpretation is to be preferred, he tentatively attributes a form of agnosticism to Leibniz during this time period. I'll turn to each of these three positions in greater detail next.

## **2. Garber 1985 – the strong realist interpretation**

In Garber 2004 we find a helpful summary of his 1985 view:

I argued that there were two important differences between the picture in the correspondence with Arnauld and the Fardella memo and the later monadology. In the earlier period, I argued, the primary focus of Leibniz's attention was on corporeal substances, while in the later it was on the non-extended monad. Secondly, I argued that in the earlier period, Leibniz accepted something like primary matter, non-mental and distinct from form, while in the later period, even matter is reinterpreted mentalistically. That is, I argued for what I earlier called a strong realist position. (2004: 35)

It is important to note that Garber's 1985 position did not involve the exclusion of monads from Leibniz's ontology during the middle years. It was "a world of both immaterial and corporeal substances" (1985: 62). There were the familiar mind-like substances from Leibniz's mature writings (monads, as he was to call them later) during this period. But there were also combinations of substantial forms and a material principle (that was regarded as distinct from the monads and non-mental in nature) which gave rise to a distinct kind of individual substance that was extended. Furthermore, inanimate bodies were to be regarded as infinite collections of corporeal substances, rather than as collections of monads and the reality of bodies was derived from the substances from which they were composed. In Garber's words:

[W]e find, I think, not a world of souls alone, but a world whose principal inhabitants are corporeal substances understood on an Aristotelian model as unities of form and matter, organisms of a rudimentary sort, big bugs which contain smaller bugs, which contain smaller bugs still, and all the way down. (1985: 29)

The bugs are the "principal" and not the only inhabitants.

### 3. Garber 1996 – the weak realist interpretation

Garber returned to his 1985 position at an Author Meets Critics session during the American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting in 1996. The talk later appeared as part of the “Symposium on Robert Adams’s *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*,” (Garber 1996). In this paper Garber repudiated an important part of his earlier view on the basis of arguments presented in chapters 11-12 of *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*. As a result, Garber had come “to doubt whether Leibniz held anything like Aristotelian primary matter” (2004: 135; see Garber 1996: 95).

Despite the rejection of strong realism, in 1996 Garber wished to maintain something of his former position that he took to be distinctive - namely “that Leibniz did believe in the reality of corporeal substance (and thus the reality of the extended world) in that earlier period in a way in which he seemed to give it up in the later” (2004: 135). He refers to the view that includes this commitment as “weak realism” (2004: 134). As we have seen, *qua* realism, Garber takes weak realism to involve a commitment to the existence of corporeal substances that “have a kind of reality that is of the same order” as the reality of simple substances (ibid.). Unlike strong realism, however, weak realism allows that there is “nothing over and above monads in the world”, but that “certain organized collections of monads” constitute corporeal substances and that “the reality of the world requires these entities as well, even if there is a sense in which these collections can be reduced to monads” (ibid.).

It is important to notice that both strong and weak realism are inconsistent with idealism as Garber characterizes it. For Garber’s idealism precludes ascribing a reality of the same order as that of monads to anything other than monads. If I understand him correctly, it is this latter account of corporeal substances which, in 1996, Garber supposed to be at the heart of the dispute between himself and those whom he took to support an idealist interpretation.

### 4. Garber 2004 and 2005 – the no position interpretation

Garber’s most recent view contains three distinct strands:

- 1) Middle period texts can be read as compatible with either an idealist or a realist conception of body and corporeal substance.

2) This can *perhaps* be explained as a consequence of the fact that Leibniz was not concerned with questions concerning the relationship between monads and corporeal substances.

3) It is “very possible [...] that Leibniz simply did not have a position on the issue of idealism”. (2004: 138)

Up till now, I have managed to avoid considering the arguments that led Garber to adopt his 1985 and 1996 views. But my discussion of Garber's new position – from herein I'll call this the ‘no position interpretation’ - will only make sense if we look at the reasons that have pushed Garber away from construing the middle-years Leibniz as a weak realist.

The positive evidence for Garber's new position is drawn from the first of four pieces which the Akademie editors have published together under the heading *Communicata ex disputationibus cum Fardella* (A VI iv, 1666-71). As Garber notes, the first is dated March 1690 by Leibniz and is connected with a meeting that Leibniz had with Michaelangelo Fardella in Venice. It begins:

I communicated several of my metaphysical thoughts to the Reverend Father Michel Angelo Fardella of the Order of Friars Minor, because I saw that he combined meditation on intellectual things with an understanding of mathematics, and because he pursued truth with great ardor. And so, after he grasped my views, he wrote out certain propositions at home to remember them in order to master what he heard from me, along with objections, which, it so happens, he sent to me for my examination. (A VI iv, 1666/AG 101)

This is followed by three propositions, which seem to be, or at least to represent, Fardella's understanding of some of Leibniz's views. The third, concerned with body and corporeal substance, is the relevant one for Garber. It is accompanied by an objection [*dubium*], presumably Fardella's, and a clarification [*declaratio*] by Leibniz.

Garber's analysis of the third proposition is based on an abbreviated version of the proposition itself and Fardella's objection (A VI iv, 1668-70/AG 103-4). The proposition contains a number of claims. Leibniz is represented as holding that bodies are not substances but aggregates of substances, since they are infinitely divisible. Furthermore, it is said to follow from this that body is not a substance since it contains an infinite number of substances and that there must be substances “over and above body or bodies”. Leibniz is also presented as claiming that unless there were indivisible substances, bodies would not be real, but mere appearances. But this should not be interpreted as the claim that the indivisible substances are

parts of body, rather they are “internal requisites”, as a point is not a part of a line. Finally, Leibniz’s position is said to include the claim that, since he is an indivisible substance, there must be some indivisible substance which persists as his body changes and which is completely different from the nature of body – or in other words, that there must be some “incorporeal, immortal substance in man, over and above the body”.

Next comes Fardella’s objection:

When dealing with a multitude of stones ABC, either stone A or B or C must be understood first. But it is not the same with a soul which, with other souls, does not constitute body. And it seems that there is some difficulty in the argument that, given that there are bodies composed of substances in the world, there must necessarily be something which is a single indivisible substance. Now, this can legitimately be inferred if the unity, as a part of the same sort, intrinsically composed the aggregate. But the substantial unity in question does not intrinsically constitute the aggregate, and is not a portion of it, but is understood to be essentially altogether different from it. How, then, is it required in order for this aggregate to subsist? (A VI iv, 1670/AG 104)

Garber, rightly I think, reads Fardella’s objection as raising a problem for Leibniz’s account of bodies as composed, or, to use Leibniz’s preferred term, ‘aggregated’, from substances and a problem for the argument that Leibniz employs to establish this thesis, i.e., the argument that the existence of a real composite entails the existence of parts which are unities, or “single individual substances”, from which it is composed. Furthermore, Garber contends, again quite rightly to my mind, that the problems arise for Fardella because he assumes that the substances in question are something like Cartesian souls. In particular, the problem arises because he assumes the substances in question are unextended (2004: 130-31). But the case for the no position interpretation relies more on Garber’s analysis of Leibniz’s “clarification”, which includes the following:

I do not say that the body is composed of souls, nor that body is constituted by an aggregate of souls, but that it is constituted by an aggregate of substances. Moreover, the soul, properly and accurately speaking, is not a substance, but a substantial form, or the primitive form existing in substances, the first act, the first active faculty. (A VI iv, 1670/AG 105)

Two aspects of this response are important to Garber’s case. First, Leibniz denies that bodies are composed from souls alone; second he asserts that souls are not

really substances, but substantial forms which exist in substances.

With the textual basis for Garber's 2004-05 position in place, I want to turn to how he thinks it supports each of the three strands. The first of these is that the middle period texts can be read as compatible with either an idealist or a realist conception of body and corporeal substance. The case here is a little complex. One component is the following:

Leibniz's reply to Fardella's objection strongly suggests to me the view that body is made up of something very like Aristotelian substances, souls connected with organic bodies, and that these corporeal substances are basic constituents of his world at that point. (2004: 137)

Here, perhaps surprisingly, we see Garber claiming that his 1985 position provides the most plausible reading of this text. Why does he say this? The answer lies in Garber's understanding of the text as a conversation between two seventeenth century philosophers. He adds:

Fardella was a Cartesian scientist, mathematician, and philosopher, originally educated in scholastic Aristotelianism. Now, when Leibniz says to such a person that "the soul, properly and accurately speaking, is not a substance, but a substantial form, or the primitive form existing in substances, the first act, the first active faculty," this is going to be understood most naturally in terms of a traditionally Aristotelian conception of substance. It is a virtual paraphrase of what one could read in any Aristotelian textbook. (2004: 136)

For Garber, this shared background makes any attempt to understand Leibniz as committed to the view that the soul is a substance in the clarification (the view required on both idealist and weak realist interpretations) problematic in this context. Instead, Garber holds that the talk of souls as substantial forms indicates that Leibniz is committed to corporeal substances construed according to the strong realist interpretation.

The *prima facie* case for the 1985 reading is backed up by another consideration. Garber suggests that Leibniz's clarification contains not just an implicit commitment to corporeal substances, but also an implicit rejection of the view that body is composed solely of monads and not of corporeal substances, or what he has labeled 'idealism'. The reasoning here is as follows:

Fardella seems to present Leibniz with the perfect opportunity to [...] say that there is a strong sense in which body *is* ultimately made up of elements that are mindlike and that there is nothing else in the world. But he didn't. In fact he explicitly *denied* it. Instead, he says, bodies are made up of substances,

and that the souls are not themselves substances, but, instead, just the substantial forms of substances. (2004: 134)

And, for Garber, this missed opportunity is made all the more surprising. As his characterization of Fardella's philosophy reveals (2004: 124-28), Fardella was a philosopher who "had serious doubts about whether there was an external world of bodies" (2004: 136). For Garber, this suggests that "in Fardella [Leibniz] had what was probably as sympathetic an audience as he was likely to find for monadological idealism" (ibid.). He concludes:

[Fardella] gave Leibniz the perfect opportunity to say that there was a real sense in which that [i.e., monadological idealism] was his view. *If*, that is, it was indeed his view. The fact that he didn't take the opportunity suggests to me that this kind of idealism wasn't what was on his mind. (2004: 136-37)

All of the above might lead the casual reader to think that Garber was about to conclude that Leibniz was not an idealist, and, *pace* Garber 1996, should be interpreted as adopting a strong realist position in the Fardella texts. But the first strand in his account makes it clear he does not. Garber continues:

But that isn't to say that Leibniz *wasn't* an idealist at this time, as I have argued on the basis of this and other texts from the period. I think that both Adams and I (and probably a number of other commentators) have made a basic error in reading these texts. It is, I think, wrong to force these texts into an idealist mold. But, I am now inclined to believe, it is equally wrong to see in them a *denial* of the idealist position that he was later to hold. (2004: 137)

Why does Garber resist his earlier dogmatism? The answer to this appears to stem from a recognition that, despite the textual pressure for strong realism above, "Robert Adams offers a different reading of the Fardella notes, one that makes it at the very least consistent with an idealist interpretation" (2004: 135). Thus, Garber appears to concede that he has no way of refuting an alternative interpretation of the texts that runs counter to the strong realist interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

But Garber does not rest here. Rather than placing the blame for this impasse on the fact that we do not have sufficient evidence to determine which of these interpretations is the correct one (or indeed whether there is another interpretation that trumps them both), he argues for a different claim which is embodied in 2) and 3) above. The impasse *might* be due to Leibniz's lack of interest in the kinds of questions that have fuelled the debate between idealist and realist readings. Indeed, our best interpretation of Leibniz's view on this issue may be that he had no view at all during the middle years.



Garber's reasons for advocating 2) and 3) stem from another feature of his understanding of the background to the Leibniz-Fardella exchange. He notes:

Basic to Fardella's Cartesianism was his commitment to Descartes's conception of body as extension. [...] It was to be central to Fardella's exchange with [Matteo] Georgi a few years later. [...] And this, I claim, was what the debate was really about, the nature of body. [...] (2004: 137)

For Garber, the main thrust of Proposition 3 is to establish the claim that body is an aggregate of indivisible substances, rather than Cartesian extended substance. And the alternative that he sketches is simply the view that body is an aggregate of corporeal substances. Nowhere, according to Garber, do we find Leibniz engaging with the question of whether idealism is true. Indeed, Garber observes that this very issue was broached by Fardella, "by raising the possibility that bodies are just aggregates of souls" (2004: 138). But with his talk of substantial forms in the clarification "Leibniz explicitly took it [i.e., that possibility] off the table"(ibid.).

With these considerations in place, Garber is in a position to argue that Leibniz did not have a view about the ultimate nature of corporeal substances. If Leibniz was only interested in showing what was wrong with Cartesian extended substance and establishing that bodies are composed of corporeal substances, then we have another hypothesis when it comes to trying to explain why the full ontological import of the text of the Fardella exchange and others from this period are hard to interpret. It may be because Leibniz never focussed on such issues. Thus for Garber:

[I]n this debate (as in the debate with Arnauld), *it seems very possible to me that Leibniz simply didn't have a position on the issue of idealism.* Or, at least, not a stable position. There is no question about Leibniz's later interest in idealism. An important part of Leibniz's later metaphysics was to establish that in a straightforward sense, all there are in the world is mind-like entities. But it may be very misleading to read Leibniz's later interests (or *our* later interests) in idealism into this earlier conversation. It just may not have been on the agenda. What *was* on the agenda was the Cartesian analysis of body and Leibniz's proposed alternative, that bodies are made up of corporeal substances. That is certainly something very much on both Leibniz's and Fardella's minds. My claim is that this is what the issue was. (2004: 138)

## 5. What can we learn from Garber's progress?

Up to this point, I've been concerned to present the way in which Garber's interpretation of Leibniz's middle-years ontology has evolved in response to a debate that turns around the distinction between a realist and idealist metaphysics of body and corporeal substance. It is, of course, useful to have a sense of how one of the main exponents of Leibniz's metaphysics of nature has changed his conception of Leibniz's philosophy over time. However, there are other, perhaps more important things that emerge from a consideration of Garber 2004 and 2005. As mentioned in the introduction, I want to discuss three things. The first concerns the precise nature of the debate between Garber and his opponents and the second concerns methodological issues connected with suggesting that an historical figure did not have any view about a particular issue. Finally, I want to draw attention to a neglected feature of Garber's position, which he maintained in 1985 and continues to maintain today.

### *5.1 The idealist reading of Leibniz in his middle years*

We have seen that Adams provides the textual basis for Garber's characterization of an idealist reading of Leibniz. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Adams is also presented as a principal exponent of this position. According to Garber, it is Adams's contention that "Leibniz was an idealist throughout his mature career, including in the period in which this note [i.e., the Fardella text] was written" (2004: 134). Thus, Garber sees an opposition between all three of the interpretations that he has adopted (strong realist, weak realism, and no position) and Adams's favored interpretation of Leibniz's middle-years writings.

There can be little doubt that Adams has argued against the strong realist interpretation. Indeed, as we have seen, this part of the debate between Adams and Garber appeared to be resolved in 1996. Here Garber presented himself as having come to doubt, after reading Adams, that Leibniz was committed to mind-independent matter, and, *a fortiori*, corporeal substances construed in the strong realist sense (Garber 1996: 95).<sup>4</sup>

What is less clear to me is that Garber is correct in his characterization of Adams as someone who embraces the idealist interpretation of Leibniz's middle years. Consider the following passage from the introduction to chapter 10 of *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*:

This chapter offers an interpretation of Leibnizian corporeal substances as a metaphysical construction from simple perceiving substances, consistent with the idealistic foundations of his philosophy.

I would not deny, however, that a tension between the idealistic foundations and the accommodation of realism causes problems in Leibniz's theory of corporeal substance. As we shall see in section 5, there is some evidence that such problems may have weakened Leibniz's own adherence to his conception of corporeal substance in his last years, though he never really abandoned it. (Adams 1994: 262)

In this chapter Adams argues that Leibniz was committed to the existence of both monads and corporeal substances throughout his middle and later years, with the reality of corporeal substances explained by appeal to the relations of domination and subordination that obtain between monads. To be sure, there were complications as a result of Leibniz's interchanges with Tournemine and Des Bosses, but, at first glance, Adams appears to favor something much closer to what Garber calls 'weak realism' as the best overall interpretation of the relevant strand in Leibniz's metaphysics.<sup>5</sup>

But there is an added complication here. As I've emphasized, for Garber weak realism differs from idealism in that it precludes ascribing a "reality of the same order" as that of monads to anything other than monads. But nowhere does he explain what this qualification amounts to. If it simply means "having substantial reality", then I find it hard to see why Adams should be regarded as abandoning this commitment on Leibniz's behalf. If it means something stronger than this, then we need some further account. After all, it is clear that Adams thinks that there are differences between the reality of monads and the reality of corporeal substances. Corporeal substances are collections, whereas simple substances are uncomposed, for example. Indeed, there is an ontological asymmetry on the interpretation that he prefers, since God's creation of an infinite number of monads determines the existence of all the corporeal substances in virtue of certain complex relations that obtain between the monads. But surely both of these facts are implicit in Garber's claim that according to weak realism "there is a sense in which these collections can be reduced to monads" (2004: 134).

I'd like further clarification of the difference between weak realism and the view that Leibniz's ontology is one that includes both monads and corporeal substances, but in such a way that the existence of the corporeal substances is determined by, and requires, the existence of the monads. For, although Garber 1996

was clearly opposed to idealists in his sense, it is not clear to me he had any real disagreement with Adams's considered position at this point in time.

One might wonder then whether Garber 1996, the proponent of a weak realist interpretation, had anything other than a straw man as an opponent. However there were other scholars who had directly opposed Garber's strong realism by 1996. It is, therefore, worth investigating the question of whether any of these authors portray Leibniz as one who fits the idealist characterization.

The most obvious candidate is Robert Sleight, to whom Garber himself attributed the view that Leibniz "in his heart [...] actually preferred the monadological [i.e., idealist] view" (1992: 162) during the middle years. But another prominent commentator is likely - namely Donald Rutherford. I'll consider them in turn.

Like Adams, Sleight rejects the strong realist interpretation of Leibniz's middle years writings (1990: 115). But does he embrace Garber's 'idealism'? Sleight's discussion ranges over a number of competing hypotheses regarding Leibniz's ontology. It includes one, which he calls "*The monadological theory*", which is as follows:

The only substances in concreto are soul-like entities – the monads [...]. This is the theory at which Leibniz ultimately arrived. It accommodates the notion of a corporeal substance as a body of a distinguished sort, whose unity is on a firmer footing than that of extended entities that are mere aggregates. But on the monadological theory all bodies, corporeal substances included, are phenomenal in the ontologically weighty sense that truths about them must supervene on facts concerning the properties of monads. [...] So on the monadological theory corporeal substances are substances by courtesy. (1990: 100)

This interpretation sounds an awful lot like Garber's idealism. But, although Sleight's analysis of the Arnauld correspondence and other middle-years texts makes direct reference to the monadological theory, it is less clear that he endorses it.

On the one hand he is prepared to claim that "all things considered, the account of extension offered in the *Discourse* and the correspondence [with Arnauld] is closer to the monadological theory than any version of the corporeal substance theory [i.e., roughly what Garber terms 'strong realism']" (1990: 101); and to claim that "lurking in the background" (1990: 115) of Leibniz's claims about physical reality is the tacit view that there "must be some [...] replacement analysis" in terms which appeal to an ultimate base that is non-physical. But on

the other, when he rejects strong realism as an appropriate interpretation of Leibniz's middle-years position, this does not appear to give way to an explicit endorsement of something like Adams's position. Furthermore, it is accompanied by the following: "The details of the *Monadology* are not to be found here. It is not part of my claim that Leibniz really had the view of the *Monadology* in mind at this time" (1990: 115).

Sleigh's position is not unambiguously clear. However, it seems that he does not confidently embrace either of the realist positions that Garber has set out or Garber's idealism. Indeed, perhaps the most charitable position to ascribe to him is something much closer to Garber 2004. But at the same time, Sleigh's analysis displays a kind of interpretative bias towards idealism or the monadological theory. For it is this account that is presented first and it looms large in the rest of his discussion. On a less charitable reading, one might suggest that it "lurks in the background" for Sleigh in ways that it may not have done for Leibniz and which it would not have done for someone who was unfamiliar with Leibniz's later writings.

For his part, Rutherford is sympathetic to the view that Leibniz embraced idealism in his later years. Thus he is prepared to assert:

[T]he doctrine of monads provides the basis for a powerful reductionist metaphysics, which Leibniz asserts with increasing confidence during the early 1700s. Having arrived at a stable conception of substance as monad, he comes to defend forcefully the view that reality consists solely of monads. (1995: 159)

But what about the middle years? Again, it is difficult to sort out the different strands of Rutherford's account. Rutherford does not say anything that suggests that he agrees with Adams's view that we should embrace something close to Garber's weak realism as an interpretation of Leibniz's views at this time. But, like Sleigh he offers a positive account that seems to contain tensions. On the one hand, Leibniz's statements in the *Discourse* leave Rutherford claiming that: "The safest thing to say is that Leibniz's views concerning the reality of body and corporeal substance do not seem to be fully settled" (1995: 155 n.57). But a few pages later, he suggests that "[Leibniz's] view of corporeal substance in the 1680s seems close to the position he defends in the *Monadology*" (1995: 157), namely the "reductionist theory" that "when Leibniz speaks of 'corporeal substances,' he is ultimately referring to soul-like substantial forms" (*ibid.*).

By the end of this discussion, Rutherford has softened his language a little more, suggesting that the considerations he has raised “have not settled the issue of Leibniz’s commitment to corporeal substance during his middle period” (1995: 158). However, he speaks of the reductionist theory as something Leibniz had “conceived of during his middle period” and as “a strong candidate for Leibniz’s position”. Furthermore, he repeats Sleight’s contention that “the theory is lurking in the background of all [Leibniz’s] statements about corporeal substance during the 1680s” (ibid.).

I can’t claim to have exhausted the list of commentators who have engaged with Garber’s case for reading Leibniz as a strong realist in his middle years. But at least the following seems to be true. Garber’s imagined opponent, Robert Adams, does not fit the characterization of someone who attributed idealism to Leibniz in the middle years. And two more of the most prominent commentators who have attacked the strong realist interpretation have some right to claim that they advance a position that is closer to Garber 2004-05 than an outright attribution of Garber’s idealism. Nonetheless, there is clearly something novel in the approach that we find in Garber’s most recent papers. I think it is fair to say that in Sleight and Rutherford the interpretation of Leibniz as lacking a determinate position is arrived at by default and is an unstated implication of difficulties that they encounter in finding a definitive positive view in the available texts. In contrast, Garber’s recent articles set out to establish this very thesis and in doing so he puts the issue of attributing no position interpretations in Leibniz studies firmly on the map more generally. Just as Garber’s 1985 paper posed challenging questions for those interested in trying to interpret Leibniz’s metaphysics, so does his most recent work. Although, of course, this challenge is of a much different kind.

## ***5.2 Adopting no position interpretations - the Fardella texts and beyond***

As we have seen, Garber 2004 contains three main theses. The first of these is concessive. Garber claims that one can read texts from this period (particularly Leibniz’s exchange with Fardella) as supporting realist and idealist interpretations. The considerations of the previous section suggest that this is not a concession that is actually demanded, since no one (as far as I know) has argued that one ought to read Leibniz as an idealist in Garber’s sense. With this concession removed

there is still a position that is clearly distinct from the ones advocated in Garber 1985 and 1996, the key elements of which are:

A) Difficulties over how to interpret Leibniz's views about his ultimate ontology by reading texts from the middle years may be grounded in the fact that Leibniz was not concerned with such issues.

B) Leibniz may have had no position at all vis à vis the relationship between monads and corporeal substances at this time.

One thing that is obvious from reading the work of all the commentators that I have mentioned is that any interpretation of Leibniz's ontological views during this period will be hard to sustain with absolute conviction. Nor do I think that any of them would disagree with this. Thus, the suggestion in A that there are interpretative difficulties is likely to be uncontentious. But what about Garber's remaining claims – that Leibniz was not interested in the relation between corporeal substances and souls or monads in the Fardella texts and that he may not have had a view about this issue at all during the middle period? Has he really made the case for this and how should we expect the claims to sit with his principal interlocutors? Furthermore, what should we think about this kind of interpretative stance more generally?

In order to answer the first of these questions I want to sketch what I take to be the basic structure of the case that Garber has made. He presents us with a choice between strong realism, weak realism, and idealism. Consideration of the Fardella interchange is taken to provide us with evidence that Leibniz did not embrace idealism (if he had done so, he would have agreed that bodies are composed of souls), and that he seems to be accepting strong realism (since he talks of souls as substantial forms and denies that the souls which partially compose corporeal substances are themselves substances – the latter being a component in both weak realism and idealism). However, Garber does not retreat to his 1985 position. Instead he suggests we should recognize that the interchange has no direct connection with the question of Leibniz's ultimate ontology, that Leibniz may not have been interested in this issue in his middle period, and, furthermore, that his lack of interest may indicate he had no position at all.

One problem with the evidence that Garber has presented so far is that it is based solely on the Fardella interchange. In order to extend the thesis to cover the whole middle period, we would need to be shown that Leibniz's discussion of body and substance in texts such as the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and *Correspondence with Arnauld* are driven by similar interests. I have argued elsewhere

that Leibniz's claims about the divisibility of body in the Arnauld correspondence are primarily connected with his attempt to refute the Cartesian account of body (Lodge 2002). This appears to support Garber's contention. However, the recognition of this fact clearly does not preclude Leibniz having a view at this time which would allow us to ascribe to him a determinate positive stance regarding the ultimate nature of body.

The discussions we find in Rutherford and Sleigh certainly go some way toward remedying this. But I think defenders of a no position interpretation still owe us a more detailed survey of the other texts from this period in order to sustain the hypothesis that the preponderance of evidence speaks in its favor. I don't want to deny that this might be the best way of explaining the relevant texts. But Garber is surely right to be tentative in advocating such a stance on the basis of his current analysis of the Fardella interchange and, more generally, I think the case still remains to be made.

There are also things that Garber's opponents might have to say even in response to the more limited claim that the Fardella exchange may be best explained as a text which reveals Leibniz's disinterest in ultimate ontological questions and agnosticism about their correct resolution. At the risk of belaboring the point, it is clear that Adams would be unmoved by the suggestion that Leibniz was not trying to establish Garber's idealism, since it is his contention that the texts of the period favor something closer to weak realism. But focusing the attention on weak realism raises another problem for Garber's current case for agnosticism based on the Fardella exchange.

As I understand his argument, Garber takes Leibniz's clarification as an anti-idealist statement, because it is an endorsement of the strong realist claim that the soul is a substantial form rather than a substance. But, as I have already observed (see footnote 4), Garber 1996 acknowledged that Adams had produced persuasive arguments against the coherence of a strong realist account of corporeal substance in the texts from this period, in particular the coherence of the notion of a mind-independent matter that is essential to the view. Indeed, his retreat to a weak realist interpretation was based primarily on this consideration. If Garber wishes to claim that strong realism is an admissible interpretation of Leibniz's position in the clarification from the Fardella texts, then we are least owed some account of why he no longer finds Adams's worries about primary matter persuasive.<sup>6</sup>

But I think there are further concerns that could be raised. Garber argues for a strong realist account on the basis that this is the only one which makes conversa-



tional sense. In doing so, he opposes an alternative reading of the passage given by Adams, according to which Leibniz uses the term 'soul' in an idiosyncratic way to indicate the active aspect of a monad (1994: 267-69) - a sense which appears explicitly in later texts (e.g., the letter to De Volder of 20 June, 1703 (GP II, 252/L 530-31)). But it is not clear just how much of a conversation Leibniz was really having when he wrote his clarification. The record of the interchange that we have in the Akademie volume does not indicate that Leibniz ever conveyed his explanations to Fardella. From the earliest stages of his career, Leibniz was prone to writing explanatory notes both on the margins of letters he had received and on other scraps of paper that were never really intended for the eyes of others. Without further evidence to the contrary, we might wonder whether the clarifications were of this kind. And, if they were, they may not carry the kind of conversational implicature that Garber suggests.

If the evidence for the strong realist reading of Fardella were not sufficient to sustain it, what would be left of Garber's new position? There is still the suggestion that Leibniz did not take up the opportunity to show his idealism to the sympathetic Fardella when invited, in that he missed the chance to endorse Fardella's suggestion that bodies are composed of monads. I think the claim is less compelling than it might appear at first glance. For, even if Leibniz had been committed to an idealist account of bodies at this time, this would not have entailed that they were composed of soul-like substances in anything like the sense that Fardella envisages when he uses this terminology. Fardella talks of "intrinsic constitution", by which I take him to mean composition of a kind which entails that all the properties of the thing composed follow solely from the properties of the things from which they are composed. But, it is no part of Leibniz's mature position that a multitude of monads give rise to an extended body simply as a result of their own properties. Certainly in his later years, Leibniz held that extension and its modes are "phenomenal" and depend in part on the way in which the constituents of bodies are represented in the perceptions of other substances. So Leibniz's avoidance of Fardella's suggestion that bodies are composed of something like Cartesian souls need not be seen as an implicit denial of this aspect of idealism.

It seems to me, then that Garber 2004-05 doesn't present an overwhelming case against maintaining a position similar to that of Adams, or for that matter an idealist interpretation. Of course, Garber need not deny this. After all, his ultimate claim is that we should resist treating the text as providing the basis for adopting any interpretative position. But an important part of his *positive* case for

the no position interpretation is that we should have expected Leibniz to display his idealism in the Fardella texts if he had been committed to it. I remain sceptical about the case that has been made for this. So, aside from advancing the no position interpretation as primary, I'm not sure that Garber's recent work gives us much more reason to adopt it than is already available from Sleigh and Rutherford.

What about the attitude we might expect to A and B from Garber's interlocutors? As I have reconstructed the debate so far, Garber only stands in direct opposition to Adams who believes that it is plausible to ascribe something like a weak realist interpretation of corporeal substance to Leibniz during his middle period. The relation to Sleigh and Rutherford is more complex. They seem to share his taste for the no position interpretation but, at the same time, lean toward something like idealism.

How are we to decide between the three camps? One way to begin is to look at the reasons that have been adduced for adopting something like the weak realist interpretation. I've already quoted a passage in which Adams reveals his commitment to this sort of position. But we have yet to see why he subscribes to it. Adams's discussion of Leibniz's views on corporeal substance is rich and complex, drawing on texts from throughout Leibniz's mature writings. However, a close examination reveals that very few of these texts actually come from the middle years. Adams's reconstruction of the account of corporeal substances as collections of monads that are unified by relations of domination and subordination draws primarily on texts from the mid-1690s and later. There is no text from the middle years which is taken to contain an explicit statement of the view that there are corporeal substances that are complex constructions from immaterial substances. Rather it is offered as the best of three competing hypotheses, each of which expresses a positive account of the nature of corporeal substances (see Adams 1994: 262-94). Furthermore, as far as I can tell, Adams does not entertain the proposition that Leibniz may have been agnostic about his fundamental ontology in the middle years. Thus, although it is a weakness of Garber 2004-05 that they contain nothing that directly challenges the case that Adams offers, we appear to have located a vulnerability in Adams's position. Even assuming that Adams provides an account that is consistent with the texts from Leibniz's middle years, and which is the best candidate among the positive views that he considers, this need not mean that it expresses a view that Leibniz himself had entertained. Without

anything close to a direct statement of the view, why suppose it on Leibniz's behalf?

To the extent that Sleight and Rutherford favor ascribing a positive view to Leibniz, they lean toward idealism rather than an Adams-style realism. Thus, there is clearly a question of which, if either, of these hypotheses is best favored by the texts. However, I am more interested here in the relationship between the attribution of a positive view to Leibniz and the attribution of no position. Neither Sleight and Rutherford nor Adams claim to find a clear and direct articulation of the view they ascribe to Leibniz in the texts that they survey. And yet they all appear to find a view that they would argue is explicitly adopted later on in Leibniz's career "lurking behind" earlier, more confusing, and ambiguous statements. One explanation of this may be the extent to which each of these accounts is driven, self-consciously, or otherwise, by the desire to produce the best rational reconstruction of Leibniz's view, given the available texts. Such an approach would lead commentators to focus on trying to articulate what Leibniz should have said about a given issue, or to articulate the best position available to Leibniz given other resources that he had available to him. And to this extent, they might well turn away from the question of what he actually did believe at a given time. Indeed, it might be argued that Garber's opponents go beyond this and assume that something like the best rational reconstruction may well have been in the back of Leibniz's mind, even if he never quite got round to setting it out on paper.

One of the things that Garber 2004 and 2005 succeed in doing, whether the case for the no position interpretation is successful or not, is to drive a clear wedge between the endeavour of providing rational reconstruction and the endeavour of trying to discern the views that a given author would have explicitly endorsed at a given point in time.

Here I think we move towards interesting questions which probably demand greater attention from Leibniz scholars, and indeed historians of philosophy more generally, than they have received. One set of issues surrounds the relative merits of pursuing each of these goals. I don't want to delve into this difficult area much further here. What I want to focus on instead is the third of the questions that I raised above, namely the conditions under which it is acceptable to attribute no determinate position on a given issue to a particular author. The question can be put starkly: Is there anything we can say, in general terms, about when it is reasonable to conclude that the writings of a given author simply do not contain the material we need to answer the questions that we are asking of them? At what

point should we concede that our questions are questions to which a given historical figure could see no answer, or for that matter that the author in question had no view at all about an issue because it was simply never considered when writing a given text?

Whether he is right or not, I think the fact that Garber pushes us to reflect on this issue in connection with Leibniz's middle years makes his most recent position a significant one. It brings an issue which is perhaps more usually discussed in private into the public domain. In a previous paper (Lodge 1998) I found myself unconvinced by the evidence that had been provided for the claim that Leibniz was committed to the pre-established harmony in all but name by 1676, and, furthermore, I thought that the evidence we did have from Leibniz's writings from the period invited the conclusion that Leibniz did not have a worked out position on this question. I'm not interested here in the issue of whether I was right, but in the attempt I made to provide some justification for my own no position interpretation. I want to consider briefly what I took to be sufficient conditions for ascribing the lack of a worked out view to Leibniz in that case and to reflect a little on how they might bear on the dispute between Garber and his opponents.

In arguing that our best option was to treat Leibniz as having no worked out position in connection with the pre-established harmony in 1676 I tried to establish the following: a) that passages presented in favor of Leibniz's commitment to the pre-established harmony were compatible with other contradictory interpretations; b) that there were other views that Leibniz adopted concurrently which appeared to be incompatible with the pre-established harmony; and c) that there was some direct evidence that Leibniz himself considered the writings from this period as worthless (Lodge 1998: 293-304).

Garber 2004 clearly involves something like the first of these, although I have suggested that we are owed a little more before Garber can legitimately claim to have shown that Adams's version of weak realism is merely one of several textually adequate hypotheses. As far as I can tell, there is nothing that looks like b) or c), and it would surely be worth someone's while to consider the texts with these kinds of questions explicitly in mind in order to determine whether they contain the relevant evidence.

However, Garber raises an important consideration that I didn't contemplate. In questioning whether Leibniz was committed to pre-established harmony or not, I never suggested that Leibniz was simply not interested in the issue of how

substantial change should be explained. In the writings from 1676, I found, or at least thought I found, plenty of interest in the question. My claim was that we didn't have grounds to choose one particular answer on Leibniz's behalf. Garber offers us another criterion which may be sufficient for the stance he adopts. He suggests that closer examination of the context surrounding certain texts may reveal that they are addressing concerns which are distinct from those we bring to them, and that in some situations these concerns may preclude reasonable appropriation of such passages in trying to resolve interpretative questions. In the case of the Fardella texts, Garber suggests that Leibniz's interest in refuting the Cartesian conception of body should lead us to question whether these writings have any consequences for our interest in providing an account of his basic ontology in the middle years. I've argued that there is probably more work to be done if this particular claim is to be sustained. However, the general methodological point still stands, I think. And Garber's suggestion - that further interrogation of the context may, in principle, lead us to decide that we were simply looking for answers where no answers are to be found - deserves serious consideration.

But whatever the value of these criteria in my earlier paper and Garber 2004, it is clear that the generalized versions should not be regarded as providing sufficient conditions for the attribution of no position to an author (either individually or jointly). A generalized version of a) may indicate only that the author was not precise enough in distinguishing his views from others, not that he had no view at all on the issue in question. Furthermore, a number of different reasons may underlie this failure. The author may have been unable to distinguish the position from others that occur to us because they were not available or because they never came to mind; or the author may have had a confused conception of the view in question which blurs the distinctions that interest us. A generalized version of b) threatens to be insufficient for similar reasons. It may just be that the author was not clear enough about what his view exactly was; or it may be that the author thought (perhaps mistakenly) that his view was compatible with those other views that appear to us to be incompatible with it. And, of course, an author's reflections on his earlier views need not be taken as a reliable guide to the status that they were accorded at that time. Nor does Garber's additional criterion do the needed work. Clearly, an author's failure to address an issue need not indicate that no view has been taken.

As I've said, I still think that the case for a no position interpretation of Leibniz's views about the ultimate nature of corporeal substance and body during his middle

years still needs to be made. But at the same time, I think that Garber poses a challenge to his opponents which cannot be completely ignored in this particular case. And there is a more significant challenge for all interpreters, one which I've explored to a small degree above - namely to get clearer about the methodological assumptions that differentiate situations in which it is reasonable to assume that a historical figure did not have a determinate view on a particular issue from one in which we are prepared attribute some view or other.

### ***5.3 The claim that bodies are aggregates of corporeal substances***

Before finishing, I want to turn to another feature of Garber 2004 that may deserve greater attention than the issue of whether we should ascribe realism or idealism to Leibniz during his middle years. A recurrent feature of Garber's writings on body and corporeal substance has been his insistence that Leibniz's account of the reality of body relies on the claim that bodies are aggregates of corporeal substances. In doing so, I think that Garber distinguishes himself from his opponents more sharply than he does when discussing Leibniz's basic ontology.

Whilst Adams attributes something like weak realism to Leibniz during his middle years, what his interpretation lacks is a distinctively philosophical explanation for Leibniz's commitment to the reality of substances other than souls at this time. Adams tells us:

I think that Leibniz never had a deep personal commitment to the view that there are corporeal substances, *one per se*. His attempt to find a place for the idea in his philosophy was heteronomous, an accommodation to traditional concerns of others, especially Roman Catholics. (1994: 307)<sup>7</sup>

In his review of Adams, Garber explains the philosophical role of corporeal substances by focussing attention on the contrast that Leibniz draws between his own view and that of the Cartesian atomist, Gerauld de Cordemoy. Garber's main point appears to be that these texts evidence a recognition on Leibniz's part that bodies, *qua* composites, must be composed of indivisible things in order to be real, but that *qua* extended things, they must be composed of things that are extended (1996: 95-100). Indeed, this seems to be precisely the point that Fardella makes in his objection, when he is concerned that bodies could not be composed of souls, since they would not be "parts of the same sort" and would not "intrinsically constitute the aggregate" (A VI iv, 1670/AG 104). As I read Leibniz's pe-

rennial concern with, and *prima facie* commitment to, the category of corporeal substance it is in part as a response to these apparently conflicting demands.<sup>8</sup> But one of the most important lessons that I think we should take away from Garber's attempts to explicate writings such as the Fardella texts is that there may be more to learn more generally about the philosophical importance of corporeal substances than has been hitherto supposed.<sup>9</sup> Rather than wondering whether Leibniz had an explanation of the reality of entities of this kind, perhaps we should devote more attention to the question of why he worked so hard at providing one, and why, in several texts at least, he claims to have been willing to accept their existence on the basis of something like faith if such an explanation could not be found (see GP III, 35; NE 317-18 and 328-29; GP VI, 81/Th 104). It may be that, in the end, the kinds of explanations favored by commentators such as Adams are the most appropriate ones. But, at this point in time, I remain unconvinced that we have exhausted other possible avenues.

## 6. Conclusion

To conclude. I think the importance of Garber's most recent writings on Leibniz is multi-faceted. It provides an opportunity to consider the precise nature of the recent debate between Garber and some of his most vocal critics. Although *prima facie* less prominent than is suggested in Garber 2004 and 2005, the claim that Leibniz had no view about his ultimate ontology during the middle years is both interesting in its own right and points towards important and far more general methodological questions. But it also allows us to focus on an important, and neglected, part of Garber's motivation for pointing toward Leibniz's adherence to the category of corporeal substance. Garber thinks that Leibniz may simply have been uninterested in providing an account of his basic ontology during his middle years – thus advocating a non-philosophical explanation of Leibniz's pronouncements where others have opted for determinate philosophical explanations. But, somewhat ironically, at the same time he insists that the category of corporeal substance is present in Leibniz's middle year writings for philosophical reasons. The importance of this latter claim has, I think, been swamped by other aspects of the debate and it is perhaps time that it is followed up in greater detail.<sup>10</sup>

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*Notes*

<sup>1</sup> In Garber 2004, idealism is characterized as the position that is enshrined in the following quote from Robert Adams: "The most fundamental principle of Leibniz's metaphysics is that "there is nothing in things except simple substances, and in them perception and appetite." It implies that bodies, which are not simple substances, can only be constructed out of simple substances and their properties of perception and appetite [...]. A construction of the whole of reality out of perceiving substances and their perceptions and appetites exemplifies a broadly idealist approach to metaphysics" (1994: 217).

<sup>2</sup> This interpretation is also endorsed several years later in a review of Robert Sleigh's *Leibniz and Arnauld* (Sleigh: 1990) – see Garber (1992, 165).

<sup>3</sup> Garber 2005 reaches a similar conclusion in connection with a passage from *On the Method of Distinguishing Real from Imaginary Phenomena* (A VI iv, 1504), dating from the mid-1680s, in which Leibniz appears to identify matter with aspects of the perceptual states of unextended substances. Here Garber's main aim is to suggest that this passage need not be interpreted as a rejection of mind-independent matter and thus provides no direct support for the contention that Leibniz contemplated idealism. But again his conclusion is just this and does not include the further claim that it must be interpreted in this way (Garber 2005: 100-105). The waters are muddied a little in that Garber 2005 includes the suggestion that the Fardella clarification "seems to exclude a strongly idealistic reading of Leibniz's views in this period" (2005: 106). However, despite its slightly earlier publication date, Garber 2004 contains a much more detailed consideration of the relevant text and case for the no position interpretation. Thus, I take it to represent Garber's current view.

<sup>4</sup> There are some tensions between Garber's claims about prime matter in his 1996 and 2005 papers. In the latter, Garber resists one passage which suggests there is no primary matter of the kind required for strong realism. But it is far from clear that he is repudiating (or at least has done enough to repudiate) his earlier admission that Adams's discussion had convinced him that primary matter should not be construed as the strong realist requires. For, although Adams does make reference to the passage from *On the Method of Distinguishing Real from Imaginary*

*Phenomena* (see 1994: 325), he is explicit that his case does not rest on this single passage. Indeed it rests primarily on an argument to the effect that the *only* thing which could perform the role that primary matter plays is an “intrinsic non-relational property” (1994: 327) and that only candidates in Leibniz’s metaphysics of the time are “qualities of perceptions or tendencies to such qualities” (ibid.).

<sup>5</sup> Adams also entertains what he calls the “qualified monad” interpretation of corporeal substances, according to which corporeal substances are not collections of monads, but “a monad *as having* a body” (1994, 269). However, it is clear from later discussion that he does not think there is genuine evidence for attributing this view to Leibniz. Indeed, Adams suggests that the thesis that corporeal substances have monads as constituents “seems to have been Leibniz’s main conception and may well have been his only conception of corporeal substance” (1994, 292).

<sup>6</sup> Again, it should be remembered that Garber 2005 does not contain a refutation of the positive arguments, but a way of reading Leibniz’s *prima facie* equation of primary matter and aspects of the perceptions of substances which is compatible with strong realism.

<sup>7</sup> For similar claims, see Sleight (1990: 106) and Rutherford (1995: 265-82). It should be noted that central to Rutherford’s view is the claim that one cannot make sense of Leibniz’s metaphysics without appeal to embodied monads. But he denies that this requires the existence of corporeal substances in a strict sense (see 1995: 193ff. and 217ff.).

<sup>8</sup> See Hartz (1998: 196) for details of Leibniz’s use of this category throughout his career.

<sup>9</sup> My own view is that there may be another philosophical motivation that has not been explored fully enough, namely that, for Leibniz, cognition of the created universe by finite minds requires the cognition of corporeal substances. However, it would go far beyond the scope of the current paper to develop the details of this account. Also see Smith (2003) for another, not completely unrelated, attempt to give the category of corporeal substance stronger philosophical credentials.

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