

Leibniz: Nature and Freedom, ed. Donald Rutherford and J. A. Cover, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. 265.

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Donald Rutherford and Jan Cover have put together an excellent volume of essays on Leibniz. Cover and Rutherford begin the volume with a clear and informative introduction, that should serve the less initiated extremely well. They explain the developments of Leibniz scholarship over the course of the twentieth century: the early twentieth century saw a focus on logic, truth and closely connected issues sparked by Russell and Couturat. In the second half of the century the scholarship changed course: issues central to metaphysics and theology became prominent in Leibniz scholarship. Furthermore, in the last 30 years or so, Leibniz scholarship has exemplified a more historical turn in history of philosophy in the English-speaking world. Scholars started to look at the historical background of Leibniz's thought, and take an interest in the development of Leibniz's thought over time, and in his very early work, where his thought seems to be quite different from the later, more familiar writings. The present volume exemplifies these newer tendencies.

The editors provide clear descriptions of the different articles, and so I shall be brief in this regard. The volume begins with papers by Kulstad and Mercer that focus on issues of unity and multiplicity in the early Leibniz. In "The One and the Many and Kinds of Distinctness" Kulstad takes on the question whether Leibniz at any point was a Spinozist monist. In doing so he employs a variety of types of distinctions to illuminate the question and argues that there is a sense in which Leibniz did at one point defend a version of monism and pantheism. Mercer takes up a puzzling issue addressed by Sleight regarding the Leibniz-Arnauld correspondence: in a corporeal substance, how does the substantial form generate the kind of unity that ought to characterize the corporeal substance? Mercer offers a Platonic solution that she finds in the early Leibniz, but considers relevant to the later years. I will return to her proposal below.

There has been much controversy whether Leibniz was an idealist already during his middle years, around 1680-1700; that is to say, whether he believed already that only soul-like entities, what in the later years he called monads, are ultimately real. He often spoke of corporeal substances during this time, and in

particular Daniel Garber set off a lively and rich debate on this issue. Garber argued that during these years Leibniz was not an idealist, but an Aristotelian hylomorphist — Leibniz believed in substances that are composites of body or matter and form. Others, such as Robert Sleigh and Robert Adams, have taken the position that ultimately Leibniz's position in these years reduces to idealism.

This debate is taken up by Samuel Levey who argues that arguments against the reality of shape or motion in Leibniz should not be taken to count against the reality of body. Rather these arguments push for a deeper analysis of the features in question, and thus of body. Garber takes up the debate again and argues that an idealist interpretation relies on importing the later monadological view into the middle years without explicit textual evidence. Indeed, the issue should be settled on the basis of the texts of the period itself, and arguments on that score abound in the literature. Garber claims that there is no clear evidence for either interpretation. He suggests that idealism was not on Leibniz's mind, rather Leibniz was focused on the critique of the Cartesian conception of body. Leibniz should not be seen as having a settled position on the issue in this period.

Catherine Wilson and Nicholas Jolley are concerned with the pre-established harmony. Wilson sorts through a puzzle that Sleigh had raised about the relations between compossibility, expression, and accommodation. Sleigh had been troubled by Leibniz seeming to suggest that these notions entail each other. Wilson argues that while compossibility and expression characterize any Leibnizian world, accommodation only characterizes some. Jolley sorts through Leibniz's arguments for pre-established harmony as superior to occasionalism. Jolley argues that at bottom the disagreement between Leibniz and Malebranche comes down to a disagreement about what is most fundamental: laws of nature or causal powers. Leibniz's rejection of occasionalism is ultimately rooted in his view that laws of nature must be grounded in real causal powers, meaning real causal powers of creatures.

This is an interesting angle on the issue. But I can't resist noting that at least as important is their disagreement about what really does justice to God's greatness: Malebranche thinks that we must locate all causal powers in God, or else we risk idolatry, including rendering excessive honor to leeks and onions: instead he recommends "*solī Deo honor et gloria*", (*Search after Truth*, Bk VI. Pt 2, Ch. 3). A stark contrast indeed. Leibniz, on the contrary, contends that it makes no sense to think that God decides that the world shall be a certain way without this decision having an effect, which, he thinks, consists in creatures with genuine causal

powers: “It contradicts the notion of that pure and absolute divine power and will to suppose that God wills and yet produces or changes nothing through willing, to suppose that he always acts but never accomplishes anything and leaves behind no work or accomplishment at all” (*On Nature Itself*, G IV 507/AG 158).

Jonathan Bennett explores the notion of teleology. Guided by his view that teleological explanation requires a “pattern of teleological behavior” Bennett argues that in the end there is little real teleology to be found in Leibniz. The exception is reason, which for Leibniz has both a cognitive and a conative function. The theme of teleology returns in several of the remaining essays which are all about Leibniz’s conception of will and freedom. Rutherford explores Leibniz’s conception of spontaneity, one of the requirements for freedom for Leibniz. All monads have spontaneity, in the sense that they all produce their own states and are not constrained by external sources. But this notion is too broad to support freedom. Rutherford singles out a notion of “agent spontaneity” in Leibniz and argues that both notions of spontaneity are important for his conception of free will.

Robert Adams and Michael Murray discuss the notion of moral necessity, a notion that for Leibniz is compatible with free will, indeed, he insists that both human and divine free choices are morally necessitated. In earlier work Murray had forced a reexamination of this notion of moral necessity arguing that among the Spanish Jesuits this notion was applied to free choices but left room for indeterminism. Adams and Murray disagree about whether the same goes for Leibniz’s use of the notion. Adams holds that free choices for Leibniz are fully determined by what the agent judges best. Moral necessity is distinguished from metaphysical necessity; the former falls under Leibniz’s account of contingency as hypothetical necessity. For Leibniz what mattered, according to Adams, is not an absence of full determination. Leibniz cares about the *type* of determination: choices are determined by values, and so not subject to blind, value-free necessity. Murray thinks that Leibniz does want to deny full determinism. He agrees with Adams that moral necessity should be understood teleologically. Again drawing on the Spanish Jesuit background as well as Leibniz’s attempt to give human freedom some independence from divine determination he defends an anti-compatibilist strain in Leibniz’s thought.

Finally, Sean Greenberg and Jack Davidson focus on the role of intelligence in Leibniz’s account of freedom. Greenberg discusses Leibniz’s rejection of the indifference of the will advocated by the Molinists. Leibniz has usually been

seen as rejecting it on the ground of the Principle of Sufficient Reason: the Molinist allows for a choice that does not have a sufficient reason. Greenberg argues, however, that Leibniz's rejection is really based on a different conception of the will, according to which it is not sufficiently independent, it lacks the capacity for self-determination that the Molinist will has. Davidson addresses Leibniz's intellectualism about sin: sin is always the result of error. He argues that the early Leibniz had a strong version of this theory: error alone explains sin. Later he held that error is always at play, but also grants a role to the passions.

I wish to return to two issues: the unity of substance and teleology. Leibniz was committed to the traditional view that substances have genuine, or *per se* unity, and this commitment was quite central in his thought. The question of substantial unity bears on the controversy about whether in his middle years Leibniz believed in full-blown corporeal substances not reducible to monads. Given his strong commitment to substantial unity, it is important to ask how Leibniz thought he could account for the *per se* unity of corporeal substances in his middle years. Monads, or in his middle years, their ancestors, substantial forms, have such unity by being simple. Corporeal substances are composites of substantial form and body. Leibniz designates the substantial form as the source of unity in addition to being an *unum per se*, but how does the substantial form generate the required unity with body?

It is natural to look for an Aristotelian answer to this question, given the Aristotelian origins of the notion of substantial form. Mercer, however, seeks it in Leibniz's Platonic background and Platonism in his early writings. She describes how the young Leibniz accounted for substantial unity of a soul-body composite in virtue of the soul acting on the body by a type of act that is a form of emanation, which results in a "hypostatic union". The paper does not fully explain the type of action at issue (one illumination is that it involves organization of the body as in an organism),¹ or how it results in real unity. Several further questions arise: Mercer writes that the young Leibniz also describes this act as exercised by God on minds. There is the risk that the same type of unity then arises for God and minds, which would yield the surprising result that God and minds form *per se* unities. Mercer appropriately indicates that more work is needed to argue that this account applies to the middle years. Indeed, during the middle years Leibniz analyzes body-soul interaction in terms of the pre-established harmony rather than the kind of emanation Mercer describes, thus making it less likely that emanation is the source of substantial unity at this time.

The question of unity suffers from a certain elusiveness. Leibniz contrasts genuine unities with mere aggregates, monads are genuine unities because they are simple. But what criteria could a composite entity satisfy to qualify as an *unum per se*? Furthermore, there are rather different kinds of solutions that emerge from Leibniz's writings: he toys with the idea of the *vinculum substantiale* in his later years — an account where something would be added to the candidates for union. This is rather different from features of the components doing the job, as in the view Mercer discusses, or as in regular old hylomorphism, where form and matter complement each other as act and potency, or are both incomplete in the right way, such that — in Aquinas's version of this view, but not other versions — they participate in one single act of existence. The pre-established harmony is an obvious candidate, but it is hard to see how for a philosopher who insists so on genuine unity a mere harmony of states could elevate two entities from being a mere aggregate to a genuine unity. Indeed, as I understand him, Leibniz himself denied in a letter to Tournemine that the harmony can accomplish this (G VI 595-596/AG 196-196). In my view for Leibniz pre-established harmony accounts for union as it concerns (apparent) body-soul interaction, but not the status of an *unum per se*.

An issue that turns up in several of the other papers is the question of teleology. Leibniz declared at *Monadology* 79:

Souls act according to the laws of final causes by appetitions, ends and means. Bodies act according to the laws of efficient causes or of motions. And the two kingdoms [*regnes*], that of efficient causes and that of final causes, are harmonious with each other.

This suggests a strict separation of the realm of efficient causes from the realm of final causes. The separation of the causal realms plays a role in Adams' account of why moral necessity of our choices is acceptable for Leibniz without generating indeterminacy: what Leibniz rejects, he argues, is blind necessity, valueless necessity. But what occurs in monads is not subject to blind necessity, since the states of monads are governed by values, it's the realm of teleology. Furthermore, the final causality that governs the states of monads is fundamental, it's not reducible to any other mechanism.

I find this convincing as a response to the issue about determinism. Leibniz indicates on various occasions that the level of final causes is the most fundamental: the level of monads is more fundamental than the level of bodies, and the bottom level of explanation consists in the choice of what's best by God. But I

am puzzled by the suggestion in the *Monadology* and many other texts of monads *only* being subject to final causality. From an Aristotelian scholastic perspective this is extremely surprising. Long before Leibniz appeared on the scene, final causes had been ceding ground to efficient causes and they were thought to be genuinely effective only in intelligent agents. Dennis DesChene writes: “Ockham had already argued, following Avicenna, that the final cause acts only by virtue of existing in the intellect of an agent; to which Buridan added that when it acts thus, it acts as an efficient cause, and that where the agent is not such as to conceive the ends by which it acts, there is no final cause at all, only efficient causes.”²

Both Adams and Rutherford offer reasons for thinking that Leibniz does not really mean to exclude efficient causality from the monads themselves. Their proposals are suggestive, but I do not find them conclusive. While arguing that the level of final causality is fundamental, and more fundamental than efficient causality, Adams suggests that when Leibniz rejects efficient causes for monads, he has mechanistic causes in mind. Adams does not think Leibniz really means to exclude efficient causes entirely from the realm of the monads. In support of his claim he cites the following text: “... even final causes can be referred to efficient causes, that is, when the agent is intelligent, for then it is moved by thought” (Grua 28). At first sight, this text might suggest something different: Leibniz seems to say here that final causes involve efficient causes *only when* the agent is intelligent, because then she is moved by thought. The passage seems to suggest that being moved by thought introduces efficient causality, while this is absent elsewhere where final causes occur. If Leibniz is here talking about causation in monads, he seems to imply that final causality does not join up with efficient causality in non-intelligent monads. In that case, the text does not support the view that monads systematically are subject to efficient (non-mechanical) causes, as I imagine Adams intended.

But the text, depending on one’s view of Leibniz’s periods, is fairly early, Grua dates it 1683-1686(?), before Leibniz (fully) articulates his monadological view, and more importantly, its context is not monadological. Leibniz is arguing against the view that final causes should be taken out of consideration of nature, “insofar as they are not natural but moral”. So the text does not really address the issue of efficient causes at the level of monads. One could import the message of the text to the level of monads as follows: not all monads are intelligent, but they all perceive, and that is good enough for their cognition of final causes. This is

pretty speculative, however, and rather thin support for attribution to Leibniz of admitting efficient as well as final causes at the level of monads.

Furthermore, along this line of thinking what becomes of the idea that final causation is fundamental for Leibniz? If he follows the line DesChene describes for Buridan, final causation is still fundamental in so far as God's decisions are fundamental, but not in the sense that the monadic level is more fundamental than the bodily, which is what matters to human freedom. Buridan seems to say that their activity reduces to the activity of efficient causation. And the passage at Grua 28 can easily be read that way. Leibniz says that an intelligent agent is moved by thought: then it looks like the intelligent agent is subject to an efficient cause, the thought of the final cause rather than the final cause itself. On the other hand, it does not follow that the determination in monads is blind: values still determine their states.

Rutherford similarly thinks that Leibniz's claim is not as strong as one might think: "While maintaining that souls or monads, 'act according to the laws of final causes,' Leibniz is clear that appetitive forces are genuinely efficacious in bringing about changes in a monad's states. His point, therefore, is not that monadic states do not *act* as efficient causes of subsequent states but that those actions cannot be *explained* by appeal to the laws of efficient causation that govern the actions of bodies", but instead by appeal to "laws of final causes" (p. 166). The first sentence of the text of the *Monadology* is clearly compatible with this interpretation, and indeed, Leibniz often makes the point in terms of different types of laws. But the last sentence of the text does not so clearly fit this view: Leibniz does not speak of laws here, but simply of efficient and final causes.³

In sum, the scholastic background and Adams' and Rutherford's considerations suggest that efficient causality does apply to the monads themselves for Leibniz. But the support for this interpretation is thin and speculative. So I remain puzzled. This is an issue that bears more discussion, more than I can offer here.⁴

While the volume is not explicitly presented this way, it is meant to serve as a tribute to Robert Sleight. No doubt the very high level of current scholarship on Leibniz has much to do with Sleight's work, as exemplified, in particular, in his marvelous book on the Leibniz-Arnould correspondence. He brings to bear a great depth of knowledge of Leibniz's writings, and a keen philosophical intellect that does not let Leibniz get away with anything. He is unwilling to gloss over difficulties and displays enormous patience with the challenges of determining just what Leibniz thought. It is inspiring to see Sleight wrestle with Leibniz, on

the page and in person, and he does so with an appealing display of humility and sense of humor. Over the years, he has fostered the work of younger scholars and encouraged us, taking us seriously and respecting our views. Consequently the high quality of this volume is particularly satisfying.⁵

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Notes

¹ But for more on this issue, see Mercer's *Leibniz's Metaphysics: Its Origins and Developments*, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

² *Physiologia: natural Philosophy in Aristotelian and Cartesian Thought*, (Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 186-187.

³ In correspondence Rutherford has suggested to me that Leibniz's separating the *regnes*—kingdoms— of efficient and final causation implies a reference to laws: Leibniz is thinking of the rule of different types of laws in the two kingdoms. Incidentally, Ariew and Garber translate *regne* as “realm” which leaves little room for this interpretation. I find that Rutherford's interpretation gains strength from changing the translation, but I do not find his reading convincing. Of course, Leibniz may simply be speaking loosely in omitting the word “law”.

⁴ In his “Leibniz on Divine Concurrence” (*Philosophical Review*, forthcoming), Sukjae Lee argues for the view that for Leibniz creaturely causation in monads only consists in final causation.

⁵ I would like to thank Donald Rutherford for very helpful correspondence on this review.