

**Reply to Jolley's Review of *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature***  
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*Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* is intended to offer a broad panorama on Leibniz's philosophy. Although necessarily selective in its focus, it aspires to a comprehensive understanding of how the different parts of Leibniz's philosophy — theodicy, ethics, metaphysics, natural philosophy — fit together in a coherent and compelling fashion. In the book, I indicate some of the places where tensions threaten the unity of this scheme. My primary goal, however, is to reconstruct a system that would be recognizable to Leibniz himself. Within this system, primacy is assigned to the doctrine of theodicy. Although many topics vied for Leibniz's philosophical attention, none was more firmly embedded in his consciousness than the problem of comprehending the existence and nature of the world (including human nature) in a way consistent with its creation by a supremely wise and good God. One of the central theses of the book is that it is only against the background of this project that we can properly understand the details of Leibniz's complex metaphysics.

Nicholas Jolley's helpful review raises questions about three issues discussed in *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature*. The first concerns Leibniz's account of the relationship between bodies and monads. As Jolley notes, I maintain that Leibniz is committed to the view that bodies are, in reality, "aggregates of monads." I see this position as involving two related ontological claims. The first concerns the essence of body, or what it is to be a material thing (an instance of what Leibniz calls *materia secunda*). According to Leibniz, when we attempt to comprehend the nature of the bodies presented to us in perception, we are inevitably led from a conception of them as extended, moving things to a conception of them as pluralities of unextended active substances (monads). The former is an understanding of bodies as they are perceived by our senses, the latter a purely intelligible concept that conveys the essence of body, or what is real in our perceptions of material things.

It follows from the first claim that any body, if it exists, is identifiable with some plurality of monads; but Leibniz does not assert that every plurality of monads is a body. This is true only of certain *aggregates* of monads: pluralities whose members exhibit a special sort of relatedness, which serves as the basis for our conceiving of them as a single collective entity. (Leibniz frequently appeals to the analogy of a herd of sheep or an army of men.) At this point we encounter Leibniz's second claim, which relies on his assumption of the ideality of all relations. In identifying

any body with an aggregate of monads, Leibniz commits himself to the mind-dependence of all matter: any aggregate is constituted through the relations holding among its members, and these relations themselves obtain only insofar as they are apprehended by some mind. I argue that Leibniz preserves the objectivity of the material world by locating the relevant relations in the mind of God: bodies exist as “well-founded phenomena” insofar as God is aware of certain relations among the monads constitutive of the aggregates identifiable with those bodies. In chapter 8 of the book, I discuss in detail the nature of the intermonadic relations that underwrite this aggregation.

In his review, Jolley highlights a common concern about the mismatch between our sensory perceptions of bodies as extended, moving things and the true account of bodies as aggregates of monads. Based on Leibniz’s law, it is tempting to think that Leibniz cannot, strictly speaking, be identifying bodies with aggregates of monads; rather he must be claiming simply that “certain aggregates of monads are misperceived as bodies by human observers.” Stated in this way, I have no problem with the “misperception thesis.” I assume from the start that there is a fundamental distinction between how bodies appear to human perceivers and how they are in themselves. My disagreement with the thesis begins when it is presented as offering something like a full interpretation of Leibniz’s view of the relation of bodies to monads. In this guise, the thesis is in two respects misguided. First, it ignores the crucial fact of Leibniz’s acceptance (diagnosed and criticized by Kant) of an intelligible, ontological grounding of the properties of bodies in the properties of monads. Second, insofar as it appeals to the operation of human perception as an *explanation* of the aggregation of monads, it threatens the status of bodies as well-founded phenomena and is arguably at odds with other central Leibnizian tenets. I claim that aggregates exist because God apprehends certain specific relations among monads. Within any human mind there are representations of objects — extended, moving things — that can be regarded as expressions (in Leibniz’s technical sense) of things categorically different from them: pluralities of unextended monads. Appeals to human “misperception” give us little handle on how to understand this relationship. The aggregation of monads is (obviously) not ascribable to our sensibility being affected by a plurality of external monads. I would argue, further, that there is no act of the human mind that can be conceived as relating monads in such a way as to produce in us the perception of an extended thing. When we attempt to imagine this, Leibniz argues, we inevitably end up thinking of monads as themselves spatial, which he strongly denies. At most, we are entitled to say that we *have* perceptions of bodies; that these bodies can be

understood as something quite different from what they seem, namely, aggregates of unextended monads; and that the existence of these aggregates can be understood in terms of relations God apprehends among the states of the individual monads.

Jolley's second set of comments focus on the status of corporeal substances in Leibniz's system. Generally speaking, I am sympathetic to the view that there is a tension in Leibniz's thought on this point. Part of him is attracted to an orthodox Aristotelian account of substance as a form-matter composite, the paradigm of which is a living organism, such as a human being, animal or plant. It is, however, extremely difficult — I argue, impossible — to reconcile this view with another foundational commitment of his metaphysics: the view that any substance is, necessarily, an *unum per se*, an entity which involves no composition. The latter strongly inclines Leibniz to think that only souls or soul-like forms (monads) qualify as genuine substances.

Jolley raises two questions about my account of Leibniz's position. First, he takes issue with my assertion that given the strength of Leibniz's commitment to the latter view of substance, he is committed to explaining the reality of what we take to be corporeal substances in terms of souls or soul-like forms alone. Jolley maintains that this proposition cannot be true on its stronger (reductive) reading because "corporeal substance is essentially a composite of form and matter." Jolley evidently understands "matter" here in a commonsense way, for he acknowledges that Leibniz regards extension and its modes as merely "imaginary" or phenomenal properties; nevertheless, he argues, "it remains to be shown that such properties cannot combine with substantial forms to produce something truly real."

I believe Jolley misinterprets Leibniz's view of the structure of corporeal substance. Leibniz maintains throughout his career that the matter that combines with a soul or soul-like form to make a corporeal substance is an aggregate of lesser corporeal substances (or organisms), each of which is in turn composed of a soul or soul-like form and an aggregate of lesser corporeal substances, and so on. In no text I know does Leibniz suggest that a corporeal substance can be explained as a composite of a substantial form and modes of extension. The issue I grapple with in the book is whether Leibniz limits himself to an account of the composition of any corporeal substance from an infinity of lesser corporeal substances or whether he also defends a deeper analysis in which the former is supplemented by an account of the composition of corporeal substances from soul-like principles alone. I argue that there is strong textual support for this position in Leibniz's later writings and at least hints of it in works dating back to the *Discourse on Metaphysics*. The upshot of this view, however, is that if corporeal substances are ultimately to be conceived

as composites of soul-like monads alone, it is impossible to see them as ontologically basic in Leibniz's philosophy. Unless one adopts a device like the *vinculum substantiale* (considered and rejected by Leibniz in the Des Bosses correspondence), one will have to conclude that "corporeal substances" are *entia per aggregationem* and not *entia per se*.

This leaves us with the question of why Leibniz seems so reluctant simply to bite the bullet and give up talk of "corporeal substances." I lean heavily on the idea that Leibniz has strong pragmatic reasons — in particular, the desire to align himself with the tenets of Catholic theology — for affirming the existence of corporeal substances. Among the resources that allow him to do this is the distinction between exoteric (what is commonly said) and esoteric (what is true in metaphysical rigor) discourse. Consistent with his attitude toward causal relations in the physical world, Leibniz can say that it does no harm to talk about corporeal substances, provided we (philosophers) understand that there is a deeper level of analysis on which these are revealed not to be genuine substances.

But there is, I believe, more to the issue than simply Leibniz's desire to save the appearances (or *doxa*). Although Leibniz lays the greatest emphasis on substance's being an *unum per se*, his conception of substance is in fact multivalent, involving in addition, e.g., the properties of completeness and identity through time. Ideally, one would hope that Leibniz would be able to show that the essential properties of substance are necessarily coextensive: any being which possessed one of them would necessarily possess all of them. However, there is a strong *prima facie* case to be made for the claim (affirmed repeatedly by Leibniz) that a living organism possesses an identity through time in virtue of its soul or substantial form. In Leibniz's view, an organism remains identical through change because its soul always represents it as the same bodily creature, regardless of how the actual matter of its body changes. This by itself is not enough to justify the claim that living organisms are substances in the strictest sense. Nevertheless, it is enough to show why Leibniz was inclined to regard them as more substance-like than, e.g., a rock or a chair. In response to Jolley's second point, I would say that Leibniz is always ready to impose the stronger condition of *per se* unity when it comes to judging what is and is not a genuine substance, but that he is aided in important ways by the weaker notion of substantiality, applicable to organisms, and that he is not above fudging the distinction when there is reason to do so.

Jolley, finally, raises a query concerning my account of the conditions for the maximization of perfection in the best of all possible worlds. I say that a maximization of perfection entails a maximization of *degrees* of perfection, hence

a maximization of the variety of beings that contribute to the world's perfection. Jolley suggests as a counterexample a universe consisting exclusively of infinitely many angels, creatures which are individually the most perfect of all finite beings. I find this scenario unconvincing, for I see no reason on Leibniz's principles for arbitrarily excluding beings of lower degrees of perfection. I take my cue from Leibniz's appeal (in the *New Essays* and elsewhere) to the principle of continuity as a principle of order governing God's realization of the greatest variety and perfection. According to this principle, God will be inclined to create as many different angelic intelligences as can coexist in a world. However, there is no reason to think that this by itself would preclude God from also creating as many lesser creatures as possible. Simply put, if God has brought together the greatest collection of compossible angels, why shouldn't God — if he intends to maximize perfection — also realize as many lesser creatures as possible? The latter may not add much perfection to the world, but they will add some. Without an argument to the effect that realizing these creatures would preclude realizing some of the angels, the counterexample fails. Beyond this, however, Leibniz also asserts (in the *Theodicy*) that for the creatures with the greatest intelligence to be able to exercise their intelligence, there have to be lesser creatures — the constituents of the natural order — for them to contemplate and reason about. Consequently, the creation of the greatest variety of creatures is in fact a necessary condition for the realization of those minds which through their God-like wisdom, goodness and power contribute the most perfection to the world.

As Jolley notes in his conclusion, my Leibniz is not primarily a problem-solving philosopher, one intent on working through a series of conceptual puzzles bequeathed to him by the works of Descartes, Spinoza and Malebranche. Leibniz, of course, does tackle any number of philosophical problems, but these problems and their solutions only have life for him within the context of his larger, systematic endeavor to construct a metaphysical theory expressive of the ends of divine wisdom. Even here, I believe, we have captured only part of Leibniz's significance as a philosopher. The practical import of his theorizing, and of his engagements with other thinkers and intellectual movements, is still not fully appreciated. Only when we realize that the point of philosophy, for Leibniz, is not simply to arrive at the truth but, in addition, to further the state of affairs that is God's principal end — the creation of the greatest possible perfection — will we be ready to understand Leibniz as he understood himself. I hope that *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* can be seen as a first step in this direction.