

ABSTRACTS OF 1994 ESSAY COMPETITION WINNERS

“Corporeal Substances and True Unities”

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In the correspondence with Arnauld, Leibniz contends that each corporeal substance has a substantial form. In support he argues that to be real a corporeal substance must be one and indivisible, a true unity. I will show how this argument precludes a tempting interpretation of corporeal substances as composite unities. Rather it mandates the interpretation that each corporeal substance is a single monad.

Thus I will be supporting the by-now traditional interpretation of Leibniz on these matters, that of Russell; call this the “Monadological view.” Some important recent commentators, following Broad, have questioned the tradition, and have found an Aristotelian strain in Leibniz’s thought. They hold that in at least some of his writings Leibniz defends a view that corporeal substances are composite unities — composites of soul and matter while yet being true unities; call this the “Composite Unity view.” The Monadological view is that each corporeal substance is just a soul. The Composite Unity view is that no corporeal substance is just a soul.

My contribution is meant to be three-fold: First, I want to explicate Leibniz’s argument that, given corporeal substances are real, there are substantial forms (souls, monads). Call it the “True Unity” argument. It rests on the principle that anything with numerically distinct parts is many things, not one thing, and on the principle that nothing that is many things is real. The main part of the argument in brief is: Anything divisible has parts, so is not a unity, so is not real. Corporeal substances are real. So, corporeal substances are not divisible. Anything material is divisible. So, corporeal substances are not material. The argument entails that only souls are real. Nothing else. Only the Monadological view can be a correct interpretation of Leibniz.

Second, I want to account for the extraordinarily compelling evidence in favor of the Composite Unity view. The view has two sub-views as it turns out, so I consider evidence for each. What divides the view is Leibniz’s use of the distinction between primary matter and secondary matter. Thus a corporeal substance is a composite of soul and primary matter on the one hand, and of soul and secondary matter on the other.

For Leibniz a corporeal substance’s secondary matter is an aggregate of other corporeal substances united, in some sense, by the soul of the first. These other

substances are said to be parts of the first. The Composite Unity view has it that many things (the aggregate) plus one thing (the soul) equals one thing (the corporeal substance). However, as I will show, Leibniz distinguishes various senses of 'part'. In the strict sense a corporeal substance has no parts. When he says they do, he is using a more liberal sense of the term, according to which a dominant monad has subordinate monads as "parts."

For Leibniz primary matter, in one sense, is an aspect of a single monad — that monad's "primitive passive power." Call it "individual primary matter." It is indivisible. In another related sense primary matter is an aspect of a collection of monads — their primitive passive powers taken collectively. I'll call this "collective primary matter." It is extended and divisible. In the case of a corporeal substance, the relevant collection is that corporeal substance plus its secondary matter. The substances in its secondary matter are not really parts of a corporeal substance, so the collective primary matter abstracted from them is not really a part either. Nor is the divisibility of this primary matter a threat to the indivisibility of the monad. But what about the single monad's own primary matter? The Composite Unity view has it that there is a distinction between a soul and its primary matter. I will acknowledge the distinction but show it is not a numerical distinction.

Third, I will suggest that the Aristotelian strain in Leibniz's thought can be disassociated from the Composite Unity view, and retained with the Monadological view. A corporeal substance properly so-called is a monad "composed" of entelechy and individual primary matter (i.e. these are aspects of it). Speaking more loosely, however, a corporeal substance is a whole "machine" — dominant monad plus subordinate secondary matter — which is a well-founded phenomenon. That is to say, it is falsely but usefully supposed a single real thing. And this supposed thing, like a monad, can be seen as being "composed" of entelechy and primary matter. The latter is also a well-founded phenomenon: It is falsely but usefully supposed real. Why are these suppositions useful? Given them, laws which hold for inter-subjective observation and which allow prediction, can be formulated. From these suppositions, an Aristotelian picture of reality results.

(The essay from which this abstract is taken is forthcoming in *Studia Leibnitiana*.)