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## ARTICLE

# LEIBNIZ'S *DE SUMMA RERUM* AND THE PANLOGISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE THEORY OF SIMPLE SUBSTANCES

Andreas Blank

### THE PANLOGISTIC INTERPRETATION OF LEIBNIZ'S METAPHYSICS

According to the panlogistic interpretation of Leibniz's metaphysics, simple substances – minds, souls, and 'bare' monads – are identical with complete concepts, i.e. abstract, logical entities.\* This interpretation has a long tradition in the continental literature on Leibniz, and still is highly influential. The use of the term 'panlogism' as a characterization of Leibniz's philosophy goes back to Louis Couturat's *La logique de Leibniz* (Paris 1900). Couturat's interpretation has two aspects: first, the claim that Leibniz's metaphysics is derived from his logic, and, second, the claim that this is so *because* logical and ontological entities, for Leibniz, are identical.<sup>1</sup> This second claim, which makes up what in the more recent literature is meant by 'panlogism', is based on aspects of Leibniz's theory of the origin of things. According to this theory, God has the complete concept of each possible individual substance in his mind,<sup>2</sup> and creation, as Leibniz says, does not change the essence of these possible substances.<sup>3</sup> This suggests the reading that individual substances in the actual world, for Leibniz, are nothing other than existing complete concepts. In fact, in 1679, and again around 1686, Leibniz uses the notion of a complete concept in order to define the notion of individual substance: an individual substance is that which has a concept

\*Abbreviations: A = G. W. Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. the German Academy of Sciences; GP = *Die philosophischen Schriften von G. W. Leibniz*, ed. Carl I. Gerhardt (Berlin, 1875–1890); L = G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. by Leroy E. Loemker, 2nd edn. (Dordrecht, 1969); PDSR = G. W. Leibniz, *De Summa Rerum. Metaphysical Papers, 1675–1676*, trans. with an introduction and notes by G. H. R. Parkinson (New Haven and London, 1992).

<sup>1</sup> Louis Couturat, *La logique de Leibniz d'après des documents inédits* (Paris, 1900), pp. X–XII; cf. Louis Couturat, 'Sur les rapports de la logique et de la métaphysique de Leibniz', *Révue de métaphysique et de morale*, 10 (1902): 1–25.

<sup>2</sup> Remarks on the Letter of M. Arnauld (GP II, 42).

<sup>3</sup> Essays on Theodicy, § 52 (GP VI, 131).

sufficient to derive all predicates pertaining to that substance.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, there are several passages in which Leibniz does not even distinguish clearly between individual substances and complete concepts.<sup>5</sup>

How can the panlogistic interpretation be reconciled with what Leibniz says about the nature of individual substances, e.g. that they are active, and that they are true unities? Jacques Jalabert uses Leibniz's distinction between 'primitive' and derivative predicate concepts for this purpose. A complete concept, as Leibniz says, is the conjunction of primitive predicate concepts, which are sufficient for deducing all that happens to an individual substance.<sup>6</sup> As the derivative predicates are deduced from the primitive ones, the complete concept, according to Jalabert, can be said to be active, and as the derivative predicates are logically contained in the primitive ones, the complete concept can be said to be their principle of unity.<sup>7</sup> In a similar way, Aron Gurwitsch bases his interpretation on Leibniz's theory of generative definitions. A generative or 'causal' definition (such as the law of a mathematical series), for Leibniz, is a definition that describes the possible generation of the defined object.<sup>8</sup> According to Gurwitsch, a generative definition can be seen as principle of activity and unity with regard to the predicates that can be derived from it.<sup>9</sup> And, in fact, Leibniz illustrates his thesis of the active nature of individual substances with the words that here 'things are as in laws of series'.<sup>10</sup>

These logical reconstructions of the activity and unity of individual substances make it clear that the panlogistic interpretation of Leibniz's metaphysics does not contradict on a superficial level what Leibniz actually says about individual substances. Quite to the contrary, the panlogistic interpretation is based on structural analogies between Leibniz's metaphysics and his theory of concepts, and, at the same time, offers an explanation of these analogies, and an account of the unity of the philosophy of Leibniz. These merits explain the influence this interpretation has had on important commentators including Martial Guéroult, Michel Serres, Gilles Deleuze, Hector-Neri Castaneda and Edward N. Zalta.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Definitions: Aliquid, Nihil [1679] (A VI, 4, 306–7); Discourse on Metaphysics § 8 (A VI, 4, 1540); Remarks on the Letter of M. Arnauld (GP II, 41).

<sup>5</sup> Definitions: Aliquid, Nihil (A VI, 4, 306); Remarks on the Letter of M. Arnauld (GP II, 43); Letter to Arnauld, 14 July 1686 (GP II, 52).

<sup>6</sup> Remarks on the Letter of M. Arnauld (GP II, 44).

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Jalabert, *La théorie leibnizienne de la substance* (Paris, 1947), pp. 64–74.

<sup>8</sup> On Universal Synthesis and Analysis (GP VII, 295).

<sup>9</sup> Aron Gurwitsch, *Leibniz. Philosophie des Panlogismus* (Berlin and New York, 1974), pp. 9–16; 236–8; 313–15.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to de Volder, 10 November 1703 (GP II, 258).

<sup>11</sup> Martial Guéroult, 'La constitution de la substance chez Leibniz', *Révue de métaphysique et de morale*, 52 (1947): 55–78; Michel Serres, *Le système de Leibniz et ses modèles mathématiques* (Paris, 1968), Vol. I, pp. 103–4; Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli. Leibniz et le baroque* (Paris, 1988), p. 56; Hector-Neri Castaneda, 'Leibniz's 1686 Views on Individual Substances, Existence, and Relations', *Journal of Philosophy*, 72 (1975): 687–90; Edward N. Zalta, *Abstract Objects. An Introduction to Axiomatic Metaphysics* (Dordrecht, 1984), pp. 84–90; 115–16.

In the following sections, I would like to explore some difficulties that arise for the panlogistic interpretation with regard to Leibniz's *De Summa Rerum*. There, Leibniz develops a more complicated version of a Neoplatonic emanation scheme, which he embraced earlier. Whereas in his earlier theory of the origin of things, in fact, he identified existing things with ideas, the view defended in the *De Summa Rerum* is that ideas and existing things stand in a close relationship to each other, but are distinct entities. Similarly, in the *De Summa Rerum* Leibniz puts forward a theory of ideas according to which minds and ideas cannot be identical because they belong to different ontological categories: minds to the category of substances, ideas to the category of modifications. Moreover, the views about the nature of ideas expressed in *De Summa Rerum* seem to be basically those of Leibniz's later metaphysical writings. The panlogistic interpretation of Leibniz's later metaphysics, therefore, seems to be in conflict with an important development that has taken place in the years of the *De Summa Rerum*.

#### THE THEORY OF THE ORIGIN OF THINGS IN THE *DE SUMMA RERUM*

In a recent article, Catherine Wilson has drawn attention to the fact that Leibniz in a fragment of 1668 explicitly embraces a monistic Neoplatonic emanation theory. Leibniz's early Neoplatonism leads to the consequence that the ideas in the mind of God and the substances of things (the 'substantial form') are equivalent:<sup>12</sup> 'From this it is apparent that there is not one substantial form for all bodies but a different one for different bodies, for as the disposition of nature is varied, the form and idea are also varied' (*On Transubstantiation*, A VI, 1, 511; L 118). In the supplement to this fragment, Leibniz even says that the ideas of God and the substances of things are 'the same in fact, different in relation; they are, moreover, as action and passion . . . the substances of things are the act of God on species'.<sup>13</sup> Obviously, in this text Leibniz adopts a view of the relation between substances and ideas that corresponds exactly to the panlogistic interpretation of his later philosophy.

Robert M. Adams, Mark Kulstad, and Catherine Wilson have argued that Leibniz in 1675–6 still accepts a version of substance monism. According to their interpretation, Leibniz in the years of the *De Summa Rerum* regards

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Wilson, 'Atoms, Minds and Vortices in *De Summa Rerum*: Leibniz vis-à-vis Hobbes and Spinoza', in Stuart Brown (ed.), *The Young Leibniz and his Philosophy (1646–1676)* (Dordrecht, 1999), pp. 223–43, especially pp. 224–7.

<sup>13</sup> A VI, 1, 512; L 119.

particulars as modes of a single, divine substance.<sup>14</sup> This seems to be a plausible reading of a text of April 1676:

It can easily be demonstrated that all things are distinguished, not as substances, i.e. radically, but as modes. This can be demonstrated from the fact that, of those things which are radically distinct, one can be perfectly understood without another; that is, all the requisites of the one can be understood without all the requisites of the other being understood. But in the case of things, this is not so; for since the ultimate reason of things is unique, and contains by itself the aggregate of all requisites of all things, it is evident that the requisites of all things are the same. So also is their essence, given that an essence is the aggregate of all primary requisites. Therefore the essence of all things is the same, and things differ only modally, just as a town seen from a high point differs from the town seen from a plain. If the only things that are really different are those that can be separated, or one of which can be perfectly understood without the other, it follows that nothing is really different from another thing, but all things are one, as Plato explains in the *Parmenides*.

(*That a Perfect Being is Possible*, A VI, 3, 574; PDSR 95)

This might suggest that particulars, being modes of God, are identical with ideas in the mind of God. However, in *On the Origin of Things from Forms* Leibniz sets forth a modified theory of the origin of existing things. In a first step, he says that the origin of things seems to follow a combinatorial pattern: things come into being by God's combining simple ideas ('simple forms'): 'It seems to me that the origin of things from God is of the same kind as the origin of properties from an essence; just as  $6 = 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 \dots$ ' (A VI, 3, 518; PDSR 77). God, as Leibniz says, is the 'subject of all simple, absolute forms' (where by 'absolute' Leibniz means 'affirmative').<sup>15</sup> This theory of the origin of existing things may seem to imply that minds are nothing other than combinations of simple ideas in the mind of God. In that case, Leibniz's view of the origin of things would come very close to Spinoza's view of the mind as idea of the body.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Wilson is reading this passage in a purely spinozistic sense.<sup>17</sup> But, a little later in the same text, Leibniz develops a more complicated view of the relation of

<sup>14</sup> Robert M. Adams, *Leibniz. Determinist, Idealist, Theist* (New Haven, 1993), pp. 130–1; Mark Kulstad, 'Did Leibniz incline towards Monistic Pantheism in 1676?', *Leibniz und Europa. Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> International Leibniz-Congress* (Hannover, 1994), pp. 424–8; Mark Kulstad, 'Leibniz's *De Summa Rerum*: the Origin of the Variety of Things', *L'actualité de Leibniz: les deux labyrinths*, Decade de Cerisy la Salle, 15–22 Juin 1995 (Studia Leibnitiana, Supplementa, 34; Stuttgart, 1999), pp. 69–85; Catherine Wilson, 'Atoms, Minds and Vortices in *De Summa Rerum*', pp. 227–8; cf. Stuart Brown, 'The Proto-Monadology of the *De Summa Rerum*', in Stuart Brown (ed.), *The Young Leibniz and his Philosophy (1646–1676)*, pp. 263–87, especially p. 265.

<sup>15</sup> A VI, 3, 519; PDSR 77.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics*, part II, proposition XII.

<sup>17</sup> Catherine Wilson, 'Atoms, Minds and Vortices in the *De Summa Rerum*', p. 227.

ideas in the mind of God and things existing in the world. There, he draws an analogy between the relation that holds between space and the immensity of God and the relation that holds between the minds in the world and the ideas in the mind of God:

Just as space is to the immeasurable, so is the collection of all minds to the active intellect. . . . God is not a part of our mind, just as the immeasurable is not a part of some place or interval. . . . Just as there is already a shape in the immeasurable before it is marked out, so there is already an idea, i.e. a difference of thoughts, in the primary intelligence. Just as a shape is in space, so is an idea in our mind.

(A VI, 3, 520–1; PDSR 79–81)

This at least gives a hint to the effect that, for Leibniz, ideas in the mind of God belong to the necessary conditions for the existence of minds without being *parts* of existing minds. Leibniz takes up this thought in the short text *On Simple Forms* written on the same sheet of paper as *On the Origin of Things from Forms*:

Things are not produced by the mere combination of forms in God, but along with a subject also. The subject itself, or God, together with his ubiquity, gives the immeasurable, and this immeasurable combined with other subjects brings it about that all possible modes, or things, follow in it. The various results of forms, combined with a subject, bring it about that particulars result.

(A VI, 3, 523; PDSR 85)

Two conclusions may be drawn from this passage: (1) Existing particulars are not mere combinations of simple forms, but require for their existence a sort of substratum, a 'subject'. (2) Even the properties of particulars are not simply equalled to forms in the mind of God but rather treated as 'results' of the combination of these simple forms. Both observations favour an interpretation of Leibniz's views on the origin of things that distinguishes between ideas (the 'simple forms' in the mind of God) and existing particulars.

#### THE THEORY OF IDEAS IN THE *DE SUMMA RERUM*

The development of a distinction between ideas and subjects in the *De Summa Rerum* is paralleled by the development of a theory of ideas. In his essay *What is an Idea*, written shortly after the papers of the *De Summa Rerum* (c. 1677), Leibniz puts forward a theory of ideas in terms of a theory of mental dispositions: concepts or ideas are dispositions to produce a thought about something. These dispositions in the human mind, in turn, correspond to modifications of the mind of God. Ideas in human minds

represent things in the world, because they are an expression of ideas in the mind of God.<sup>18</sup>

Already in *On the Origin of Things from Forms* (April 1676), Leibniz defines an idea as the ‘difference between thoughts due to the difference of their object’ (‘Idea est differentia cogitationum ratione objecti’). Consequently, he characterizes an idea as a sort of ‘modification in thought’ (‘modificatio in cogitatione’) or ‘modification in the mind’ (‘modificatio in mente’).<sup>19</sup> According to *On the Origin of Things from Forms*, there are only two kinds of ideas: ideas in our minds (the differences of our thoughts) and ideas in the mind of God.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Leibniz says that the modifications in the mind differ from modifications of matter ‘as action from passion’.<sup>21</sup>

This theory of ideas plays a crucial role in Leibniz’s early reactions to Spinoza’s doctrine of the mind. In a famous reading note to Spinoza’s *Ethics* (c. 1678), Leibniz points out that the mind is active, whereas ideas are not:

Ideas do not act. The mind acts. The whole world in fact is the object of each mind, and the whole world somehow is perceived by each mind. The world is one, and yet minds are diverse. The mind therefore does not come into being through the idea of the body, but because God sees the world in various ways, in the way I see a town.

(A VI, 4, 1713, my translation)

A second argument against Spinoza’s theory of mind can be found in *On the Origin of Things from Forms*. Minds, as Leibniz argues immediately after exposing the outlines of his theory of ideas, have identity over time, whereas bodies, and, consequently, ideas of bodies, have not: ‘Is the mind the idea of the body? That cannot be, for the mind remains when the body has been continually changed’ (A VI, 3, 518; PDSR 75).<sup>22</sup> Both arguments,

<sup>18</sup> On Leibniz’s *What is an Idea*, cf. Leroy E. Loemker, ‘Leibniz’s Doctrine of Ideas’, in Ivor Leclerc (ed.), *The philosophy of Leibniz and the Modern World* (Nashville 1973), pp. 29–51; Massimo Mugnai, ‘Idee, espressioni delle idee, pensieri e caratteri in Leibniz’, *Rivista filosofia*, 64 (1973): 219–31; Hans Poser, ‘Der Begriff der *Idee* bei Leibniz’, in M. Fattori, M. L. Bianchi (ed.), *Idea. VI. Colloquio Internazionale del Lessico Intellettuale Europeo*, Roma, 5–7 gennaio 1989, Rome 1991, pp. 67–78.

<sup>19</sup> A VI, 3, 518; PDSR 77.

<sup>20</sup> A VI, 3, 521; PDSR 81.

<sup>21</sup> A VI, 3, 518; PDSR 75.

<sup>22</sup> Leibniz adds a third argument:

And will the idea of the body be the idea of all that it perceives? If so, any mind will be the idea of a whole vortex, which is not the case – unless you say that it is the result of the relation of all other things to one certain thing.

(A VI, 3, 518; PDSR 75)

It is not completely clear what Leibniz may have had in mind here. For two plausible interpretations of this argument, cf. Catherine Wilson, ‘Atoms, Minds and Vortices in the *De Summa Rerum*’, p. 228.

in turn, are connected to a line of thought that foreshadows aspects of Leibniz's later theory of innate ideas:<sup>23</sup>

Extension is a state, thinking is an action. . . . Everything that thinks, thinks something. The most simple thing is that which thinks that it thinks itself. . . . We perceive many things in our mind, such as thinking or perceiving, perceiving oneself, perceiving oneself to be the same, perceiving pleasure and pain, perceiving time or duration. . . . Since there is nothing in us except the mind it is wonderful how so many different things are perceived in it. But in fact the mind is added to matter, and without matter it would not perceive as it does. . . . The idea of existence and of identity does not come from the body, nor does that of unity. It is a wonderful thing when the mind remembers negatives, or, is conscious that it had not thought something.

(A VI, 3, 518; PDSR 75–77)

Here, Leibniz seems to regard metaphysical categories such as identity, unity, time, and activity as an implication of descriptions of our own mental life. More specifically, he seems to regard the conception of the mind as an enduring principle of activity as the result of such a descriptive strategy. Metaphysical ideas differ from ideas that are derived from the body in that the structure of our mental life is directly accessible in introspection. In this sense, Leibniz can say that there is 'nothing in us except the mind'. Of course, what is contained in the passage cited above is hardly more than a sketch of a fully worked out argument. Nevertheless, it is clear that the argument Leibniz has in mind is intended to show that the structure of mental activity is incompatible with Spinoza's thesis that the mind is the idea of the body. Quite to the contrary, the argument based on introspective description suggests what subjects that differ from mere conceptual entities might be like. Minds, being capable of reflexive knowledge of their own activity, according to *On the Origin of Things from Forms*, are a model for the 'simple' in the world.

#### LEIBNIZ'S LATER COMMENTS ON SPINOZA'S THEORY OF MIND

The development of Leibniz's view of the difference between ideas and minds in the *De Summa Rerum* shows considerable influence in his later metaphysical writings. In the *Elements of Reason* (c. 1686), Leibniz repeats

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Giorgio Tonelli, 'Leibniz on Innate Ideas and the Early Reactions to the Publication of the *Nouveaux Essais* (1765)', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 12 (1974): 437–54; Nicholas Jolley, *Leibniz and Locke. A Study of the New Essays on Human Understanding* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 166–179; Werner Schüssler, *Leibniz's Auffassung des menschlichen Verstandes* (intellectus). *Eine Untersuchung zum Standpunktwechsel zwischen système nouveau und système commun und dem Versuch ihrer Vermittlung* (Berlin and New York, 1992), pp. 76–86.

his argument that the mind is not the idea of the body because ideas are not active:

And yet he [Spinoza] endeavours to say many things about the happiness and improvement of our mind, as if he could make these figures and abstract ideas better, and as if they could be active and passive, or as if the geometrical idea itself determines, whether this body recently had this form. . . .

(A VI, 4, 725)

In the *Correspondence with de Volder*, Leibniz takes up the same line of thought. Although, as Leibniz writes, the soul contains the idea of the material world, the soul itself has to be distinguished from the idea of the material world. Rather, the soul is to be seen as the source of ideas. Once again, Leibniz characterizes ideas as being devoid of activity:

In the soul there is an adequate idea of matter, yet the soul is not, for me, the idea of matter itself but the source of ideas for itself and in itself – ideas born of its own nature but representing the different states of matter in order. An idea in, so to speak, something dead and unchangeable in itself, as is a figure; soul is rather something living and full of activity, and in this sense I do not say that it is any one idea which tends to change out of itself, but only various ideas succeeding each other, one of which can, however, be derived from another.

(Letter to de Volder, June 23, 1699, GP II, 184; L 520).

Although he subsequently admits that, in a figurative sense, the soul could be called a ‘living idea’, Leibniz stresses that, in a literal sense, the soul is not an idea but a substance that produces ideas: ‘But in another sense of the word, I could say that in some way the soul is a living or substantial idea, more correctly, however, that it is an ideating substance’ (GP II, 184; L 520, translation slightly changed). The same conception of the soul can also be found in Leibniz’s preceding letter to de Volder of March 24/ April 3, 1699. There, Leibniz explicitly draws a distinction between ideas as something that is changing and the soul as the persistent cause of changing ideas:

Meanwhile, I think that you agree with me that the soul is one thing, and the idea of the body another, for the soul remains the same, but the idea of the body changes as the body itself changes, whose present modification it always reveals. Of course the idea of the present state of the body is always in the soul, but it is not simple and hence not purely passive but is combined with a tendency toward a new idea arising out of the earlier one, so that the soul is the source and foundation of different ideas of the same body, which arise according to a prescribed law.

(GP II, 172; L 519)

Perhaps the most decisive statement precluding the identification of minds and ideas can be found in the *Essays on Theodicy* (1710). There, Leibniz says with regard to Spinoza's ontology:

It looks as if the soul, for him, was only a transitory modification; and when he pretends to make the soul enduring, and even eternal, he substitutes for the soul the idea of the body, which is a mere notion, and not a real and actual thing.

(Essays on Theodicy, § 372, GP VI, 337)

Real and actual things, consequently, are, throughout Leibniz's mature metaphysical writing, more than existing ideas or concepts.

### CONCLUSION

Seen from the perspective of the *De Summa Rerum*, the panlogistic interpretation of Leibniz's theory of simple substances faces some serious difficulties. It is true that, according to Leibniz's 1668 version of a Neoplatonic emanation theory, existing things and ideas are identical. However, in the *De Summa Rerum* Leibniz proposes a more complicated theory of the origin of things in which subjects play an important role in addition to ideas. Moreover, since the years of the *De Summa Rerum*, Leibniz analyses the notion of an idea in terms of a philosophical psychology: ideas are properties of minds, human or divine. According to this view, human minds are not ideas but entities that produce ideas; only minds are active, whereas ideas are not; and only minds are principles of identity and unity, whereas ideas are not. In this respect, Leibniz's later metaphysical writing – the *Elements of Reason*, the *Correspondence with de Volder*, and the *Essays on Theodicy* – follows closely the line of argument of the *De Summa Rerum*.

Due to the development of Leibniz's thought in the *De Summa Rerum*, and the influence this development has in later years, the simple substances of his later metaphysics cannot be identical with complete concepts. Concepts, ontologically, are ideas,<sup>24</sup> and, therefore, remain on the side of modifications of substances, human or divine. Leibniz's refinement of his first version of a Neoplatonic emanation theory, and the development of his views concerning the nature of ideas, seem to exclude the panlogistic interpretation of his later theory of simple substances. Although, according to his refined theory of the origin of things, ideas in the mind of God still play an important role in the process of creation, the existing world, for Leibniz, since the years of the *De Summa Rerum*, is something beyond the realm of logic.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. *What is an Idea* (A VI, 4, 1370–1); remarks on the Letter of M. Arnauld (GP II, 40).