

## The Ontological Status of Bodies in Leibniz (Part II)

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### Sommaire

Dans la deuxième partie de cet essai, je tâche de montrer que Leibniz, en soutenant que les corps sont des agrégats, veut affirmer quelque chose à propos des corps en tant qu'ils existent *a parte rei* ou en réalité: en réalité, un corps n'est pas un être, mais une multitude d'êtres ou de substances. Et ceci, selon moi, est précisément ce qui pousse Leibniz à affirmer que les corps sont des phénomènes: puisqu'en réalité un corps n'est pas un être, mais plutôt une multitude d'êtres, il suit qu'un corps, conçu comme *un* être, est quelque chose qui existe seulement objectivement dans l'âme. C'est à dire, un corps, conçu comme *une* chose, n'est pas un être réel, mais un être imaginaire, un phénomène.

In Part I of this paper I began to address the question of how to reconcile Leibniz's apparently competing characterizations of body—as a real or well-founded phenomenon, on the one hand, and as an aggregate of substances that possesses the reality of its constituents, on the other. The bulk of Part I, more specifically, was devoted to considering and refuting two attempts to reconcile these characterizations—those of Donald Rutherford and Robert Adams. As I explained there, both scholars maintain that the solution to the problem posed by these seemingly inconsistent characterizations lies in recognizing that one and the same thing can, according to Leibniz, be *both* a phenomenon *and* an aggregate of substances possessed of a reality wholly derived from its constituents. According to Adams, both the aggregates and the phenomena with which Leibniz identifies bodies are representational contents. That is, the aggregates with which Leibniz identifies bodies, and which are said by him to have a reality derived wholly from the substances that figure in them, exist objectively in the mind. According to Rutherford, on the other hand, when Leibniz characterizes body as both a phenomenon and an aggregate of substances, he has in mind a kind of hybrid of real and ideal entities—i.e., a hybrid of real, perceiver-independent substances, on the one hand, and an ideal system of relations obtaining among those substances, on the other. Against Rutherford, I argued that when Leibniz goes from the claim that bodies are

aggregates to the conclusion that they are phenomena, the phenomena he has in mind are representational contents, and not hybrids of real and ideal elements. Against Adams, I argued that the aggregates of substances with which Leibniz identifies bodies, and which are said by him to possess a reality that is wholly borrowed from their constituent substances, are perceiver-independent collections of substances which, given Leibniz's commitment to the ideality of all relations, can be nothing over and above the constituent substances themselves.

Here in Part II of this paper, my primary aim is to present and defend a different solution to the problem posed by Leibniz's apparently inconsistent accounts of body. It will be recalled that on my interpretation, Leibniz's two accounts of body are usefully considered in the light of the traditional distinction between how a thing stands *quoad nos* (with respect to us) and how that thing stands *a parte rei* (as it is in itself or in reality). And my claim is that when Leibniz declares a body to be an aggregate of substances that possesses a reality derived from, and indeed identical to, the reality of its constituent substances, he is making a claim about the body *a parte rei*. In reality, it is a collection of substances that is nothing over and above those substances themselves. Moreover, it is *this* thesis that motivates the further claim that a body is merely a well-founded phenomenon: given Leibniz's commitment to the principle that real unity is a necessary feature of every real being, it follows that a body, understood as a being (i.e., as *one* thing), exists only objectively in the mind as a being of reason or imagination. Otherwise put, a body, understood as a being, has only *esse objectivum*, and not *esse formale* or *reale*—i.e., only a mental existence, and not an extra-mental one. For when it comes to a perception that has a body as its representational content, there is no single real being that this perception is a perception *of*, even if the perception is connected in a rule-governed way with other perceptions, within both the perceiver and all other perceivers, and also has some foundation in reality by virtue of the fact that it is, in the final analysis, the perception of a plurality of real beings.

It's worth noting that Leibniz sometimes denies that bodies have real unity by saying that the unity of a body is from the perceiver, from thought, or from the mind—which is simply to say

that a body's unity is merely apparent.<sup>1</sup> In much the same way, one might assert that the redness of a child's ball is from the perceiver: the point is that the ball is not *really* red, but only *appears* red. There is, however, one crucial difference between the redness of a ball and the unity of a body, according to Leibniz: since real unity, unlike real redness, is for him a *necessary* feature of every real being, the conclusion that a body's unity is merely apparent implies, on his view, that a body is not after all a *real* being, but an *apparent* or *imaginary* being. It is not something that exists in reality; what exists in reality is instead a plurality of beings which are together conceived as, or represented in perception as, a single thing. But the same is not true in the case of the ball: the conclusion that its redness is merely apparent does not by itself imply, for Leibniz, that the ball does not exist in the nature of things.

As I say, my primary aim in this part of the paper is to show that this is how we should understand Leibniz's apparently competing accounts of body, although my arguments against the interpretations of Adams and Rutherford in Part I of this paper should go some way toward recommending my interpretation. To be sure, I am not alone in holding that the phenomena with which Leibniz can be found identifying bodies are to be understood as the representational contents of perceptions that have, as their extra-mental objects, the aggregates with which Leibniz also identifies bodies.<sup>2</sup> But with one notable exception,<sup>3</sup> none of the scholars who embrace this view has satisfactorily explained how Leibniz's two accounts of body go together. Indeed, they have sometimes felt the need to privilege one of these accounts over the other by saying, for example, that for Leibniz bodies are, strictly speaking, well-founded phenomena, rather than

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<sup>1</sup> See Leibniz's letter of January 1705 (?) to De Volder for a passage in which Leibniz says that the unity of a body comes from the perceiver. See his letter of 20 June 1703 to De Volder, GP II, 250; LDV, 261, and *Nouveaux essais*, II, 24, §1, A VI, 6, 226; NE, 226, for two passages in which he says that the unity of a body comes from thought. And see Leibniz's letter of 20 June 1703 to Volder, GP II, 256; LDV, 275, his letter of 21 January 1704 to the same, GP II, 261/LDV, 285, and his letter of 30 June 1704 to the same, GP II, 267; LDV, 301, for three passages in which he says that the unity of a body comes from the mind.

<sup>2</sup> See the authors listed in note 5 of Part I of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> See note 16 in Part I of this paper.

aggregates of substances.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, Leibniz's idealism, his claim that monads alone are substances, was implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, supposed to explain how the accounts go together: granted that all substances are simple and incorporeal, the thought went, a body can be nothing other than a phenomenon. But this, on my view, is mistaken. Primarily motivating the claim that bodies are aggregates and therefore phenomena is not idealism, but Leibniz's commitment to the view that every being is a unity.

In this part of the paper, I will, in addition to arguing for this interpretation, consider two important consequences of my solution for our understanding of Leibniz's system. In particular, I will show, first, that Leibniz's pronouncement that bodies are phenomena is not to be taken as implying a commitment to idealism on his part. Second, I will argue that it is a mistake to think, as some of Leibniz's current interpreters do, that the mature Leibniz ever endorsed a phenomenalism like George Berkeley's, according to which bodies are the representational contents of perceptions that have nothing substantial (e.g., an aggregate of monads) as their extra-mental object.

In the next section, I show that the line of reasoning that I am here attributing to Leibniz is not unique to him, and that Leibniz's pronouncement that bodies are aggregates and phenomena is usefully understood by appeal to other philosophers. In Section 2, I offer textual evidence directly in support of my interpretation. In Section 3, I discuss the mentioned consequences of my interpretation for our understanding of Leibniz's system. In Section 4, I conclude.

### *1. Other Philosophers on the Inference From Aggregates to Phenomena*

It is now generally recognized that for Leibniz the claim that bodies are aggregates serves as an explanation or justification for the claim that bodies are real or well-founded phenomena. Adams and Rutherford are certainly right about this. The question at issue here is how to understand Leibniz's inference from aggregates to phenomena. In my opinion, the answer to this question comes into view when we consider a number of other philosophers, for Leibniz is not the

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Mates: *The Philosophy of Leibniz* (see note 5 in Part I of this paper), p. 204. On my view, which of the two accounts properly applies to body depends on how body is conceived: conceived as a unity, it is a phenomenon; conceived as a plurality, it is an aggregate.

only philosopher to argue that *A*, understood as a being or single thing, is merely a creature of perception on the grounds that *a parte rei* or in reality *A* is not a being, but many beings. Substantially the same line of reasoning is found in other thinkers, before and after Leibniz.

The early modern atomist David Gorlaeus is perhaps most famous for claiming that a human being, understood as a composite of body and soul, is an accidental being (*ens per accidens*).<sup>5</sup> This thesis is advanced in his *Exercitationes philosophicae* (1620),<sup>6</sup> in the course of explaining what an *ens per accidens* is. To begin with, Gorlaeus asserts that an accidental being or being by aggregation “is not properly a being, but beings.”<sup>7</sup> He also asserts that a being by aggregation “exists *per accidens*, since its parts exist.”<sup>8</sup> Here, I take it, Gorlaeus qualifies his attribution of existence to a being by aggregation (such a being is said to exist “*per accidens*”) because what exist, properly speaking, are the individual beings out of which the aggregate is composed. In other words, existence is predicated properly or primarily of the beings that compose a being by aggregation and only in a derivative or secondary way of the being by aggregation itself, since it is properly not a being (*ens*)—of which existence is properly predicated—but beings (*entia*). Gorlaeus then goes on to give us some idea of what sorts of things count as beings by aggregation, on his view, when he claims that “everything constituted from many beings is a being by aggregation,”<sup>9</sup> including the composite of body and soul, since “a union does not change the essence of things in such a way that from two things a thing that is one in number is made. For those two things always remain two.”<sup>10</sup> As this text makes clear, then, Gorlaeus denies the status of being to many things that were commonly regarded as beings: anything composed of several beings—including Peter and Paul, understood as composites of body and soul—is not a being; any such composite is, rather,

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<sup>5</sup> Henricus Regius, Descartes’s erstwhile disciple, cites David Gorlaeus as a source of inspiration for his own assertion that the human being is an *ens per accidens*. See C. Lüthy: *David Gorlaeus (1591-1612): An Enigmatic Figure in the History of Philosophy of Science*, Amsterdam 2012, pp. 139-53.

<sup>6</sup> D. Gorlaeus: *Exercitationes philosophicae*, Lugduni Batavorum, 1620.

<sup>7</sup> Gorlaeus: *Exercitationes philosophicae* (see note 6), p. 25: “Hoc autem propriè non est ens, sed entia.”

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.: “& per accidens existit, quia ejus partes existunt.”

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.: “Est verò illud omne ens per aggregationem, quod ex pluribus entibus conflatum est.”

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.: “Neque enim unio mutat rerum essentiam, ut ex duabus rebus possit fieri una res numero. Duæ enim illæ res semper manent duæ.”

several beings. To be sure, Gorlaeus holds that a being by aggregation involves a union of the *per se* beings that serve as its parts: he explicitly mentions (i) a union without order, such as is found in a mere pile of rocks, (ii) a union that does involve order, which is found in the world as a whole, and (iii) a union in which one thing “is in another intimately, penetrates it, and acts through it,” which is found in the human being, understood as a composite of body and soul.<sup>11</sup> But notwithstanding this, he clearly thinks that such a union does not prevent us from saying of a being by aggregation that it is properly not a being, but beings, i.e., that it is identical to its parts. Most important for present purposes, however, is a distinction that Gorlaeus goes on to make between two different ways of conceiving a being by aggregation. When, he explains, a being by aggregation “is conceived by the mind as a whole, it is not a being of reason,” since it is not in that case something fashioned (*fingitur*) by the mind, but “is the same as many beings united among themselves, and is so conceived by the mind—namely, as not distinct from all of its parts thus assembled.”<sup>12</sup> The implication seems to be that when we conceive a being by aggregation as a whole, we conceive it as it really is, with the result that a being by aggregation, so conceived, is something that exists (sc. *per accidens*) in reality. However, Gorlaeus immediately goes on to say that “if the mind conceives [a being by aggregation] as a single being numerically distinct from its parts, it will not be the same as all those real beings together, but a being of reason [*ens rationis*],” i.e., “not a true being [*verum ens*].”<sup>13</sup> “For,” he explains, “it will in this way be feigned

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.: “Sed varium est pro horum entium unione. Nonnunquam haec se invicem confuse contingunt; ut in acervo lapidum: aliquando ordine; ut in mundo: quandoque habent easdem qualitates, ut etiam ejusmodi unio sit inter illa; sicut inter hanc & illam aquae guttam: sunt quoque, ubi unum est in alio intimè, illudque penetrat, & per illud agit; sicut anima in corpore.”

<sup>12</sup> Gorlaeus: *Exercitationes philosophicae* (see note 6), p. 26: “Quando verò illud ens per accidens à mente concipitur ut totum, non est ens rationis: non enim à mente fingitur: sed est idem, quod multa entia inter se unita, & eo modo concipitur à mente: nempe ut non distinctum ab omnibus suis partibus ita collectis.”

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.: “Quodsi mens illud concipiat ut ens unum numero distinctum à suis partibus, non erit idem, quod omnia illa entia realia simul; sed ens rationis. [...] Atque hoc modo manifestum fit, quo pacto ens per aggregationem non sit verum ens, & tamen verè dicatur esse. Nempe quia idem est, quod omnia illa entia realia, quae simul unum neque fiunt sumpta ens fictum, neque unum reale; sed manent quod sunt, & verè apprehenduntur esse multa entia realia.”

[*fingetur*] to exist.”<sup>14</sup> The implication here, I take it, is that when a being by aggregation is conceived *not* to be identical to the many beings that figure in it—i.e., when it is conceived not to be a whole or many beings, but rather a single being—it is something feigned or fashioned by the intellect, a being of reason. Indeed, Gorlaeus himself explains that when a being by aggregation is taken not to be identical to the many beings from which it is constituted, but is rather taken to be a single being, the mind imposes a unity on it that “is not real, but feigned [*ficta*], just as a pile [of rocks] also, conceived as a being, is not real, but feigned [*fictus*].”<sup>15</sup> Clearly, the unity that is here said to be imposed by the mind on the aggregate is something more than the union of parts that Gorlaeus finds in a whole. Of course, as I’ve already had occasion to note in Part I of this paper, a being of reason (*ens rationis*), as traditionally understood, is something that has only objective existence (*esse objectivum*), i.e., is something that exists only objectively in the mind. Nor does Gorlaeus differ from the tradition on this score.<sup>16</sup> The line of reasoning that I’m here concerned to attribute to Leibniz, then, can be found in the work of David Gorlaeus.

Although Gorlaeus might be unusual in holding that a human being is an aggregate, still, the general view that a plurality of beings, conceived as one being, is something that exists only objectively in perceivers is recognized by more orthodox thinkers. Without any hint of disapproval, for example, the Franciscan Hermann Osterrieder tells us in his *Metaphysica vetus et nova* (1761) that some thinkers classify as a “non-being” (*non ens*) any sort of being *per accidens* that “consists in an aggregate of many beings that maintain no order in their union,” such as a pile of grains or stones, “and this for the following reason: since such a being involves many things, it ought rather to be called *beings* than a *being*.”<sup>17</sup> What’s more, in his *Logica critica* (1760) Osterrieder

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.: “Illud enim esse eo modo fingetur.”

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.: “Quae unitas realis non est, sed ficta, quemadmodum & acervus, ut ens conceptus, non est realis, sed fictus.”

<sup>16</sup> See Gorlaeus: *Exercitationes philosophicae* (see note 6), p. 23: “a being of reason is what is fashioned by the mind [*ens rationis est, quod ab intellectu esse fingitur*].”

<sup>17</sup> H. Osterrieder:, *Metaphysica vetus & nova: Logicae criticae nuper editae tanquam pars altera* [...], Augustae Vindelicorum – Ratisbonae 1761, pp. 52-53: “Caeterum ad *non ens* refertur quoque a nonnullis *ens per accidens*, quod consistit in *aggregatione* plurium entium, quae nullum in unione sua servant

claims that when the intellect cognizes a non-being it makes a being of reason,<sup>18</sup> which he defines as something that has only *esse objectivum* in the intellect, any other kind of *esse* being impossible for it.<sup>19</sup> According to Osterrieder, in other words, a non-being can exist only objectively in the mind, and this it does when it is conceived by the intellect. This view, taken together with the view that an *ens per aggregationem* is a non-being, implies that a pile of stones, when conceived as a being or single thing, is something that exists only objectively in the mind as a being of reason.<sup>20</sup> To be sure, those whose views Osterrieder is reporting do not go as far as Leibniz, inasmuch as they deny the status of being only to aggregates of a particular sort, while Leibniz targets aggregates generally. Leibniz, that is to say, places greater restrictions on what can count as a genuine unity or being. But the basic idea, it seems clear, is the same: a plurality of real beings is not a real being, and when a plurality of beings is conceived as a single being or thing, it is merely a being of reason, something that exists only objectively in the mind.

It is worth noting that some early modern thinkers do not merely deny the status of a being to a plurality or aggregate of *substances*. In his *Philosophia prima* (1697), for example, Joannes Hebenstreit remarks:

Some also classify a being *per accidens* as a non-being, not because it plainly does not exist, but insofar as it is much or involves beings one of which is not ordained by its nature to another, nor are they both ordained by their nature to the constitution of a third as to the constitution of a being *per se*. For in this respect it is not a being, but beings, since a being is one, and whatever is not a being is a non-being [...].<sup>21</sup>

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ordinem, (unde & *ens per aggregationem* communius dicitur, e.g., *acervus frumenti* aut *lapidum*), & hoc ideo, quia; cum tale ens involvat *plura*, potius est *entia* quam *ens* dicendum.”

<sup>18</sup> H. Osterrieder, *Logica critica sive ars universae sapientiae studium rite instituendi*, Augustae Vindelicorum 1760, p. 479: “*Propositio* III. Intellectus dum cognoscit *non ens*, facit *ens rationis*. *Demonstratur*. Dum cognoscit *non ens*, facit *non ens cognitum*, sed *non ens cognitum* est *ens rationis* (per *definit.* III.) quippe *non ens cognitum* habet tantum *esse objectivum actu*, hoc est, habet *actum purum objectivum*, nec enim alterius capax est: ergo intellectus dum cognoscit *non ens*, facit *ens rationis*. Q.E.D.”

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 477: “*Definitio* III. “*Ens rationis* est, quod habet *esse objectivum in intellectu tantum*, nec aliud habere potest. [...] Alii sic: *ens rationis* est *non ens cognitum*.”

<sup>20</sup> See also the passage from Dionysius van de Wynpersse quoted in note 40 in Part I of this paper.

<sup>21</sup> J. Hebenstreit: *Philosophia prima* (see note **Error! Bookmark not defined.** in Part I of this paper), p. 98: “Quidam etiam *ens per accidens* referunt ad *non entia*, non quòd planè *non existat*, se[d] quatenus est multum seu involvit *entia*, quorum unum nec ad alterius, nec ipsa ad tertii entis constitutionem tanquam entis per se ordinantur ex sua naturâ. Hòc enim respectu non est *ens*, sed *entia*, cum *ens* sit unum: Quicquid autem non est *ens*, illud est *non ens*.”

It was commonly held that the class of beings *per accidens* includes not only aggregates of many substances, such as piles of stones or wheat, but also accidental compounds like *homo musicus* (musical human being) as well, that is to say, combinations of substance and accident.<sup>22</sup> The view discussed here by Hebenstreit, as he himself notes, entails that such an accidental compound, too, is not a being, but beings.

That an accidental being is a non-being and can be said to exist, at best, only objectively in the intellect, is a view that is plausibly attributed to Thomas Aquinas as well. For while commenting on Bk. 6, Ch. 2 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in which the accidental (e.g., the pale man or the musical builder) is said not to be the concern of any science, Thomas Aquinas explains that this is so in part

because a science examines those things which are beings in reality, and an accidental being is a being only in name, as it were, inasmuch as one thing is predicated of another. For each thing is a being insofar as it is one. But from two things, one of which is related accidentally to the other, one thing does not come to be, except in name, according as one thing is predicated of the other, as when a musician is said to be pale, or the converse.<sup>23</sup>

Here Thomas explains that where one thing belongs to another *per accidens*, the resulting composite is not a being in reality (*secundum rem*), but a “being only in name, as it were” (*ens quasi solo nomine*). Accordingly, since a science concerns itself only with things that are beings in reality, it falls to no science to study beings *per accidens*. Of course, the contrast here between an *ens solo nomine* and an *ens secundum rem* is strongly suggestive of the distinction between a being that has merely *esse objectivum* and a being that has *esse reale*.

Francisco Suárez adopts substantially the same position. In Section 1 of the First Disputation, Suárez explains that a being *per accidens*, as such, cannot fall under any science, including metaphysics, since a “being *per accidens*, as such, is not a being, but beings.” Moreover, Suárez

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<sup>22</sup> See Suárez: *Disputationes metaphysicae*, 4, 3, 14, in: F. Suárez: *Opera omnia*, vol. 25, ed. C. Breton, Paris 1856, p. 130. See also Bk. I, Ch. 13 of Joachim Jungius, *Logica Hamburgensis* (see note 40 in Part I of this paper), p. 57, as well as Leibniz's notes on this chapter (A VI, 4, 1069 (1678-80?)).

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Comm. in Metaph.* VI, lec. 2, n. 6 (1176), in Thomas Aquinas: *In metaphysicam Aristotelis commentaria*, Altera editio, ed. M. R. Cathala (Turin: Marietti, 1926), p. 358. (English translation: Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. J. P. Rowan, Chicago 1962, p. 466.)

grants that, if a being *per accidens* is considered insofar as it (sc. truly) has some sort of unity, it is considered not “insofar as it is *per accidens*, but insofar as it is in some way comprehended under the scope of being *per se*.” But he also cautions that if the unity under which a being *per accidens* is considered “does not exist in reality, but only in apprehension or conception,” then that being *per accidens* “will not truly be called real.” It will, in truth, be a being of reason, and in this case, too, it will not fall under the purview of metaphysics, since beings of reason are excluded from the subject of metaphysics.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the most important philosopher to mention here, however, is Democritus, for Leibniz himself frequently cites with approval Democritus’s (alleged) claim that bodies (sc. non-atomic ones) exist *νόμῳ*, and not *φύσει*—i.e., by convention or agreement, and not by nature.<sup>25</sup> Democritus, of course, is famous for his view that sensible qualities like sweetness, heat, and colour exist only by convention. And as Leibniz understands it, this view amounts to “what the more recent philosophers insist on, that sounds, colours, heat, and other qualities of the senses are not real things but phenomena” (“Ad constitutionem scientiae generalis,” A VI, 4, 477 (1682?)). Less well known, however, is the fact that Democritus was sometimes understood to have held that non-atomic bodies likewise exist *νόμῳ*, and not *φύσει*. Those who understood Democritus in this way, moreover, seem to have been motivated in their interpretation by the belief that according to him a collection of atoms cannot constitute a single being. For Aristotle reports in his *Metaphysics* that according to Democritus one substance cannot come from two nor

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<sup>24</sup> Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, 1, 1, 5, in: *Opera omnia*, vol. 25 (see note 22), p. 3: “Propterea enim dixi sermonem esse de ente per accidens quatenus tale est; nam illud, ut sic, non est ens, sed entia, et ideo directe non comprehenditur sub obiecto unius scientiae, sed plurium, ad quas pertinere possunt entia per se ex quibus tale ens per accidens constat, ut D. Thom. notavit dicto lib. VI Metaph., lect. 4. Si autem illa unitas non sit in re, sed tantum in apprehensione vel conceptione, tale ens ut sic non vere dicetur reale: unde eadem erit de illo ratio quae de caeteris entibus rationis. Haec autem excluduntur a consideratione directa huius scientiae [sc. metaphysicae] ab eodem Aristotele, libro VI Metaph., in fine, ut ibidem omnes interpretes notarunt. Et ratio est, quia talia neque vere sunt entia sed fere nomine tantum, neque cum entibus realibus conveniunt in eodem conceptu entis, sed solum per quamdam imperfectam analogiam proportionalitatis, ut infra videbimus; obiectum autem adaequatum scientiae requirit unitatem aliquam obiectivam.”

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Leibniz’s letter of 30 April 1687 to Arnauld, A II, 2, 191; LA, 126, and his letter of 20 June 1703 to De Volder, GP II, 252; LDV, 264.

two from one.<sup>26</sup> Aristotle is also quoted by Simplicius as stating that for Democritus atoms

conflict with one another and move within the void on account of their dissimilarity and the other differences mentioned, and as they move, they collide and intertwine with such an intertwining as to make them touch and be next to one another, but which does not in reality generate any other single nature from them all; for it is completely ridiculous for two or more ever to become one.<sup>27</sup>

Assuming that Aristotle is right that for Democritus a multitude of atoms cannot constitute a single being or nature, it follows that for the ancient atomist a non-atomic body is not a being, but beings. This, it should be noted, sits well with the scholarly view that ancient atomism was originally motivated in part by a concern to accommodate the Eleatic ban on coming-to-be,<sup>28</sup> for on this interpretation of him, Democritus holds that the generation of an animal (for example) is not a case of a substance's coming-to-be, but rather a case of many substances' becoming so-situated with respect to one another. And from the view that a non-atomic body is not a being, but many beings, it is a short step to the view that a non-atomic body, understood as a being or single thing, is something that exists only *νόμῳ*, and not *φύσει*. That, at any rate, seems to have been the assessment of the Platonist philosopher Plutarch. For in his *Adversus Colotem* Plutarch addresses the Epicurean Colotes's attack on the claim that bodies exist *νόμῳ*, not by denying that this was indeed Democritus's view, but by alleging that Epicurus—another atomist—was committed to the very same position.<sup>29</sup> Here, moreover, it is worth noting that the Greek term *νόμῳ*, which is commonly translated “by convention,” is cognate with the verb *νομίζω*, which means “to think” or “to believe.” It is possible, therefore, to understand the claim that something is or exists *νόμῳ* as

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<sup>26</sup> Aristotle: *Metaphysics* Z.13, 1039a7-10. Cf. “Discours de métaphysique” §9, where Leibniz claims that “a substance is not divided into two, nor is a substance made from two substances” (A VI, 4, 1541-42; AG, 42).

<sup>27</sup> Simplicius: *On Aristotle's 'On the Heavens' 1.10-12*, trans. R. J. Hankinson, Ithaca – New York 2006, p. 6 (295.9-14).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, R. D. McKirahana, Jr.: *Philosophy Before Socrates: An Introduction with Texts and Commentary*, Indianapolis – Cambridge 1994, Ch. 16.

<sup>29</sup> See Plutarch: *Adversus Colotem*, 1110E – 1111F, in: Plutarch: *Moralia*, vol. 14, trans. Benedict Einarson and Phillip H. De Lacy, Cambridge, MA – London 1967, pp. 208-17. See also Eleni Kechagia, *Plutarch Against Colotes*, Oxford 2011, Ch. 6.

involving, among other things, the claim that it exists in the mind.<sup>30</sup> When Leibniz expresses approval of Democritus's alleged belief that bodies exist only *νόμῳ*, then, it is very plausible to think that his own insistence on the principle that unity is a necessary feature of every being, taken together with the conviction that bodies are in reality or *a parte rei* aggregates (i.e., mere pluralities), led him to agree with Democritus (as interpreted by Plutarch and Colotes) that bodies exist only *νόμῳ*, even if he himself rejected Democritus's material atoms. Of course, whereas Democritus (according to Plutarch and Colotes) takes non-atomic bodies to exist *νόμῳ*, i.e., by convention or agreement, Leibniz commonly speaks instead (e.g., in the correspondence with Des Bosses) of how a kind of reality accrues to well-founded phenomena and other imaginary beings by virtue of a harmony that obtains among the perceptions of all monads.

It seems likely, then, that when Leibniz claims that a body is not a substance, but substances or an aggregate of substances, and therefore a phenomenon, his point is that a body, understood as a single being, is something that exists only objectively in perceivers, since *a parte rei* or in reality a body is not a being, but beings. Indeed, given that substantially the same line of reasoning is found in a number of other thinkers, Leibniz himself may well have assumed that his readers would understand his claim that bodies are phenomena in the way that I think we should understand it.

## 2. Textual Evidence

It is worth noting, moreover, that Leibniz explicitly states in several texts that a body is a “being of the imagination” (*estre d’imagination*), an “apparent being” (*estre apparent*), a “fictional being” (*estre de fiction*), or a “being in name” (*estre de nom*).<sup>31</sup> And his point, it seems clear, is that a

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<sup>30</sup> Here I’m putting a slight twist on a point made by Kechagia, *Plutarch Against Colotes* (see the previous note), p. 182.

<sup>31</sup> To the extent that such texts would seem to preclude an assignment of substantial reality to bodies, they are, of course, problematic from the viewpoint of Adams’ interpretation. But it is worth noting that such texts are problematic for Rutherford’s interpretation as well, since, on his view, the aggregates with which Leibniz identifies bodies are not merely mental or imaginary things, but, at most, “semi-mental” things.

body is something that exists only objectively in perceivers. In the texts I have in mind, moreover, Leibniz's various claims are most plausibly interpreted in the way that I think they should be: as informed by the view that a body, conceived as a being or single thing, is something that exists only objectively in the mind, since in reality or *a parte rei* a body is not a being, but beings. Consider, for example, the following memorandum of 29 December 1692 (Old Style), in which Leibniz summarizes a conversation with the Electress Sophie:

Since every body is composed of parts, it is not truly a being, but many beings; it is a being in name [*un estre de nom*], somewhat like an army or flock, or like a reservoir full of fish. An army is not properly one thing, but many taken together; its unity is only nominal [*son unité n'est que de nom*], it is a fictional being [*estre de fiction*]. The soldiers are true beings, but the army is only a plurality of beings. A machine is not a being either, strictly speaking, since it is only a heap of wheels and springs so ordered as to concur in the doing of certain tasks. The same can be said of the body of an animal. We regard a body, a piece of flesh, a bone as a being, but this is because of our weak vision; if our vision were piercing enough to see this heap of worms or other animals, plants or other species of which this piece of flesh is composed, we would see that it is no more a being than an army or a flock. Thus it is a being of the imagination. (A II, 2, 639; LTS, 100)

The first thing that is liable to strike the reader here is the frequency with which Leibniz goes back and forth in this passage between claiming that something is a plurality of beings and claiming that it is an imaginary being, a fictional being, or a being in name. In the light of the last section's discussion of Gorlaeus, Osterrieder, Aquinas, Suárez, and Democritus, Leibniz is most plausibly interpreted here as claiming that an army (for example) is really a plurality, and not a unity, and therefore, that an army, conceived as a being or unity, is merely a creature of the mind or "fictional being," something with a mental existence, but not an extra-mental one. Otherwise put, an inventory of the beings that really exist in the universe will include individual soldiers, but it will make no mention of armies.

Notice, moreover, that in this passage's penultimate sentence Leibniz offers what amounts to an explanation of why we are more inclined to recognize that an army (conceived as a single thing) is a fictional being than we are to recognize that a bone or piece of flesh is. Here Leibniz seems to want to say that while we are more inclined to think that an army, understood as a single thing, is a mental construct of some sort—since, on reflection, it is fairly obvious (according to

Leibniz, at least) that in some important sense an army is not in reality a being, but a plurality of beings—in the case of a bone or piece of flesh, by contrast, we are more inclined to think of it as a single being because our vision is not piercing enough for us to be able to discern the animals and plants contained within it. In other words, although a bone, as it exists in itself, is no more a single thing than an army is, we are more inclined to think of it as a single thing because, thanks to the confusion of our perceptions, it is made to appear to us in consciousness as a single thing in a way that an army is not. Nevertheless, a bone or piece of flesh (sc. understood as a single thing) is only “a being of the imagination.” The clear suggestion here is that how we conceive a body—as a unity or as a plurality—is crucial to determining its ontological status: an army, conceived as a plurality, is a collection of real beings. Conceived as a unity, however, an army is not real, but a being of the imagination. So again, Leibniz is most plausibly interpreted as holding that a body, understood as a being or single thing, has only *esse objectivum*, since *a parte rei* a body is a plurality of beings, and not a being.

Another text worth considering here comes from Leibniz’s late “Entretien de Philarète et d’Ariste” (1712; rev. 1715):

I also have other important reasons that lead me to refuse to bodies the title and name of substances, metaphysically speaking [*en langage metaphysique*]. For, to put it in a word, a body is not a true unity; it is only an *aggregate*, what the Schools call *a pure accident*, an assemblage like a flock; its unity comes from our perception. It is a *being of reason*, or rather a *being of imagination*, a *phenomenon*. (GP VI, 586; AG, 262-63; emphases in original)

In this passage, too, Leibniz goes from the claim that a body is not a true unity to the claim that it is a being of the imagination or phenomenon, and this via the claim that a body’s unity comes from perception—i.e., is merely apparent. Again, the suggestion is that, in the mind’s conception of a body as a single thing, the body’s unity is not something that belongs to it *a parte rei* or in reality. It is, rather, fashioned entirely by the mind. And because the unity conceived to belong to a body is not real, but ideal, a body, understood as a single thing, is not a real being, but something that exists only objectively in perceivers. This reading of the passage, moreover, seems amply confirmed by the fact that Leibniz here also characterizes a body as a being of reason. Again, as

traditionally understood, a being of reason exists only objectively in the intellect, which is to say that it has only objective being (*esse objectivum*).<sup>32</sup>

A third passage seems clearly to show that Leibniz's inference from aggregates to phenomena is to be understood in the way I claim it should be. The passage I have in mind appears in a letter of 1716 to Samuel Masson. Here, after claiming that "there are as many completely distinct substances as there are monads," that "not all monads are minds," and that "these monads do not make up a whole that is truly one," Leibniz adds that matter

is a heap, *not a substance but a substantiatum*, as would be an army or a flock; and, insofar as it is considered as making up *one* thing, it is a phenomenon, very true, in fact, but whose *unity* is due to our conception. (GP VI, 625; AG, 227 – emphases in original)

Of course, when Leibniz declares here that matter is a heap (*amas*), he is claiming, as his appeal to the example of an army makes clear, that it is an aggregate. Notice, however, that he does not then immediately go on to declare that matter is a phenomenon. Rather, he implies, or at least strongly insinuates, that a distinction is to be drawn between matter, understood as an aggregate, and matter, understood as a single thing, and it is only matter conceived in the latter way that is said to be a phenomenon and "something whose unity is due to our conception." The implication or suggestion here, then, is that when Leibniz first declares that matter is a heap or aggregate, he does *not* understand this aggregate to be a phenomenon or something that exists only objectively in the mind. What *is* a phenomenon is the objective content of the mind's conception of the aggregate as a being or single thing. Given Leibniz's commitment to the view that unity is a necessary feature of every being, then, his reasoning in this passage would seem clearly to be this: a body or chunk of matter, understood as a being or single thing, is no more than a real phenomenon or imaginary being because, in itself or *a parte rei*, every body or chunk of matter is not a being, but a plurality of beings. When conceived as it really is—as a plurality of beings—a chunk of matter is an aggregate whose reality is derived from, and indeed identical to, the reality of the beings contained within it. So conceived, it is not a being, but beings. When conceived as a unity or being,

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<sup>32</sup> See note 40 in Part I of this paper.

however, it is a phenomenon, a creature of the mind, since in reality there is no single thing that answers to our conception of the chunk of matter.

It is with all this in mind, I would suggest, that we must consider the following passage, from a letter of 1702 to Queen Sophie Charlotte:

simple substances are subject to no dissolution, and one cannot deny that there are any, since all the reality of composites [*des composées*] comes only from the components, or rather [*ou plustost*], composites are only apparent beings and do not constitute one true substance; for since all the reality of a society or herd is only in the particular men or sheep, without there being anything more in the assemblage except relations [*le rapport*], the reality of which, over and above their foundations, is only in the mind that thinks of them, it follows that, insofar as the components are only composites, one will never arrive at something that has a reality proper to it, nor at substances that are truly real: therefore, either there will be nothing real there, or one must come to simple substances. This is also why composite beings can perish, even though every annihilation is inconceivable: they are not true substances. (GP VI, 516; LTS, 274)

Leibniz does not assert in this passage that composites are imaginary beings; rather, he asserts that they are apparent beings. But in a text from the mid-1680s Leibniz seems clearly to understand an apparent being to be an imaginary being.<sup>33</sup> In calling a composite an apparent being, then, in this passage Leibniz is implying that a composite is an imaginary being. Notice, however, that here Leibniz claims that composites are apparent beings notwithstanding the fact that he is also concerned to argue that there must be simple substances on the grounds that composites are

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<sup>33</sup> See "Divisiones," A VI, 4, 576 (1683-86?): "A being [*ens*] is either real or apparent—real, such as the sun—imaginary, for instance, a parhelion or rainbow or other phenomena." Every thing [*res*] is either a being *per se* or a being *per accidens*—being *per se*, what is really [*revera*] one, for instance a human being, an animal—being *per accidens*, what is also called a being through aggregation, for instance, a multitude of human beings, a pile of wood, a machine. If animals are machines, if bodies lack substantial forms, they will be beings *per accidens*—in fact, it can be shown finally that, if every body is a being *per accidens*, a body will be an imaginary thing [*rem imaginarium*] or a phenomenon after the example of a rainbow". Notice Leibniz's switch, in the first sentence of this passage, from 'apparent' to 'imaginary.' Clearly, he understands an *ens apparens* to be an *ens imaginarium*. (Notice, too, Leibniz's claim that if every body is a being *per accidens*, and therefore a being through aggregation, it follows that a body is an imaginary thing.) See also "Genera terminorum. Substantiae," A VI, 4, 566 (1683-85?), where one finds the following pairs of terms: "something, nothing," "possible, impossible," "necessary, contingent," "being in act, being in potency," "real being, apparent being." Here, Leibniz offers as an example of an apparent being the rainbow (*iris*), which, in the passage quoted at the beginning of this note, he labels an imaginary being. See also "Notationes generales," A VI, 4, 555 (1683-85?): "The distinction between a real and apparent being, and between a real and apparent quality, is worth examining."

composed of, and derive their reality from, simple substances.<sup>34</sup> This leaves us with something of a puzzle: granted, as I've argued against Adams, that an imaginary being cannot possess the reality of genuine substances, it is liable to seem at first that Leibniz undermines his own argument for the existence of simple substances immediately after offering it by declaring that composites are apparent beings. But this way of reading the situation seems quite implausible, especially considering the number of times Leibniz rehearses this very argument in various texts. The problem, I daresay, is not to be solved by supposing that for Leibniz an imaginary being can after all possess the reality of genuine substances. Not only is such a view problematic in itself, and inconsistent with many things that Leibniz says, but the adversative expression 'or rather' (*ou plustost*)—which is interjected immediately *after* the claim that composites receive their reality from their components, and immediately *before* the claim that composites are “only” apparent beings—clearly points to some sort of contrast between a composite, considered as having a reality derived from its components, and a composite, considered as an apparent being. It therefore seems more plausible to suppose that what we have here is a shift in Leibniz's conception of a composite. For, as I have argued, Leibniz thinks that composites or bodies can be conceived in either of two ways: as pluralities or as unities. And on his view, a composite or body, conceived as a plurality (i.e., truly), does indeed possess reality without qualification (i.e., does indeed possess an existence outside perception), and the reality of a body, so conceived, just *is* the reality belonging to the unities that figure in it. When considered as a unity, on the other hand, a body or composite is merely an imaginary or apparent being, something with a merely mental existence, and not an extra-mental one. Indeed, that there is this shift in Leibniz's conception of a composite is, I would argue, the only way to explain the contrast implied by the adversative expression 'or rather' (*ou plustost*). The passage under consideration, therefore, supports, or is at least consistent with, my contention that Leibniz's inference from aggregate to phenomenon is to be understood

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<sup>34</sup> The argument in question is a version of one that is found time and again in the Leibnizian corpus. See, for example, “Monadologie” §2, GP VI, 607; AG, 213.

as an inference from the claim that every body is in reality a plurality of beings to the claim that a body, understood as a single thing, is something that exists only objectively in perceivers.

### 3. Consequences

The arguments of the two preceding sections offer significant support for my proposed solution to the problem posed by Leibniz's ostensibly inconsistent characterizations of body. Before concluding, I will identify and discuss a couple of this position's consequences for our understanding of Leibniz's system.

The first is briefly stated and concerns the issue of Leibniz's idealism. It is well known that in recent decades a number of scholars have challenged the traditional reading of Leibniz as committed to idealism during his entire mature period (from the 1680s onward). Some scholars, notably Daniel Garber,<sup>35</sup> have argued for a so-called 'middle period' (the 1680s and the bulk of the 1690s) during which Leibniz was committed to the existence of genuinely extended corporeal substance. Others, like Pauline Phemister,<sup>36</sup> have found in Leibniz a lifelong commitment to the existence of such substances. The main thesis argued for here hardly provides the key to resolving this debate, but it does imply that talk of bodies as well-founded phenomena in Leibniz's writings of the 1680s and 90s is not to be interpreted, without further ado, as inconsistent with a developmentalist reading of his philosophy like that offered by Daniel Garber. For Leibniz's equivocal use of the term 'body' makes the claim that bodies are real or well-founded phenomena equivocal: only when Leibniz uses the term 'body' in the more inclusive sense—according to which corporeal substances, assuming they exist, count as bodies—does the claim that bodies are (aggregates and therefore) phenomena imply a commitment to idealism on his part. And this is because, when 'body' is taken in the more restricted sense—according to which corporeal

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<sup>35</sup> Garber: *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad* (see note **Error! Bookmark not defined.** in Part I of this paper). Garber has been at the forefront of efforts to resist the traditional reading of the mature Leibniz as a committed idealist. See D. Garber: "Leibniz and the Foundations of Physics: The Middle Years," in: *The Natural Philosophy of Leibniz*, eds. K. Okruhlik & J. R. Brown, Dordrecht – Boston 1985, pp. 27-103.

<sup>36</sup> Phemister: *Leibniz and the Natural World* (see note 38 in Part I of this paper).

substances have bodies but are not themselves bodies—the claim that bodies are well-founded phenomena is analytic, since Leibniz holds that the body of a corporeal substance is invariably an aggregate (sc. of other corporeal substances). In Leibniz, therefore, the simple claim that bodies are phenomena does not stand or fall with a commitment to idealism. Indeed, it is only indirectly—via the implication that *every* perception with an extended thing as its representational content also has a plurality of beings as its extra-mental object—that idealism motivates the claim that every body, in the more inclusive sense of ‘body,’ is an aggregate and therefore nothing but a phenomenon.

The second consequence I should like to address concerns the claim, often repeated in the secondary literature, that in some texts Leibniz endorses a phenomenalism like Berkeley’s, according to which bodies are the representational contents of perceptions that have nothing substantial (such as an aggregate of monads) as their extra-mental object.<sup>37</sup>

I have argued that the aggregates of substances with which Leibniz often identifies bodies, and which are said by him to possess a reality derived wholly from their constituent substances, are collections that are nothing over and above the substances contained within them. For I have argued that when Leibniz claims that a body is an aggregate of substances that possesses a reality derived wholly from its ingredients, the assertion is to be understood as a claim about what a body is *a parte rei* or in reality. It follows that such an aggregate is to be understood as enjoying an extra-mental and perceiver-independent existence. But if an aggregate, so understood, is to be something over and above its constituents, there must be real relations among its constituents

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<sup>37</sup> M. Furth: “Monadology”, in: *The Philosophical Review* LXXVI/2 (1967), pp. 169-200, argues that Leibniz abandoned the conception of body as an aggregate of (simple) substances in favour of a phenomenalistic reduction of bodies to perceptions. On this account, the perceptions or phenomena with which Leibniz identifies bodies lack any sort of extra-mental object. Regarding this essay, see Nicholas Jolley, “Leibniz and Phenomenalism” (see note 5 in Part I of this paper), 38-51: “Since Furth’s pioneering paper, *Monadology*, most scholars would no doubt agree that Leibniz at least flirted with phenomenalism” (p. 38). And indeed, according to Robert Sleigh, *Leibniz and Arnauld* (see note 18 in Part I of this paper), during the correspondence with Arnauld, “Leibniz moved away from” a theory according to which minds alone exist and bodies are imaginary phenomena “toward some other theory” (p. 100). And according to Hartz: *Leibniz’s Final System* (see note 4 in Part I of this paper), pp. 80-82, Leibniz sometimes asserts that bodies are phenomena without extra-mental objects.

that give rise to some sort of unity of the collection. And it is well known that for Leibniz all relations (excepting, presumably, those relations of dependence that each creature bears directly to its creator) are ideal, which implies that there can be no relations that obtain *a parte rei* among the constituents of an aggregate. Accordingly, the aggregates which bodies are said to be *a parte rei* can possess no unity whatsoever, according to Leibniz, and so must instead be collections that are nothing over and above their constituents.<sup>38</sup>

This conclusion is important, for it implies that, on Leibniz's view, a commitment to the reality of an aggregate of substances, understood as something which possesses a reality wholly derived from its ingredients, is not a commitment to the reality of anything other than those same substances. For this reason, when Leibniz tells De Volder in a letter of 30 June 1704 that, "considering the matter carefully, it should be said that there is nothing in things except simple substances and in them perception and appetite" (GP II, 270; LDV, 307), we should indeed understand Leibniz to be committing himself to idealism, but we certainly *need* not read him as committing himself to a phenomenalism like Berkeley's, according to which bodies are what Leibniz sometimes calls "imaginary phenomena" — that is to say, representational contents of perceptions that have nothing substantial (such as aggregates of substances) as their extra-mental objects.<sup>39</sup> For the claim that there is nothing in things except simple substances and their properties is perfectly compatible with the claim that *a parte rei* every body, in the more inclusive sense of 'body,'

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<sup>38</sup> I am in no way concerned to deny that for Leibniz the reality (such as it is) of those relations which obtain among creatures depends on God's conception of them, or that for Leibniz the way we individuate collections of monads in perception — thanks to which some plurality of monads appears to us in consciousness as a single thing — is dependent on our grasp of such relations. See Leibniz's letter of 15 February 1712 to Des Bosses, GP II, 438; LDB, 233, and Rutherford: "Leibniz and the Problem of Monadic Interaction" (see note 9 in Part I of this paper). Nothing about the interpretation presented here commits me to a denial of either of these two claims. What I deny is Rutherford's claim that for Leibniz these relations — which are ideal — are themselves *constitutive* of, and *intrinsic* to, aggregates, understood as things whose reality is derived wholly from the substances contained within them.

<sup>39</sup> Leibniz distinguishes between imaginary *phenomena* and imaginary *beings*. On his view, an imaginary being can have a foundation *in re*, but an imaginary phenomenon, by definition, cannot. Moreover, although the claim that some item is an imaginary phenomenon certainly implies that it is an imaginary being, the converse does not hold, since some imaginary beings are real or well-founded phenomena, rather than imaginary phenomena.

is an aggregate of monads, understood as something that is nothing over and above the monads that figure in it. And the same is true when Leibniz immediately goes on to tell De Volder that

matter and motion are not so much substances or things as the phenomena of perceivers, the reality of which is located in the harmony of perceivers with themselves (at different times) and with other perceivers. (ibid.)

For on the interpretation defended here, the claim that a body is a real or well-founded phenomenon amounts to the claim that a body, understood as a being or single thing, is not a real being, but an imaginary one—i.e., something that exists only objectively in perceivers. And nothing prevents bodies, so understood, from having a sort of reality that accrues to them insofar as a harmony obtains among the well-ordered perceptions of all monads. Indeed, that the phenomena with which he identifies bodies possess some sort of reality by virtue of a harmony obtaining among monadic perceptions is, in all likelihood, Leibniz's version of the Democritean pronouncement that bodies exist by *convention* or *agreement* (*νόμος*). The account presented here, therefore, sees no inconsistency between passages in which Leibniz claims that a body is not a substance, but substances or an aggregate of substances, and other passages in which he asserts that bodies are phenomena that possess some sort of reality by virtue of an intersubjective agreement that obtains among the well-ordered perceptions of all substances.

Further, as I pointed out in Part I of this paper, there are a good number of texts from the correspondence with Des Bosses in which we find the claim that bodies are aggregates of monads standing alongside the claim that bodies are phenomena to which some sort of reality accrues insofar as a harmony obtains among the perceptions of all monads. The choice often presented by Leibniz in these texts, then, is not a choice between corporeal substances, on the one hand, and a phenomenalism like Berkeley's, on the other. At issue, rather, is the question of whether any perception that has an extended thing as its representational content has a genuine unity as its extramental object. If not, then every body (in the more inclusive sense of 'body') will be, when conceived as a being or single thing, a real or well-founded phenomenon, since *a parte rei* every body will in this case be many beings, rather than a being. On the other hand, if *some* perceptions that

have extended things as their representational contents have unities as their extra-mental objects—and this because certain collections of monads possess a real unity conferred on them by some sort of substantial bond—then not every body, conceived as a being or single thing, will be real or well-founded phenomena. Some bodies, so conceived, will be *real*.

It is worth noting, moreover, that in the letter to De Volder quoted above, in which Leibniz states that “there is nothing in things except simple substances and in them perception and appetite,” we likewise find Leibniz rehearsing his frequently repeated argument that indivisible unities—i.e., monads—are primary constituents of bodies (GP II, 267/LDV, 301). So in this text, too, we find the claim that bodies are collections of substances standing alongside the claim that bodies are phenomena to which there accrues some sort of reality by virtue of a harmony obtaining among monads’ perceptions.

To be sure, it cannot be denied that on some occasions Leibniz holds out the *possibility* that bodies are imaginary phenomena. But this he does only when he is concerned to point out a necessary consequence of denying something that he himself believes—namely, that *a parte rei* bodies, at a minimum, *contain* unities. A good example of this can be found in the correspondence with Arnauld. In his letter of 4 March 1687 to Leibniz, after claiming that Augustine was willing to grant that bodies do not have true unity (since unity involves indivisibility, and no body is indivisible), Antoine Arnauld asserts that, according to Leibniz, by contrast, a body that does not possess a soul or substantial form contains nothing substantial (A II, 2, 153; LA, 107). In his letter of 30 April 1687 to Arnauld, Leibniz responds to this (in part) as follows:

You object, sir, that it could pertain to the essence of body not to have true unity; but it will then pertain to the essence of body to be *a phenomenon deprived of all reality*, as an ordered dream would be, for phenomena themselves, like the rainbow or a pile of stones, would be altogether *imaginary* if they were not composed of beings having true unity. (A II, 2, 186; LA, 121-2; my emphases)

In his correspondence with Arnauld (which pre-dates the correspondence with Des Bosses by about 20 years), Leibniz frequently alleges that if a body is to count as a substance, it must have a soul or substantial form. The suggestion in several passages is that such a soul or form, which

Leibniz also characterizes as an indivisible substance (A II, 2, 121; LA, 94 (28 Nov./8 Dec. 1686)), can confer unity on the body of which it is an element, thereby making that body a substance (A II, 2, 122; LA, 95). At issue in the exchange just mentioned, however, is not the question of what is required for a body to be a substance. The exchange concerns, instead, those bodies which lack a soul or substantial form and are not, therefore, substances. Arnauld mistakenly claims that for Leibniz such a body contains nothing substantial, i.e., that it contains no unities. In his response, Leibniz denies that this is his view; to the contrary, he explains, he grants that bodies which lack true unity invariably possess “as much reality or substantiality as there is true unity in that which enters into their composition.” The claim here is that a body which *a parte rei* lacks unity nonetheless possesses the reality of the true unities that figure in it. To suppose, on the contrary, that a body which lacks unity contains *a parte rei* no unities whatsoever is, according to Leibniz, to claim that *a parte rei* there is no body at all—not even a body conceived as an aggregate or plurality of substances. And from this it follows, not merely that there is nothing more to a body, understood as a being or single thing, than a phenomenon, but that there is nothing more to a body than an *imaginary* phenomenon—i.e., nothing more than the representational content of a perception that altogether lacks an extra-mental object or *fundamentum in re*.<sup>40</sup> As Leibniz puts in the passage quoted above, “phenomena themselves, like the rainbow or a pile of stones, would be altogether imaginary if they were not composed of beings having true unity.” But of course, in this text

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<sup>40</sup> The passage just quoted is not the only in which Leibniz speaks of imaginary phenomena in the correspondence with Arnauld, although in other passages he doesn’t use the expression ‘imaginary phenomenon’; instead, he speaks of phenomena “in which nothing real is found”. (Notice that in the passage just quoted, Leibniz seems to equate an imaginary phenomenon with a “phenomenon deprived of all reality.”) See, e.g., the second draft of Leibniz’s letter of 30 April 1687 to Arnauld, A II, 2, 169: “where there are only beings by aggregation, there aren’t even any real beings. And the reason is that every being by aggregation presupposes beings endowed with true unity, since it has its reality only from those beings out of which it is composed, with the result that it would have no reality at all if each being of which it is composed is again a being by aggregation, where one must again seek another foundation for its reality. And here no process to infinity is possible [...]. Consequently, if there is nothing in bodies but extension, in pursuing the resolution one will come necessarily to atoms, like those of Epicurus or those of Cordemoy, or else bodies must be composed of mathematical points, that is to say, points devoid of parts; or finally it must be admitted that bodies are only phenomena *in which nothing real is found*.”

Leibniz is not claiming that bodies are imaginary phenomena. He is, rather, making a conditional claim: if a body *a parte rei* neither is a unity nor contains unities, then there is nothing more to that body than an imaginary phenomenon.

Many of the texts normally adduced in support of the view that Leibniz endorsed a phenomenalism like Berkeley's do not, therefore, *require* that we subscribe to this view. But there are, in addition, a number of good reasons to think that Leibniz never endorses such a phenomenalism. For starters, on the interpretation defended here, to assert that the mature Leibniz at any point subscribed to a phenomenalism like Berkeley's is actually to undermine his grounds for concluding that bodies are real or well-founded phenomena. For, once again, on Berkeley's version of phenomenalism, a body is the representational content of a perception that has nothing substantial (such as an aggregate of substances) as its extra-mental object. And on this conception of the phenomena with which bodies are identified, it makes no sense to distinguish between what a body is *quoad nos* (sc. a unity) and what a body is in reality or *a parte rei* (sc. a plurality).<sup>41</sup> And so it makes no sense to argue that body *A* is not a real being, but a well-founded phenomenon or imaginary being, on the grounds that in reality *A* is a mere plurality of beings.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See G. Bekeley: *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, eds. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, London – New York 1948-1957, vol. 2, pp. 244-45 (*Third Dialogue between Hylas and Philonous*): “*Phil.* You mistake me. I am not for changing things into ideas, but rather ideas into things; since those immediate objects of perception, which, according to you, are only appearances of things, I take to be the real things themselves. *Hyl.* Things! You may pretend what you please; but it is certain you leave us nothing but the empty forms of things, the outside only which strikes the senses. *Phil.* What you call empty forms and outside of things seems to me the very things themselves.”

<sup>42</sup> It will perhaps be objected that there is at least one famous passage in which Leibniz seems clearly to endorse the view that bodies are the representational contents of perceptions that have no substantial extra-mental objects. In this passage Leibniz states:

It is true that the things that happen in the soul must agree with those that happen outside the soul; but for this it is sufficient that those things that happen in one soul correspond both among themselves and with those thing that happen in any other soul; and there is no need to posit something beyond [*extra*] all souls or monads. According to this hypothesis, when we say that Socrates is sitting, nothing more is signified than those things that we understand by ‘Socrates’ and ‘sitting’ are appearing to us and to others to whom it pertains. (to Des Bosses, 28 August 1712, GP II, 451-52; LDB, 257)

This passage might easily be taken to suggest that Leibniz understands bodies to be the representational contents of perceptions that have no substantial extra-mental objects. After all, the truth of “Socrates is sitting” is *not* said to depend on some state of affairs *a parte rei* that the perception of Socrates

Second, there are several texts that speak against the suggestion that in some texts the mature Leibniz endorses the view that bodies are imaginary phenomena. In one well-known text, for example, Leibniz explicitly complains that Berkeley failed to recognize “the infinity of monads, *constituting everything*” (my emphasis).<sup>43</sup> What’s more, in at least three different texts Leibniz asserts that an ontology like Berkeley’s—that is to say, an ontology according to which only rational simple substances exist—is incompatible with, or not consonant with, God’s supreme perfection. One of these texts was written in 1687 (draft of Leibniz’s letter of 30 April to Arnauld, A II, 2, 172), another in 1696 (“Eclaircissement du nouveau systeme,” GP IV, 495; WF, 49), and the third in 1715 (to Des Bosses, 29 April, GP II, 496; LDB, 339). Leibniz makes it quite clear in these three texts that a world in which spirits or minds alone exist, and their perceptions correspond to nothing substantial in the world (i.e., are imaginary phenomena), is incompatible with God’s perfection. It seems, then, not only that there is no good reason to think that the mature Leibniz ever endorsed a phenomenalism like Berkeley’s, but also that there is good reason to think that he did not.

#### 4. Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that when Leibniz asserts that a body is an aggregate of substances that possesses a reality wholly derived from its constituent substances, his claim is to be understood as a claim about what a body is in reality or *a parte rei*. I have also argued that such an aggregate is, according to Leibniz, a mere plurality of substances that is nothing over and above

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seated confusedly represents. However, a careful reading of the passage reveals that this observation misses the point: what Leibniz denies is merely that the truth of the statement “Socrates is sitting” requires that we posit something beyond, or in addition to (*extra*), all souls and monads—i.e., that we posit a *corporeal substance* called “Socrates”. Notice, moreover, that on the interpretation presented here, in the absence of corporeal substances, the subject of the statement “Socrates is sitting” can only be an imaginary being, according to Leibniz. So it should not come as a surprise if Leibniz accounts for the truth of the statement by appeal to every monad’s possessing a perception, whether conscious or unconscious, in which a particular body is presented as seated. Notice also that this is entirely compatible with the claim that the perception of Socrates seated confusedly expresses or represents some state of affairs obtaining in the monadic realm.

<sup>43</sup> See AG, 307. The Latin original can be found in: A. Robinet: “Leibniz: Lecteur du ‘Traité de Berkeley’”, in: *Les Études philosophiques* II (1983), pp. 217-223, at p. 218.

those substances themselves, since Leibniz denies that there are any real relations obtaining among creatures. This is not to deny that for Leibniz ideal relations enjoy a kind of reality by virtue of God's conception of creatures as related among themselves; nor is it to deny that for Leibniz the way creatures individuate collections of monads in perception—thanks to which some plurality of monads appears to them in consciousness as a single thing—is dependent on their grasp of ideal relations.<sup>44</sup> It is simply to say that in calling a body an aggregate of genuine substances, Leibniz's means to assert that *a parte rei* a body is a collection of created substances in which no two substances bear a real relation to one another. I have also argued that for Leibniz the claim that a body is a real or well-founded phenomenon is a claim about a body, conceived as a being or single thing, and that it amounts to the claim that a body, so conceived, is an imaginary being—i.e., something with a mental existence, but not an extra-mental one. I have also argued that the claim that a body is a well-founded phenomenon is motivated by the claim that a body is an aggregate of substances whose reality is wholly derived from, and indeed identical to, the reality of those same substances. For if every body is a mere plurality of beings *a parte rei*, it follows that in reality there is no such thing as a body, conceived as a being or single thing. A body, so conceived, is something that exists only objectively in the mind.

In closing, it is worth noting that one major advantage of this interpretation is its ability to make sense of a wide array of texts. For one thing, on this interpretation, passages that have often been taken as evidence of Leibniz's occasional commitment to, or flirtation with, a phenomenalism like Berkeley's are easily reconciled with other passages that clearly suggest otherwise—in particular, with passages in which Leibniz characterizes bodies as aggregates of substances. It can also make sense of the fact that Leibniz sometimes speaks of bodies as phenomena even in contexts in which he apparently commits himself to the existence of corporeal substances.<sup>45</sup> For when Leibniz maintains that there are corporeal substances, he also holds that the body of a corporeal substance is an aggregate of other corporeal substances, which implies, on the present

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<sup>44</sup> See Leibniz's letter of 15 February 1712 to Des Bosses, GP II, 438; LDB, 233.

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Leibniz's letter of 4 November 1715 to Remond, GP III, 657.

interpretation, that the body of a corporeal substance, conceived as a being or single thing, is a real or well-founded phenomenon. And finally, this interpretation can make good sense of passages in which Leibniz states that bodies are beings of reason, imaginary beings, fictional beings, etc. Such passages, it's worth noting, have not attracted much comment by Leibniz scholars. What's more, this interpretation provides the key to reconciling passages like these—which seem clearly to prohibit the attribution of *esse reale* or *formale* to bodies—with other passages in which Leibniz *does* attribute the reality of genuine substances to bodies. In the final analysis, therefore, the account defended here has much to recommend it.