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Leibniz on Agential Contingency and Explanation of Rational Action

Leibniz sur la contingence agentielle et l'explication de l'action rationnelle

Leibniz über Handlungskontingenz und die Erklärung rationaler Handlungen

ABSTRACT: Leibniz endorses several tenets regarding explanation: (1) causes provide contrastive explanations of their effects, (2) the past and the future can be read from the present, and (3) primitive force and derivative forces drive and explain changes in monadic states. I argue that, contrary to initial appearances, these tenets do not preclude an intelligible conception of contingency in Leibniz's system. In brief, an agent is free to the extent that she determines herself to do that which she deliberately judges to be the best from several considered options that she could have brought about, had she come to the deliberative conclusion that these options were best. I develop a model which illustrates how Leibnizian agents could have come to different deliberative conclusions, and which thus illustrates how Leibnizian agents could have acted differently.

Keywords: Leibniz, agency, contingency, freedom, explanation, rational action

RÉSUMÉ: Leibniz soutient plusieurs doctrines concernant l'explication: (1) les causes fournissent des explications contrastées de leurs effets, (2) le passé et l'avenir peuvent être lus à partir du présent, (3) la force primitive et les forces dérivées mènent et expliquent les changements dans les états des monades. Je soutiens que ces doctrines, contrairement à leurs apparences initiales, n'empêche pas une conception intelligible de la contingence dans le système de Leibniz. En résumé, un agent est libre dans la mesure où elle se détermine à agir ce qu'elle juge délibérément le meilleur parmi plusieurs options envisagées qu'elle aurait pu faire si elle était parvenue à la conclusion délibérée que ces options étaient les meilleurs. Je développe un modèle qui illustre comment les agents leibniziens auraient pu arriver à des conclusions délibératives différentes et qui montre donc comment les agents leibniziens auraient pu agir différemment.

Mots-clés: Leibniz, agente, contingence, liberté, explication, action rationnelle

KURZFASSUNG: Leibniz vertritt mehrere Grundsätze über Erklärungen: (1) Ursachen sind kontrastive Erklärungen ihrer Wirkungen, (2) Vergangenheit und Zukunft können von der Gegenwart abgelesen werden, (3) primitive Kraft und derivative Kräfte betreiben und erklären Veränderungen in den Zuständen von Monaden. Ich argumentiere dafür, dass diese Grundsätze – entgegen dem Schein – eine glaubwürdige Auffassung von Kontingenz in Leibniz' System nicht ausschließen. Kurzum ist ein Handelnder in dem Maß frei, in dem er sich selbst deter-

miniert, das zu tun, was er nach Überlegung als die beste mehrerer erwägter Möglichkeiten beurteilt. Die anderen erwägten Möglichkeiten hätte der Handelnde herbeigeführt, wenn er zu dem Schluss gekommen wäre, dass sie am besten seien. Ich entwickle ein Modell, das erläutert, wie Leibniz'sche Handelnde zu anderen Schlüssen gekommen sein könnten und daher anders gehandelt haben könnten.

Schlagworte: Leibniz, Handlung, Kontingenz, Freiheit, Erklärung, rationale Handlungen

Introduction

A fundamental concept in Leibniz's philosophy is the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). This is the principle that "nothing happens without a reason why it should be so rather than otherwise"¹. As Leibniz sees it, even free actions must satisfy the PSR². Many philosophers have insisted, however, that if there is a sufficient explanation why something is the way it is and not otherwise, then in some important sense it *must be* the way it is³. That is, it seems that the PSR entails some form of necessitarianism.

Leibniz himself, however, insists in *Theodicy*, § 34, that freedom requires contingency: "I am of opinion that our will is exempt not only from constraint but also from necessity"⁴. Furthermore, he assures us that the PSR does not rule out the kind of contingency that matters for freedom. He pens:

- 1 "[...] c'est que rien n'arrive, sans qu'il y ait une raison pourquoy cela soit ainsi plustost qu'autrement"; GP VII, 356 / English translation: *G. W. Leibniz and Samuel Clarke: Correspondence*, ed. by Roger Ariew, Indianapolis/Cambridge 2000 (cited by letter and section), Leibniz's second letter, § 1, p. 7. Translations are my own unless a translation is cited.
- 2 For example: *Leibniz and Clarke: Correspondence* (see note 1), Leibniz's third letter, § 7; GP III, 36; A VI, 4 B, 1408; *Theodicy*, § 175 (GP VI, 218–219) / English translation: *G. W. Leibniz: Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, transl. by E. M. Huggard and ed. by Austin Farrar, La Salle, IL 1985 (hereafter: Huggard/Farrar), p. 236.
- 3 Both Hobbes and Spinoza, for example, were convinced of this. For Hobbes see: *Hobbes and Bramhall on Liberty and Necessity* (= *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy*), ed. by Vere Chappell, Cambridge 1999, § 31; for Spinoza see: *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, transl. and introd. by Edwin Curley, Princeton 1994, *The Ethics* I, Prop. 8, Prop. 11, Prop. 15, Prop. 16, Prop. 23 and Prop. 29. It is also this conviction that led Lovejoy to say that Leibniz's doctrine of merely inclining reasons was "manifestly without logical substance" (Arthur O. Lovejoy: *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*, Cambridge, MA 1964, pp. 172 f.) and that Leibniz's endorsement of the Principle of Sufficient Reason committed him to metaphysical necessitarianism. Lin ably presents Spinoza's argument and persuasively argues that Leibniz has good grounds for endorsing the Principle of Sufficient Reason but not metaphysical necessitarianism (M. Lin: "Rationalism and Necessitarianism", in: *Noûs* 46/3 (2012), pp. 418–448).
- 4 "Je suis d'opinion que nostre volonté n'est pas seulement exemte de la contrainte, mais encor de la necessité"; GP VI, 122 / Huggard/Farrar, p. 143. See also *G. W. Leibniz: Dissertation on Predestination and Grace* (= *The Yale Leibniz*), ed. and transl. by Michael J. Murray, New Haven 2011, "Leibniz's Commentary on Burnet", § 35 (b), pp. 110, 111; GP III, 36 / English translation: *G. W. Leibniz: Leibniz on God and Religion: A Reader*, ed. and transl. by Lloyd Strickland, London 2016, "On God and Man", p. 297; A VI, 4 B, 1407; Leibniz to Coste, 19 December 1707, A II, 4, 702–704 (Vorabdruck, 26.10.2020; GP III, 400 f.) / English translation: *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, ed. and transl. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Indianapolis 1989 (hereafter: Ariew/Garber), "Letter to Coste, On Human Freedom", pp. 193 f.; *Theodicy*, §§ 45, 65–67, 288.

“Now every effect is determined by its causes and their predispositions, such that there is always some reason why it exists rather than not [...] [T]he reasons that determine a free cause are never necessitating but only inclining, and to that extent the indifference or contingency in them is preserved”⁵.

Thus, Leibniz insists that the PSR is compatible with the kind of contingency that is relevant to freedom – even if, perhaps, the PSR is necessitating in some other sense⁶. In this paper, I will simply be *assuming* that Leibniz is entitled to metaphysical contingency, and I will be developing an account of the kind of contingency that matters for freedom on the basis of this assumption⁷.

Leibniz’s claim that “the reasons that determine a free cause are never necessitating but only inclining”⁸ seems to be that there is something distinctive about the kinds of explanations of free actions themselves, as demanded by the PSR, which makes room for a kind of contingency that matters for freedom. This is Leibniz’s infamous ‘merely inclining reasons’ doctrine. I have argued elsewhere that this doctrine can be elucidated by a

- 5 “Et licet omnis effectus determinetur ex suis causis, earumque praedispositionibus, ita ut semper ratio aliqua subsit, cur potius existat quam non existat, [...] rationes tamen quibus determinatur causa libera, nunquam sunt necessitantes, atque eatenus indifferentia sive contingentia in illis salva manet”; GP III, 36–37 / English translation: Strickland: *Leibniz on God and Religion* (see note 4), p. 297.
- 6 In his mature writings, Leibniz talks about moral necessity as the kind of necessity that compels the wise to choose the best (*Theodicy*, §§ 158–60, 168, 230, 237, 367, 386) and insists that this kind of necessity is a “happy necessity” (“heureuse nécessité”; GP VI, 219) which is compatible with freedom (*ibid.*, §§ 175, 191, 344, 374). It is arguable that moral necessity is a kind of necessity that is implied by the PSR plus other conditions (wisdom, etc.).
- 7 One of the most disputed topics in Leibniz scholarship is the topic of contingency. Many scholars think that at the end of the day Leibniz is a kind of necessitarian. See Benson Mates: “Individuals and Modality in the Philosophy of Leibniz”, in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 4 (1972), pp. 81–118; Benson Mates: *The Philosophy of Leibniz: Metaphysics and Language*, New York/Oxford 1986; Fabrizio Mondadori: “Reference, Essentialism, and Modality in Leibniz’s Metaphysics”, in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 5 (1973), pp. 74–101; Fabrizio Mondadori: “Leibniz and the Doctrine of Inter-World Identity”, in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 7 (1975), pp. 21–57; Fabrizio Mondadori: “Understanding Superessentialism”, in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 17 (1985), pp. 162–190; Lois Frankel: “Being Able to Do Otherwise: Leibniz on Freedom and Contingency”, in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 16 (1984), pp. 45–59; Michael V. Griffin: *Leibniz, God and Necessity*, Cambridge 2013; Michael V. Griffin: “Leibniz on God’s Knowledge of Counterfactuals”, in: *The Philosophical Review*, 108/3 (1999), pp. 317–343; and Julia Jorati: *Leibniz on Causation and Agency*, New York/Cambridge 2017, chap. 5. A few disagree: Graeme Hunter: “Leibniz and the ‘Super-Essentialist’ Misunderstanding”, in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 13 (1981), pp. 123–132; Michael J. Murray: “Spontaneity and Freedom in Leibniz”, in: Donald Rutherford / Jan A. Cover (eds.): *Leibniz: Nature and Freedom*, Oxford 2005, pp. 194–216; Michael J. Murray: “Pre-Leibnizian Moral Necessity”, in: *The Leibniz Review* 14 (2004), pp. 1–28. And others are somewhere in between: Robert Merrihew Adams: *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, Oxford 1994; L. M. Donald Baxter: “Leibniz on Contingent Conceptual Truths and the Arnauld Correspondence”, in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 32 (2000), pp. 191–214; and Don Lodzinski: “Leibnizian Freedom and Superessentialism”, in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 26 (1994), pp. 163–186, for example.
- 8 GP III, 36–37 / Strickland: *Leibniz on God and Religion* (see note 4), p. 297. This is Leibniz’s infamous doctrine of merely inclining and not necessitating reasons. Jose Maria Torralba (“La Libertad Possible Acerca de la Noción Leibniziana de Inclinar sin Necesidad”, in: *Anuario Filosófico* 38/1 (2005), pp. 279–312), Jorati (*Leibniz on Causation* (see note 7), pp. 123–132), and Murray (“Pre-Leibnizian Moral Necessity” (see note 7)) discuss this Leibnizian doctrine.

kind of contingency that I labeled ‘agential contingency’⁹. I use this label because I think this kind of contingency is demanded by Leibniz’s conception of free agency. In brief, an agent is free to the extent that she determines herself to do that which she deliberately judges to be the best from several considered possible options that she could have brought about, had she come to the deliberative conclusion that these options were best. In other words, a free action is agentially contingent when an agent determines herself to a course of action that she deliberately judges the best considered alternative and when she has the power to have determined herself to a different considered alternative had she come to the deliberative conclusion that it was best. These kinds of powers I have called ‘agential powers’¹⁰. I will be relying on this account of agential contingency here.

In this paper, I wish to adumbrate a general picture of Leibniz’s commitments regarding the explanation of rational action. As I see it, this general picture includes three elements that are deeply connected to the PSR: i) a priori explanations or the kinds of explanations that causes provide of the effects that they cause, which explain why those effects exist in the way that they do rather than otherwise; ii) Leibniz’s ‘traces and marks’ doctrine: the past and the future can be deduced from the present; and iii) Leibniz’s doctrine of a primitive force and derivative forces (as modifications of a primitive force) as the internal principle of change that drives and explains the passage from one perceptual state to another in a monad. I shall call this general picture ‘Leibnizian Causal Determinism’. This general picture of explanation of rational action sets the limits for an intelligible account of contingency as a condition for freedom in Leibniz’s system. I will argue that agential contingency fits well with Leibnizian Causal Determinism, and I take this to be a further reason for commending it.

Regarding agential powers, it seems that actually unexercised agential powers can only be exercised by violating the PSR¹¹, or some other element within Leibnizian Causal Determinism, and thus that by holding these general facts about explanation of rational action fixed, *actually* unexercised agential powers are rendered *necessarily* unexercised powers (in this modal sense)¹². In this paper, I will argue that this initial impression is mistaken. That is, I will advance here a model which illustrates how it is possible for actually unexercised agential powers to be exercised given Leibnizian Causal Determinism. Put differently, agential powers ground how Leibnizian agents could have acted differently had they come to different deliberative conclusions about what is best, and I will develop a model which illustrates how Leibnizian agents could have come to differ-

9 Manuscript currently under review titled “Leibniz on Agential Contingency and Inclining but not Necessitating Reasons”.

10 I will present agential modality and agential powers in more detail in Section Two.

11 It is an unargued assumption of this paper that the PSR is metaphysically contingent.

12 This parenthetical qualification is important. Because I am assuming that the PSR is metaphysically contingent, it is straightforward that it is metaphysically possible for agential powers to be exercised precisely by violating the PSR. The question I am asking in this paper is whether agential powers can be exercised without violating the PSR or other constraints presented by Leibnizian Causal Determinism.

ent deliberative conclusions and thus which illustrates how these agential powers could be exercised even given the constraints presented by Leibnizian Causal Determinism.

The plan is the following. In Section One, I will present Leibnizian Casual Determinism. In Section Two I will present agential contingency in more detail, and I will develop a model which illustrates how unexercised agential powers are not necessarily unexercised powers, even given the constraints on explanation of rational action presented in Section One.

1. PSR and Explanation of Free Actions

As already noted, Leibniz thinks that the PSR demands contrastive explanations and that this demand extends to free actions. Leibniz himself thinks that this demand rules out some conceptions of contingency and repeatedly uses the PSR as a ground for objecting to the kind of contingency required by voluntarist conceptions of freedom¹³. The voluntarists conceive of the will as a self-determining faculty whose freedom requires that it be able to determine itself towards several alternatives even after the intellect has issued its ‘last practical judgment’¹⁴ or has judged alternatives in accordance with their apprehended goodness. As the voluntarist sees it, all conditions for action given (or ‘being posited’), it is possible for the will to determine itself towards several of the considered alternatives. Thus, the conditions for action, including the judgments of the intellect, do not *explain* the will’s act, lest they *determine* the will’s act, and thus deprive the will of its self-determining capacity¹⁵. This kind of contingency, which requires causal indeterminacy, violates the PSR and is thus unacceptable to Leibniz¹⁶.

It is thus clear how the PSR does indeed rule out some conceptions of contingency as a condition for freedom. The demand for contrastive explanation of free actions, however, is not the only demand intimately connected with the PSR that Leibniz endorses. His commitment to the PSR brings further constraints on the intelligibility and plausibility of the kind of contingency that matters for freedom.

In this section I wish to adumbrate a general picture of Leibniz’s commitments regarding the explanation of free actions. There are a few basic elements of this general picture. They are either motivated by, or are perhaps better understood as implications of, the PSR. The precise nature of the relationship between these basic elements and the PSR will, however, not be pursued here. The more modest goal of painting this general

13 For an insightful history of this doctrine and its main opposition ‘intellectualism’, see Bonnie Kent: *Virtues of The Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Late Thirteenth Century*, Washington DC 1995; Michael J. Murray: “Intellect, Will, and Freedom: Leibniz and His Precursors”, in: *The Leibniz Review* 6 (1996), pp. 25–59; Michael J. Murray: “Leibniz on Divine Foreknowledge of Future Contingents and Human Freedom”, in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55/1 (1995), pp. 75–108.

14 “Ultimum iudicium practicum”: This is a term of art during the medieval period.

15 See Luis de Molina: *Liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, divina praescientia, providentia, praedestinatione et reprobatione concordia*, ed. by Johannes B. Rabeneck SJ, Oña/Madrid 1953 (cited by section number), I.2.3 and IV.47.2.

16 *Theodicy*, §§ 35, 46, 362, 364–367.

picture, for the purposes of this paper, is to lay down the general constraints on the intelligibility of an account of contingency as a condition for freedom in Leibniz's system.

The first basic element in this picture is what I shall call 'a priori explanations'. Leibniz, following tradition¹⁷, sometimes uses the expression 'a priori proofs' or demonstrations to mean proofs or demonstrations of effects from their causes. In this sense he talks about 'a priori reasons' as the causes that provide explanations for the effects that they cause¹⁸. On other occasions, Leibniz contrasts a priori reasons – as those reasons that explain why something is the way it is rather than otherwise – with a posteriori reasons/demonstrations – which merely demonstrate that something is, without also explaining why it is (the way it is rather than otherwise)¹⁹. I explicitly wish to include both of these considerations in what I shall call 'a priori explanations'. A priori explanations are the kinds of explanations that causes provide, of the effects that they cause, which explain why those effects exist in the way that they do rather than otherwise. I shall refer to the causes that provide a priori explanations as 'a priori reasons'. Furthermore, as Leibniz sees it, these a priori explanations form a series of explanations uniting the entire universe. He articulates this kind of causal determinism in the following way: "the present is pregnant with the future; the future can be read in the past"²⁰.

This Leibnizian causal determinism can be made a bit more precise by introducing some basic elements of his mature metaphysics. During his mature period, Leibniz famously postulated mind-like simple substances that he refers to as "monads"²¹. Leibniz writes,

"a monad, in itself and at a moment, can be distinguished from another only by its internal qualities and actions, which can be nothing but its *perceptions* (that is, the representation of the composite, or what is external, in the simple) and its *appetitions* (that is, its tendencies to go from one perception to another) which are the principles of change"²².

Here Leibniz makes a fundamental distinction between appetitions and perceptions. The former are dispositions or tendencies or powers of a substance which in some sense

17 Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae*, I.2.2, see the edition in: *Corpus Thomisticum: Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia*, ed. by Enrique Alarcón (www.corpusthomicum.org/iopera.html); or closer in time to Leibniz, Arnauld and Nicole: *Port-Royal Logic*, IV.1, cited by Adams: *Leibniz* (see note 7), p. 109.

18 *Theodicy*, § 44; "Discourse on Metaphysics", § XXII, A VI, 4 B, 1564–1566 (GP IV, 447–448) / English translation: Ariew/Garber, pp. 54–55; A VI, 4 B, 1632 (C, 272); "Nouveaux essais", A VI, 6, 294 / English translation: P. Remnant / J. Bennett (eds.): *G. W. Leibniz: New Essays in Human Understanding*, Cambridge 1996, p. 294.

19 A VI, 4 A, 4 (C, 154).

20 "[L]e present est gros de l'avenir, le futur se pouvoit lire dans le passé"; "Principles of Nature and Grace", § 13, GP VI, 604 / English translation: Ariew/Garber, p. 211.

21 A succinct description of Leibniz's mature metaphysics is presented in his "Monadology", cited by section as in GP VI, 607–623 / English translation: Ariew/Garber, pp. 213–225.

22 "[...] une Monade en elle même, et dans le moment, ne sauroit être discernée d'une autre que par les qualités et actions internes, lesquelles ne peuvent être autre chose que ses *perceptions* (c'est à dire, les représentations du composé, ou de ce qui est dehors dans le simple) et ses *appetitions* (c'est à dire, ses tendances d'une perception à l'autre) qui sont les principes du changement"; "Principles of Nature and Grace", § 2, GP VI, 598 / Ariew/Garber, p. 207.

serve as its inner principle of change, whereas the latter are the perceptual states which come and go in intra-substantial change.

With this distinction between appetitions and perceptual states, a crucial notion in Leibniz's mature metaphysics can be introduced: primitive forces. Importantly for my purposes, and in my terminology, primitive forces serve as fundamental *a priori reasons* that explain free actions, or, in other words, primitive forces are essential constituents in a priori explanations of free actions. Leibniz describes a substance's primitive force as "a nature or an internal force that can produce in it, in an orderly way [...] all the appearances or expressions it will have, without the help of any created being"²³. Or, in other words, a substance's primitive force is "the internal principle [of a substance] which brings about the change or passage from one perception to another"²⁴. A substance's primitive force is, for Leibniz, the inner principle of change which explains why the substance undergoes all the change it undergoes and has all the perceptual states it has. Importantly, then, a substance's appetitions just are different modifications of its primitive force, or derivative forces.

This basic sketch of Leibniz's mature metaphysics enables us to make Leibnizian Causal Determinism a bit more precise and elucidate statements like: "And since every present state of a simple substance is a natural consequence of its preceding state, the present is pregnant with the future"²⁵. It is the present perceptual state of the substance together with its primitive force and its modifications (as the principle of intra-substantial change) that gives rise to, and provides an a priori explanation of, its subsequent perceptual state. It is in this sense that the present state of the substance is impregnated with the future. Leibniz sometimes describes this impregnation in terms of 'traces and marks' – which is the final basic element of the general picture adumbrated in this section. According to Leibniz, the present is impregnated with the future and has marks of the past, or as he puts it:

"Thus when we consider carefully the connection of things, we can say that from all time in Alexander's soul there are vestiges of everything that has happened to him and marks of everything that will happen to him [...] even though God alone could recognize them all"²⁶.

This doctrine of traces and marks, together with the other adumbrated Leibnizian commitments, gives us a strong version of causal determinism driven by the substance's primitive force: every perceptual state of the substance is brought about and explained

23 "[...] une nature ou force interne qui luy puisse produire par ordre [...] toutes les apparences ou expressions qu'elle aura, et cela sans le secours d'aucune creature"; "New System", GP IV, 485 / English translation: Ariew/Garber, p. 144.

24 "[Le] principe interne, qui fait le changement ou le passage d'une perception à une autre"; "Monadology", § 15, GP VI, 609 / Ariew/Garber, p. 215.

25 "Et comme tout present état d'une substance simple est naturellement une suite de son état precedent, tellement que le present y est gros de l'avenir"; "Monadology", § 22, GP VI, 610 / Ariew/Garber, p. 216.

26 "Aussi quand on considere bien la connexion des choses, on peut dire qu'il y a de tout temps dans l'ame d'Alexandre des restes de tout ce qui luy est arrivé, et les marques de tout ce qui luy arrivera, et même des traces de tout ce qui [se] passe dans l'univers, quoyqu'il n'appartienne qu'à Dieu de les reconnoistre toutes"; "Discourse on Metaphysics", § VIII, A VI, 4 B, 1541 (GP IV, 432–433) / Ariew/Garber, p. 41.

by the preceding state together with the substance's primitive force and its modifications. All free actions, then, are embedded in a series of a priori explanations, driven by the substance's primitive force, spanning the entire history of the universe. As already stated, I will refer to this general picture as 'Leibnizian Causal Determinism'.

2. Agential Contingency as Condition for Freedom

Given these Leibnizian commitments about the explanation of free actions, is there any space left for an intelligible sense of contingency as a condition for freedom? I will argue in this section that the answer is 'yes'. Here I will present a basic description of what I take to be Leibniz's conception of the kind of contingency that matters for freedom, and the kind of power to do otherwise that undergirds this kind of contingency. I will argue that there is an intelligible, and even plausible, sense of contingency as a condition for freedom even given Leibnizian Causal Determinism.

2.1 Does Contingency Matter for Freedom?

Before presenting what I take to be Leibniz's conception of the kind of contingency that is relevant for freedom, it is worth noting that this condition on freedom has often been underplayed in the secondary literature. And, importantly, that doing so is not without a reason. Leibniz himself sometimes gives this impression. For example, sometimes Leibniz presents his account of freedom as requiring only spontaneity and rationality²⁷. [Spontaneity is self-determination, and the kind of intelligence that matters for freedom is practical or deliberative intelligence.] He writes: "I therefore conclude that true freedom consists in the power that we have to reason carefully about things and to act according to what we have judged the best"²⁸. Or more succinctly: "*Freedom* is spontaneity joined to intelligence"²⁹. That Leibniz feels comfortable leaving contingency out of some of his characterizations of freedom might be taken as an indication that it is not an important condition for freedom. Furthermore, this impression might even be bolstered by passages in which Leibniz *cites* contingency as a condition for freedom. An often-quoted passage is the following:

"I have shown that freedom, according to the definition required in the schools of theology, consists in intelligence, which involves a clear knowledge of the object of deliberation, in spon-

27 *Theodicy*, §§ 65, 291; A VI, 4 B, 1409 / English translation: L. Strickland (ed.): *The Shorter Leibniz Texts*, London 2006, p. 93; GP VII, 109 / English translation: Strickland: *Shorter Leibniz Texts* (see above), p. 94.

28 "Ainsi je conclus, que la vraie liberté consiste dans le pouvoir que nous avons de raisonner meurement sur les choses et d'agir suivant ce que nous aurons jugé le meilleur"; A VI, 4 B, 1409 / Strickland: *Shorter Leibniz Texts* (see note 27), p. 93.

29 "La Liberté est une spontanéité jointe à l'intelligence"; GP VII, 109 / Strickland: *Shorter Leibniz Texts* (see note 27), p. 94.

taneity, whereby we determine, and in contingency, that is, in the exclusion of logical or metaphysical necessity" (*Theodicy*, § 288)³⁰.

In this illuminating passage Leibniz cites the three conditions of freedom – intelligence, spontaneity, and contingency³¹ – and appears to give a gloss on the basic meaning of each of these conditions. Importantly for our purposes, he only makes reference to lack of metaphysical necessity when glossing the kind of contingency that matters for freedom, and Leibniz's conception of metaphysical contingency is rather thin³²: something counts as metaphysically contingent if its opposite does not imply a contradiction³³. Furthermore, that only metaphysical contingency is cited might also contribute to thinking that contingency can be safely put aside without losing much when presenting Leibniz's account of freedom, for Leibniz insists that everything in the world is metaphysically contingent. He pens: "absolutely speaking, every matter of fact, the whole world and everything that happens in it, is contingent"³⁴. Thus, if everything is metaphysically contingent, it is no surprise that free actions are metaphysically contingent, but for the very same reason citing it seems unimportant in explaining the nature of freedom in Leibniz's views, it appears. Indeed, according to this reading, citing contingency to explain freedom seems akin to citing the presence of oxygen when explaining why a building burned to the ground: it is true that oxygen is required for the fire, but it hardly seems explanatorily relevant.

I will argue that this impression of the unimportance of contingency as a condition for freedom is misplaced. In Leibniz's view, contingency plays an important role in explaining the nature of freedom. Importantly, the very passages I have put forth do not seem to support this dismissive reading, once they are placed in their proper context. For example, after characterizing freedom as spontaneity joined to intelligence, Leibniz

30 "Nous avons fait voir que la liberté, telle qu'on la demande dans les Ecoles Theologiques, consiste dans l'intelligence, qui enveloppe une connoissance distincte de l'objet de la deliberation, dans la spontanéité, avec laquelle nous nous déterminons, et dans la contingence, c'est à dire dans l'exclusion de la nécessité logique ou metaphysique"; GP VI, 288 / Huggard/Farrar, p. 303.

31 See also: GP III, 36 / Strickland: *Leibniz on God and Religion* (see note 4), "On God and Man", p. 297; A VI, 4 B, 1407 / Strickland: *Shorter Leibniz Texts* (see note 27), p. 92; Leibniz to Coste, 19 December 1707, A II, 4, 702–704 (Vorabdruck, 26.10.2020; GP III, 400 f.) / Ariew/Garber, "Letter to Coste, On Human Freedom", pp. 193 f.; and *Theodicy*, §§ 34, 45, 65–67.

32 Some scholars have argued that Leibniz is only concerned with metaphysical contingency as a condition for freedom. See C. Armstrong: "Leibniz and Lewis on Modal Metaphysics and Fatalism", in: *Quaestiones Disputatae* 7/2 (2017), pp. 72–96; David Blumenfeld: "Freedom, Contingency, and Things Possible in Themselves", in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 49/1 (1988), pp. 81–101; A. Burms / H. De Dijn: "Freedom and Logical Contingency in Leibniz", in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 11 (1979), pp. 124–133; Paul McNamara: "Leibniz on Creation, Contingency and Per-Se Modality", in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 22 (1990), pp. 29–47; Henrik Lagerlund / Peter Myrdal: "Possible Worlds and the Nature of Choice in Leibniz", in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 38/39 (2006), pp. 156–176. See also Frankel: "Being Able to Do Otherwise" (see note 7); Jorati: *Leibniz on Causation* (see note 7), chap. 5; and Adams: *Leibniz* (see note 7), chap. 1.

33 A VI, 4 B, 1446–1449 (Grua, 290–291); A VI, 4 B, 1649–1652 (Grua, 302–306); Grua, 478–479; "Discourse on Metaphysics", § XIII, A VI, 4 B, 1546–1549 (GP IV, 436–439).

34 "[...] absolument parlant toute chose de fait, tout le Monde et tout ce qui y arrive est contingent"; Grua, 478, cf. pp. 480–481 / Strickland: *Shorter Leibniz Texts* (see note 27), p. 96.

goes on to explain what he means by spontaneity, which itself includes contingency. He writes: “*Spontaneity* is contingency without compulsion, or rather, we call spontaneous that which is neither necessary nor constrained”³⁵. This way of putting things fits quite well with the account that will be advanced in this paper, for contingency as a condition for freedom is more precisely understood as contingency as a condition for the kind of spontaneity or self-determination that matters for freedom.

Furthermore, part of the temptation of reading Leibniz as dismissive of contingency as a condition for freedom, includes, I think, understanding the three conditions as independent conditions that happen to come together in the case of freedom. Leibniz, however, has a more unified account of these three conditions on freedom. Two sentences after the quoted passage in *Theodicy*, § 288, Leibniz continues: “The free substance is self-determining and that according to the motive of the good perceived by the understanding, which inclines it without compelling it: and all the conditions of freedom are comprised in these few words”³⁶. Here, Leibniz does not present three independent conditions, but rather a single or unified account that has three aspects or elements. Importantly, I think we should understand the kind of contingency that matters for freedom not merely as metaphysical contingency *as such*, but rather as metaphysical contingency further constrained by the other conditions on freedom. This combination of the three conditions gives rise to a more restricted and intelligible kind of contingency that matters for freedom that I shall label ‘agential contingency’³⁷.

Here is a brief description of how, as I see it, the three conditions of freedom come together in a unified way. One of the conditions for freedom is that of spontaneity or self-determination. Jorati has argued persuasively that the kind of spontaneity that is relevant to freedom, in Leibniz’s view, is self-determination on the basis of the apprehended goodness of the object of choice – which she labels “rational spontaneity”³⁸.

35 “La spontanéité est une contingence sans coaction, ou bien on appelle spontané ce qui est ny nécessaire ny contraint”; GP VII, 110 / Strickland: *Shorter Leibniz Texts* (see note 27), p. 94.

36 “La substance libre se determine par elle même, et cela suivant le motif du bien apperçu par l’entendement qui l’incline sans la necessiter: et toutes les conditions de la liberté sont comprises dans ce peu de mots”; GP VI, 288 / Huggard/Farrar, p. 303.

37 Whether adding further conditions to a kind of modality gives rise to a different kind of modality is controversial. I think that at least in some cases it does, but I do not wish to wed the account presented here to this claim. The reader can think of the proposal I will be calling ‘agential modality’ as a version of metaphysical modality with further conditions or restrictions. I have in mind something akin, but not identical, to what is described by Fine as defining a modality partly in terms of another by *restriction* – that is, by adding conditions other than the first modality (Kit Fine: “The Varieties of Necessity”, in: T. Gendler / J. Hawthorne (eds.): *Conceivability and Possibility*, Oxford 2002, pp. 253–282). Kratzer also provides plausible ways of defining a modality partly in terms of another by relativization or quantifier restriction (A. Kratzer: “What *Must* and *Can Must* and *Can Mean*”, in: *Linguistics and Philosophy* 1 (1977), pp. 337–355; A. Kratzer: “Modality”, in: A. von Stechow / D. Wunderlich (eds.): *Semantics: An International Handbook of Contemporary Research*, Berlin 1991, pp. 639–650).

38 Jorati: *Leibniz on Causation* (see note 7), p. 52. I am running together two categories that Jorati separates. She defines “rational spontaneity” as the kind of self-determination which is exempt from non-rational influences. The other category she labels “rational teleology”. She defines “rational teleology” as the kind of end-directedness, or teleology, that is based on the agent’s explicit judgment of the best (p. 75). As she sees it, then, both rational spontaneity and rational teleology come together, and “correspond” (p. 75) in voluntary or free actions.

More precisely, rational spontaneity is the kind of spontaneity whereby an agent determines herself to a course of action on the basis of her deliberate judgment of the best. This characterization is important for our purposes, for it clearly illustrates how the two conditions of intelligence and spontaneity come together in a unified characterization. The account is not merely that freedom is the special case in which spontaneity and intelligence happen to come together; but rather the stronger claim that what it is for the kind of spontaneity to be the kind of spontaneity that matters for freedom essentially involves a reference to intelligence³⁹.

Agential contingency can be seen as a natural elaboration of rational spontaneity: agential contingency is the kind of contingency that is required for rational spontaneity – that is, the kind of contingency that matters for freedom is the kind of contingency that is required for an agent to determine herself on the basis of her deliberate judgment of the best. Contingency is required for rational spontaneity, I will argue, because rational spontaneity requires the judgment of the best, and the judgment of the best requires deliberating between several possible courses of action that the agent has the power to bring about, were the agent to come to the deliberative conclusion that this alternative is best. That is, free actions are contingent because they require this kind of power towards both: a) the course of action actually judged best; and b) considered but not-chosen possible alternatives in deliberation.

Agential contingency thus illustrates how the kind of contingency that matters for freedom is interconnected with the other two conditions on freedom in a unified account.

2.2 Agential Contingency

In general, part of the theoretical motivation for postulating contingency as a condition for freedom is carving some conceptual space for advancing a faculty of choosing amongst several alternatives that are open to the free agent. Importantly for our purposes, Leibniz sometimes explicitly articulates this theoretical motivation. Regarding God's freedom, Leibniz writes in *Theodicy*, § 235: "For God chooses among the possibles, and for that very reason he chooses freely, and is not compelled; there would be neither choice nor freedom if there were but one course possible"⁴⁰. Divine freedom requires that there be several options open to God, and importantly that God be able to choose

39 I have argued for this point in more detail elsewhere (cf. my manuscript: "Leibniz on Agential Contingency and Inclining and not Necessitating Reasons" (see note 9)). Jorati herself relies on this and insists rational spontaneity counts as a different kind of spontaneity, in Leibniz's system, precisely because of this essential reference to deliberate judgments of the best. She identifies two other kinds of spontaneity which she labels "metaphysical" and "agent spontaneity" (Jorati: *Leibniz on Causation* (see note 7), chap. 2). The details of what make these kinds of spontaneity different *kinds* of spontaneity need not detain us here.

40 "Car Dieu choisit parmi les possibles, et c'est pour cela qu'il choisit librement, et qu'il n'est point nécessité: il n'y auroit point de choix ny de liberté, s'il n'y avoit qu'un seul parti possible"; GP VI, 258 / Huggard/Farrar, pp. 272–273.

amongst them: “God is able to do, know, and will (in a certain sense of willing) many more things than he actually does”⁴¹. As Leibniz sees it, then, God, as the most perfect manifestation of a free agent, is free only if there are several options open to God from which He can choose; or more precisely freedom requires having the capacity to choose between several alternatives open to the agent. Regarding human agents, Leibniz articulates this theoretical motivation in the following way:

“When there are several paths, one has the freedom to choose [...]. But if one found oneself in a narrow street, between two high walls, there would only be one possible path, and this represents necessity. By this we see that [...] freedom [...] [requires] the faculty of choosing among several possibles”⁴².

In this section, I wish to articulate Leibniz’s conception of contingency, as a condition for freedom, in a way that elucidates a plausible sense of a faculty of choosing amongst several alternatives open to an agent.

The faculty of choosing amongst alternatives is best read not as merely grounding *per se* modality⁴³ – intuitively, the kind of possibility in itself that something enjoys is due to its essential qualities alone and not to extrinsic properties or relations – but more ambitiously as grounding a modality governing whether the agent *can* choose an option⁴⁴. More precisely, part of the plausibility of the kind of contingency that matters for freedom depends on whether an option is possible – not only in itself, but, crucially – *relative* to the agent – i. e., whether the option *can* be chosen by the agent. I think that there is conceptual space in Leibniz’s system for precisely this kind of modality governing what an agent can choose. The first main step in my proposal is to note that there is nothing *essential*⁴⁵ to the agent or essential to possible options that makes it impossible for

41 “Deus plura potest, scit, vult, (certo volendi modo) quam agit”; *Leibniz: Dissertation on Predestination and Grace* (see note 4), “Leibniz’s Commentary on Burnet”, § 26 (d), pp. 90, 91.

42 “Quand il y a plusieurs chemins, on a la liberté de choisir [...] Mais si on se trouvoit dans une rue étroite, entre deux hautes murailles, il n’y auroit qu’un seul chemin possible, et cela represente la necessité. On voit par là que [...] la liberté [a besoin] la faculté de choisir entre plusieurs possibles [...]” (Leibniz for Gerhard Wolter Molanus, early November 1699, A I, 17, 611).

43 Some scholars think that metaphysical contingency is the only kind of contingency that Leibniz wants as a condition for freedom. See note 32 for citations.

44 I have provided some reasons for this view elsewhere (see my manuscript mentioned in note 39).

45 Leibniz employs the word “essence” in multiple different ways throughout his career – see for example, *Causa Dei asserta per justitiam ejus, cum caeteris ejus perfectionibus, cunctisque actionibus conciliatam*, Amsterdam 1710, § 9 (GP VI, 440) / English translation: *Monadology and Other Philosophical Essays*, ed. and transl. by P. Schrecker and A. M. Schrecker, Indianapolis 1965, p. 115; *Leibniz: Dissertation on Predestination and Grace* (see note 4), “Leibniz’s Commentary on Burnet”, § 24 (a), pp. 84, 85; *Leibniz and Clarke: Correspondence* (see note 1), Leibniz’s fifth letter, §§ 9–10; Schrecker: *Monadology* (see above), p. 110; *Theodicy*, §§ 7, 9, 335; A VI, 4 B, 1649–1652 (Grua, 302–306) / Strickland: *Shorter Leibniz Texts* (see note 27), “On Contingency”, pp. 110–113; “Discourse on Metaphysics”, §§ XVI, XXII, XXVI, A VI, 4 B, 1554–1555, 1564–1566, 1570–1571 (GP IV, 441–442, 447–448, 451–452); A II, 2, 45 (GP II, 38). At least on some occasions he does use essence in contrast to “accident”, as I intend to do in the main text – see for example, *Leibniz: Philosophical Texts*, ed. and transl. by R. S. Woolhouse and R. Francke, Oxford 1998, p. 108; GP II, 458 / English translation: G. W. Leibniz: *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, transl. and ed., with an introduction by L. E. Loemker, Dordrecht 1989, p. 606; A VI, 4 B, 1593 (Grua, 383); *Leibniz and Clarke: Correspondence* (see note 1), p. 37; “Discourse on Metaphysics”, § XXIV, A VI, 4 B, 1567–1569 (GP IV, 449–450). To

the agent not to choose these options. What rules out the agent choosing a given option O_1 is something *nonessential* to *both* the agent and O_1 – namely the existence of another option, O_n , that the agent deems better than O_1 in a given case of rational deliberation.

I think that this fact – about what rules out an agent choosing an option – matters because it opens up conceptual space for an intelligible sense of the modality governing what an agent can choose that, I will argue, can be utilized to develop a plausible account of the kind of contingency that matters for freedom in Leibniz's system. The basic idea behind the modality I have in mind is the following: because there is nothing essential to option O_1 or to agent S that rules out S choosing O_1 , there is a *metaphysically possible* deliberation situation D_1 in which S concludes that O_1 is the best option under consideration, and thus D_1 results in S choosing O_1 . And so, there is a plausible sense of it being *possible* for S to choose O_1 . If the deliberation in D_1 is sound, it would require that there are no alternatives better than O_1 under consideration, but this is of course no obstacle to the proposal precisely because there is nothing essential to O_1 or to S that requires that S take into consideration another option O_n that is better than O_1 in the process of deliberation.

A crucial element in agential modality is what it is for an option to be open to an agent. Here is my basic proposal. The core idea is that what it is for an option to be *open* to an agent is for this option to be the sort of thing that is taken into consideration by the agent in practical deliberation. Given this, a few words about the nature of deliberation, according to Leibniz, are in order. As Leibniz sees it, an essential aspect of the process of deliberation is the intellectual weighing of the apprehended goodness of each of the alternatives open to the agent. He pens: "A measure of freedom is necessary for punishments and rewards, and this is why there is an intellect that compares and weighs goods and evils against each other and also a faculty of inclining and willing in accord with one's deliberations"⁴⁶. This intellectual aspect of the process of deliberation culminates in a final judgment by the intellect regarding which considered course of action is best. The process of deliberation, however, involves more than a merely intellectual aspect; as Leibniz sees it, the process of deliberation also essentially involves an appetitive aspect that he describes as a struggle of rational inclinations or appetitions. In this context,

contrast an essence with an accident is at least in part to regard that which is essential to be necessary and that which is accidental to be contingent, and importantly, as far as Leibniz is concerned, the intuitive grip on these modal notions is in terms of the Principle of Contradiction: the essentially true is such that its opposite implies a contradiction, and the accidentally true is such that its opposite does not imply a contradiction. It is this basic intuitive notion that I wish to build upon in the main text. There is a long tradition of philosophers using the expression "real definition" or "essence" to mean roughly what I mean. See for example, Aristotle's *Categories* and middle books on *Metaphysics*: Alan Code: "Aristotle: Essence and Accident", in: R. Grandy / R. Warner (eds.): *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality: Intentions, Categories, Ends*, Oxford 1986, pp. 411–439; Kit Fine: "Essence and Modality: The Second Philosophical Perspectives Lecture", in: *Philosophical Perspectives* 8 (1994), pp. 1–16; Kit Fine: *Modality and Tense: Philosophical Papers*, Oxford 2005. I will return explicitly to the topic of 'essence' at the beginning of the following subsection, where I will identify the essence of a substance with its primitive force.

46 "Libertatis gradus necessarius ad poenas et praemia est, ut intellectus adsit bona malaque inter se comparans atque expendens, et facultas secundum deliberata conandi seu volendi"; *Leibniz: Dissertation on Predestination and Grace* (see note 4), "Leibniz's Commentary on Burnet", § 42 (c), pp. 128, 129.

Leibniz makes a distinction between antecedent and consequent wills. An antecedent will is just a rational inclination towards the apprehended goodness of an option under consideration in the process of deliberation. As Leibniz sees it, the appetitive aspect of the process of deliberation essentially involves the coming together of several antecedent wills in a kind of struggle that results in the consequent will – the one that settles the action for the agent. Leibniz describes this appetitive process thus: “Now this consequent will, final and decisive, results from the conflict of all the antecedent wills, of those which tend towards good, even as of those which repel evil; and from the concurrence of all these particular wills comes the total will” (*Theodicy*, § 22)⁴⁷. The process of deliberation, then, includes both an intellectual and an appetitive aspect for Leibniz⁴⁸. In the cases of rational action, at the end of rational deliberation the agent’s intellect issues a final judgment regarding which course of action is best, and this judgment is followed by a consequent will to bring about the course of action judged best⁴⁹.

With this basic sketch of the process of deliberation, we can make a bit more precise the notion of what it is for an option to be open to an agent in the sense that matters for agential contingency, and thus freedom. I have suggested that what it is for an option to be open for an agent is for this option to be the sort of thing that is taken into consideration in the process of deliberation, so for an option to be open is for this option to be the suitable object of both the intellectual and appetitive aspects of deliberation. A bit more precisely, then, I suggest that what it is for an option to be the sort of thing that can be taken into consideration in the process of deliberation is for this option to be the sort of thing that an agent can come to recognize as good and for the agent to be rationally inclined to bring this option about on the basis of this perceived goodness. This, in general terms, is what it is for an option to be open for an agent⁵⁰.

More precisely, in the ideal case, I shall say that an option O_i is *perfectly open* to an agent S if and only if S apprehends the correct degree of goodness in O_i , and S possesses a rational inclination whose strength is proportionate to the degree of apprehended goodness in O_i . Most agents to some extent or other fall short of this ideal. Given this lamentable fact about most agents, it is important to define a different sense in which an option is open to an agent. In the non-ideal case, I shall say that an option O_i is *imperfect-*

47 “Or cette volonté conséquente, finale et decisive, resulte du conflit de toutes les volontés antecedentes, tant de celles qui tendent vers le bien, que de celles qui repoussent le mal: et c’est du concours de toutes ces volontés particulieres, que vient la volonté totale”; GP VI, 116 / Huggard/Farrar, p. 137.

48 This characterization is a bit simplistic, but it will do for our purposes. Part of what makes it simplistic is that it presupposes that the individually strongest rational inclination is inevitably the one that will become the consequent will. This, however, need not be the case. Several rational inclinations can come together to give rise to a new complex inclination (*Theodicy*, § 22), or non-rational inclinations can get in the way of rational inclinations (*Theodicy*, § 305), or consideration of general principles can play a role (*Theodicy*, § 337), etc. These further complications are important for understanding what Leibniz takes the nature of deliberation to be, but they are only indirectly relevant to the purpose of our discussion.

49 I intend this description of deliberation to be a general, non-controversial description, and I do not wish to wed my account of agential contingency to a precise account of deliberation. That is, I intend my account of agential contingency to be sufficiently compatible with multiple competing, more precise accounts of the nature of deliberation in Leibniz’s views.

50 I mean to include inaction as an ‘option’.

ly open to an agent S if and only if S apprehends some goodness in O_1 but S is mistaken about the degree of goodness in O_1 , or S has a rational inclination towards O_1 but the strength of S 's rational inclination fails to be proportionate to the apprehended degree of goodness in O_1 . Given that most agents fail to be ideally rational, in one way or another, I think that both senses of being open to an agent are important for agential modality. Thus, I shall say that an option O_1 is open to an agent S if and only if O_1 is either perfectly open or imperfectly open to S .

With this basic sketch of what it is for an option to be open to an agent, we are now in a position to articulate agential modality – the kind of modality that governs whether an agent can choose an option in the sense that matters for freedom, as Leibniz sees it. I shall say that it is *agentially possible* for S to choose option O_1 if and only if O_1 is open to S , and there is a *metaphysically possible* deliberation situation D_n in which S concludes that O_1 is the option considered best and chooses O_1 on that basis. I shall say that it is *agentially impossible* for S to choose option O_1 if and only if O_1 is not open to S , or there is no metaphysically possible deliberation situation D_n in which S concludes that O_1 is the best considered option. I shall say that it is *agentially necessary* for S to choose option O_1 if and only if O_1 is open to S , and there is no option O_n , distinct from O_1 , that is open to S . I shall say that agent S chooses option O_1 in an *agentially contingent* way if and only if S chooses option O_1 in deliberation situation D_1 , and there is at least another option O_n , distinct from O_1 , that is both *agentially possible* for S and taken into consideration in D_1 . Finally, with this sketch of agential modality, we can shed some light on what the faculty or power to choose amongst possible options, that is required for freedom, can be for Leibniz. I shall say that an agent S has the *agential power* to bring about an option O_1 if and only if i) it is agentially possible for S to choose O_1 , ii) S takes O_1 into consideration in deliberation, and iii) S has a rational inclination towards O_1 ⁵¹.

Each of these definitions has two components: i) whether an option is open to an agent, and ii) whether there are the relevant kinds of metaphysically possible deliberation situations. The latter, as will see shortly, depend on what is metaphysically possible, and are thus timeless and unchanging. The former, however, depends upon various temporal and changeable matters, including which particular rational inclinations (or antecedent wills) an agent happens to have at a given time. In other words, what is agentially possible for an agent S at a time t depends upon which options are open to S at t , and which options are open to S at t partly depends upon which rational inclinations S has at t . Thus, what is agentially possible for an agent S at time t is partly grounded in the will of the agent at t . These observations illustrate how, on my reading, metaphysical contingency *as such* is insufficient for the kind of contingency that matters for freedom, in Leibniz's view. There are many more metaphysical possibilities than there are agential possibilities for an agent, and the latter, but not the former, are partly grounded in existing wills at different times.

51 Condition (iii) is redundant. As I have defined agential possibility, it requires that the option be open to the agent, and the option being open to the agent requires that the agent have a rational inclination towards it. I made condition (iii) explicit merely to illustrate the importance of the will for agential powers.

Arguably, this account of agential modality is more plausible when reading it as requiring or involving something analogous to transworld identity⁵². That is, arguably, the account sketched here is more tenable if we understand the relevant deliberation situations that are metaphysically possible as including the numerically identical substances, instead of merely numerically distinct but qualitatively similar substances⁵³. Arguing for this thesis, however, is beyond the scope of this paper. Readers are free to not read this thesis into the sketched proposal, if they wish. For this project, I wish to leave such details about metaphysics of modality underdetermined and thus compatible with several accounts.

I wish to conclude this section by making a couple of observations regarding agential powers. The account of agential powers can be understood, at least in part, as a conditional account of powers; part of what it is for an agent *S* to have an agential power to bring about an option O_1 is for the following conditional to be true of *S*: if *S* were to deliberatively conclude that O_1 is the option considered the best, then *S* would determine herself to bring about O_1 on the basis of her judgment of the best. This account is not modally reductive, however, for agential powers are not reduced to these kinds of conditionals. Importantly, an agential power is grounded in, and partly constituted by, an existing rational inclination, or antecedent will, as an element in the relevant process of deliberation, and, importantly, this rational inclination is irreducibly modal. As Leibniz sees it, an appetite in general, and a rational inclination in particular, is a dynamic force (or tendency or conatus) striving to bring about a particular effect such that unless it is impeded by other appetitions (both rational and non-rational), it will bring about this particular effect⁵⁴.

2.3 Primitive Force as Essence and Multiple Possible Series of Perceptual States

In the previous section I introduced the heart of my account of agential contingency. In brief, an agent is free to the extent that she determines herself to do that which she deliberately judges to be the best from several considered possible options that she could have brought about, had she come to the deliberative conclusion that these options were best. In this section I wish to address how this account fits in with the general picture of the explanation of free actions sketched in Section One.

52 Transworld identity is the thesis that individuals exist in more than one possible world. In contemporary discussions on metaphysics of modality, this view has been made popular by: Alvin Plantinga: *God, Freedom and Evil*, Grand Rapids, MI 1977; Alvin Plantinga: *The Nature of Necessity*, Oxford 1974; Thomas P. Flint: *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, Ithaca 1998. One of the most able opponents of this view is David Lewis. See David Lewis: "Counterpart Theory and Quantified Modal Logic", in: *Journal of Philosophy* 65 (1968), pp. 113–126; David Lewis: *Counterfactuals*, Cambridge 1973; David Lewis: *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Oxford 1986.

53 Something along the lines of what Griffin or Mondadori (see note 7 for full citation details) advocate as an interpretation of Leibniz.

54 *Theodicy*, § 87.

As presented, agential contingency only makes reference to metaphysical possibility, so it is compatible with agential contingency that Leibnizian Causal Determinism allows for only one series of perceptual states for each substance. In other words, it is compatible with agential contingency that Leibnizian Causal Determinism entails that only the agential powers that are *actually* exercised *can* be exercised. In fact, it seems initially plausible to think that unexercised agential powers can only be exercised by violating the PSR, or some other element within Leibnizian Causal Determinism, and thus that by holding these general facts about the explanation of free action fixed, *actually* unexercised agential powers are rendered *necessarily* unexercised powers, in this modal sense.

In this section, I wish to advance a model which illustrates how it is possible for actually unexercised agential powers to be exercised, given Leibnizian Causal Determinism. As already stated, part of what it is for an agent *S* to have an agential power to bring about an option O_1 is for the following conditional to be true of *S*: if *S* were to deliberately conclude that O_1 is the best considered option, then *S* would determine herself to bring about O_1 on the basis of her judgment of the best. These conditionals illustrate how Leibnizian agents would have acted differently had they come to different deliberative conclusions about what is best. In this section, I will develop a model which illustrates how Leibnizian agents could have come to different deliberative conclusions, and thus which illustrates how Leibnizian agents could have acted differently – that is, how unexercised agential powers are not necessarily unexercised powers even given Leibnizian Causal Determinism.

At the heart of my account of agential modality is a distinction between the essence of a substance and its accidents. What, in Leibniz's system, is a substance's essence? And how can it play the kind of role that is required by agential modality? I think that for Leibniz the essence of a substance is to be identified with its primitive force⁵⁵. With this identification, and given that rational inclinations are appetitions, and that appetitions are derivative forces, or modifications of a substance's primitive force, the more precise question becomes: how *can* a primitive force be modified differently than it *actually* is without violating the constraints laid down by Leibnizian Causal Determinism? Or, a bit more generally, are there several possible series of perceptual states compatible with a single primitive force and Leibnizian Causal Determinism?

Before answering these questions, it is important to note that Leibniz himself clearly wanted such possibilities to allow for several theological doctrines to be compatible with human freedom. These theological doctrines include divine providential control, divine foreknowledge, and distribution of various kinds of divine graces. I have argued elsewhere that Leibniz's views on divine foreknowledge and providential control have

55 Other commentators have accepted this identification: Yitzhak Y. Melamed / Martin Lin: "Principle of Sufficient Reason", in: Edward N. Zalta (ed.): *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition; <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sufficient-reason/>); John O'Leary-Hawthorne / J.A. Cover: "Leibniz on Supersensationalism and World-Bound Individuals", in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 22 (1990), pp. 175–183; John O'Leary-Hawthorne / J.A. Cover: "Leibnizian Essentialism, Transworld Identity, and Counterparts", in: *History of Philosophical Quarterly* 9/4 (1992), pp. 425–444.

remarkable similarities to traditional Molinism⁵⁶. Even though Leibniz is commonly depicted as a foe of Molinism in the secondary literature⁵⁷, I think that such a depiction is partly based on a misunderstanding of what Molinism is. Part of this assessment involves interpreting Molinism as essentially involving a robustly libertarian conception of freedom, and this Leibniz clearly rejects. I have argued, however, that Molinism is best understood as a conception of divine knowledge *as such*, and that its ability to secure a robust conception of libertarian freedom is one of its main purported theoretical benefits but not an essential part of the view itself. Leibniz, as I read him, endorses much of the conception of divine knowledge – that is, of Molinism – but rejects its purported theoretical benefit, and uses the relevant theoretical tools to safeguard his own conception of the kind of contingency that matters for freedom, which is not libertarian.

Leibniz grounds his account of divine foreknowledge on God's knowledge of subjunctive conditionals of freedom – propositions of the form “if agent *S* were in circumstances *C*, *S* would freely *phi*”. As Leibniz sees it, God's knowledge of subjunctive conditionals of freedom requires that God know the free actions specified in the consequents on the basis of the conditions for action specified in the antecedents. Leibniz writes, for example:

“Yet there remains the difficulty urged by some against divine omniscience, namely how can God know what another mind will choose according to the pleasure of its own free will? [...] [We can] solve the problem without difficulty, for since God foresees contingent things from his own free decrees, he will also know from those what the state of a free mind deliberating about some choice will be at any given time, i. e. how the arguments for each side will appear to it. Therefore he knows on which side of those presented the greater good or evil will be found, and hence what a mind will freely but certainly choose. From this it is also straightforwardly obvious how God knows what any free mind would choose if it were to find itself in any situation which nevertheless will not actually occur [...]”⁵⁸.

56 Juan Garcia: “Leibniz, a Friend of Molinism”, in: *Res Philosophica* 95/3 (2018), pp. 397–420. Jean-Pascal Anfray (“God's Decrees and Middle Knowledge: Leibniz and the Jesuits”, in: *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 76/4 (2002), pp. 647–670) argues persuasively for a similar thesis. Sven K. Knebel (“Leibniz, Middle Knowledge, and the Intricacies of World Design”, in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 28 (1996), pp. 199–210) also argues similarly.

57 Sean Greenberg: “Leibniz against Molinism: Freedom, Indifference, and the Nature of the Will”, in: Rutherford/Cover: *Leibniz: Nature and Freedom* (see note 7), pp. 217–233; Griffin: *Leibniz, God and Necessity* (see note 7); Griffin: “Leibniz on God's Knowledge” (see note 7); Didier Njirayamanda Kaphagawani: *Leibniz on Freedom and Determinism in Relation to Aquinas and Molina*, Brookfield 1999.

58 “Superest tamen difficultas, quam quidam contra divinam omniscientiam movent, quomodo nempe Deus possit scire quae Mens alia secundum sui liberi arbitrii placitum electura est [...] facile nodum expediunt; cum enim Deus res contingentes praevideat ex suis decretis liberis, ex ipsis etiam cognoscet, quis aliquando status mentis liberae de electione aliqua deliberantis sit futurus, seu quanam argumenta in utramque partem ei sint obversatura. Scit ergo a qua parte oppositorum bonum vel malum appariturum sit majus, et proinde quid Mens licet libere, certo tamen, sit electura. Unde etiam facile patet, quomodo Deus sciat quid Mens aliqua libera esset electura, si in aliquem statum deveniret qui tamen reapse nunquam est futurus, [...]”; A VI, 4 C, 2318 / Strickland: *Leibniz on God and Religion* (see note 4), “Rationale of the Catholic Faith”, § 7, pp. 74–75.

Here Leibniz argues that God knows what a free agent would do partly on the basis of knowing how things would appear to this agent. How things would appear to an agent is part of the agent's deliberation process, and thus part of the conditions for free choice.

It is crucial to note that Leibniz is not merely talking about what will *in fact* happen to any substance, but also about "any situation which nevertheless will not actually occur"⁵⁹. That is, Leibniz is not just talking about future contingents; he is also talking about subjunctive conditionals some of whose antecedents will not be realized. God knows what agents would do freely even in situations in which those agents are never going to be. As Leibniz sees it, God has knowledge of free actions on the basis of their conditions for action; or, in other words, God has knowledge of the truth of subjunctive conditionals of freedom by knowing how the free actions specified in the consequents are explained by the conditions for actions specified in the antecedents.

As Leibniz sees it, God's knowledge of these subjunctive conditionals augments providential control by enabling God to know what would happen if He were to place the same individual in different possible circumstances⁶⁰. Having this kind of power is central to having providential control. Leibniz pens:

"[...] God considers what a man would do in such and such circumstances; and it always remains true that God could have placed him in other circumstances more favorable, and given him inward or outward succour capable of vanquishing the most abysmal wickedness existing in any soul" (*Theodicy*, § 103)⁶¹.

Leibniz also relies on God's knowledge of subjunctive conditionals of human freedom to illustrate how God distributes the graces required for salvation. He notes:

"Undoubtedly, it must be conceded that God foresees conditionally how someone would use his free choice, were certain aids afforded; and relying on knowledge of that, along with knowledge of all others, He renders his decisions concerning the division of humanity with respect to salvation"⁶².

59 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

60 This is, of course, only part of the story. A similar sort of providential control can be secured by having numerically distinct possible individuals in different circumstances, instead of the numerically identical individuals in different circumstances. I do not mean to deny this. However, part of the larger theoretical motivation includes safeguarding a more plausible conception of freedom, by providing a more plausible conception of contingency as a condition for freedom, and thus safeguarding human moral responsibility even given divine providential control. Thus, allowing for God to place the same individual in different possible circumstances helps God having providential control, while retaining a more plausible sense of human moral responsibility, even given this providential control.

61 "[...] Dieu considere ce que l'homme feroit en telles ou telles circonstances, et il demeure toujours vray que Dieu auroit pu le mettre dans d'autres plus salutaires, et luy donner des secours internes ou externes, capables de vaincre le plus grand fonds de malice, qui pourroit se trouver dans une ame"; GP VI, 159 / Hugard/Farrar, p. 179.

62 "Concedendum haud dubie est, Deum praevidere conditionata, quomodo scilicet quisque libero arbitrio usus esset, si quaedam auxilia offerrentur; eaque cognitione, ut aliis omnibus, nixum, decernere de oeconomia generis humani ad salutem"; *Leibniz: Dissertation on Predestination and Grace* (see note 4), "Leibniz's Commentary on Burnet", § 9 (d), pp. 58, 60, 59, 61.

Here God's decision to elect some people for salvation depends upon His knowledge of what people would do freely if afforded different kinds of divine graces or aids.

It is thus clear that Leibniz accommodates several theological commitments by relying upon God's knowledge of subjunctive conditionals of human freedom. Furthermore, God knows these conditionals by knowing which free actions, specified in the consequents, are explained by which of the conditions for actions, specified in the antecedents. And, crucially for our purposes, that for these subjunctive conditionals to be true, a single substance must be compatible with more than one possible series of perceptual states. Leibniz theological commitments require this much.

Here is my suggestion for how Leibniz can accommodate this, even given the constraints on the explanation of free action articulated in Section One. First, Leibniz does not think that the series of perceptual states of a substance depends entirely on the substance's primitive force, and its modifications. Rather, Leibniz insists that this series of perceptual states also depends upon the 'initial state' that God 'bestows' upon the substance. Leibniz writes:

"Everything occurs in every substance as a consequence of the first state which God bestowed upon it [...], and, extraordinary concurrence excepted, his ordinary concurrence consists only of preserving the substance itself in conformity with its preceding state and the changes that it bears"⁶³.

Leibniz here notes that the general claim about perceptual states following from the primitive force and its modifications does not apply to the cases of 'extraordinary concurrence' or supernatural graces. I will bracket the issues regarding supernatural graces for the purposes of this discussion, so the claims I make here should be taken with this important qualification in mind. In any case, the postulation of these 'initial states' of a substance opens up conceptual space for a single primitive force to have different possible series of perceptual states precisely by having different initial states. Additionally, and importantly, Leibnizian Causal Determinism is also preserved in this model, for the different possible series of perceptual states would be different from the beginning, and the explanatory demands of this kind of determinism can be accommodated in each possible series of perceptual states.

Furthermore, a plausible way of understanding God's knowledge of subjunctive conditionals of human freedom is as God's knowledge of different possible series of perceptual states which would follow from the man's primitive force, and its modifications, depending on which initial state God decides to bestow. Moreover, that God has the power to 'place' the same individual in different circumstances, then, can be understood as God having the power to bestow a different initial state on the substance. By God

63 "Tout arrive dans chaque substance en consequence du premier estat que Dieu luy a donné [...], et le concours extraordinaire mis à part, son concours ordinaire ne consiste que dans la conservation de la substance même, conformément à son estat precedent et aux changemens qu'il porte"; A II, 2, 177 (GP II, 91–92) / English translation: *The Leibniz-Arnould Correspondence*, ed. and transl. by H. T. Mason with an introd. by G. H. R. Parkinson, Manchester 1967, p. 115.

bestowing a different initial state on a substance, the agent will effectively find him- or herself in different circumstances for action both in the initial state and as the series of perceptual states unfolds. Thus, in bestowing a different initial state on the substance, God can adequately be understood to be ‘placing’ the agent in different circumstances for action depending on the series of perceptual states that would follow from this initial state and the primitive force and its modifications.

An example can help make this proposal more concrete. Consider Susan; she is deliberating about what career path to take, and her main alternatives are a career in economics and a career in music. She adequately recognizes her aptitudes and talents, and thus the prospects of her doing well in either career path; she also accurately assesses the goods associated with either of her options, and the extent to which these goods would contribute to her well-being. In the actual world, Susan comes to the conclusion that a career in music is best for her because this prospect affords her more opportunities for artistic development and expression; she concludes that this would contribute more to her well-being than a higher paycheck and the kinds of goods associated with this – call this deliberation situation D_1 . Being a rational agent Susan chooses a career in music on the basis of her judgment that this is the best course of action open to her.

In the actual world, God bestowed upon Susan an initial state S_1 which eventually unfolded to include the deliberation situation just described. It was within God’s power, however, to bestow upon Susan a different initial state S_2 which would eventually unfold to a slightly different deliberation situation. In this different deliberation situation, let us suppose, it would have been more salient in Susan’s deliberation to assess the economic goods connected with a career in economics. More precisely, instead of concentrating on how the monetary goods of an economics career would contribute to her well-being – as she did in D_1 – she would also take into consideration more seriously how these monetary goods could be used to contribute to the well-being of others. In this alternative deliberation situation, call it D_2 , then, she would recognize, for example, that the extra cash could alleviate a significant amount of lamentable poverty that plagues many people in the world. Given these considerations, Susan would come to the conclusion that it would be best to pursue a career in economics and she would act accordingly.

There are several things worth noting about these examples regarding Susan. First, these examples illustrate how God has the power to place the same individual in different circumstances without violating the Principle of Sufficient Reason or other constraints included in Leibnizian Causal Determinism. Second, how the series of perceptual states unfolds depends on what the agent would freely decide to do in the circumstances that she finds herself. More generally, and importantly for the general purposes of this paper, this model enables us to see clearly how the content of the actual world depends upon *both* what God would do and what creatures would do. The content of the actual world depends upon which initial state God decides to bestow upon the substance; the content of the actual world also depends upon what a substance would do (as encoded in the subjunctive conditionals of freedom that are true of this substance) given the initial state God bestows upon it and what unfolds from this initial state.

Regarding the examples of Susan, that the actual world includes Susan taking a career in music depends upon two factors: God's decision to bestow initial state S_1 on Susan, and the subjunctive conditionals of freedom which describe what Susan would do if D_1 were actual. Similarly, had God decided to create a different possible world⁶⁴, the one in which Susan takes the career in economics, the content of that possible world would also depend upon both God's decision to bestow initial state S_2 on Susan and the subjunctive conditionals of freedom that describe how Susan would act if D_2 were actual. This, of course, also applies to all deliberation situations that follow from either S_1 or S_2 , not just D_1 and D_2 , and the subjunctive conditionals that encode what the agent would do in these different deliberation situations. In general, then, the content of "the actual world" (read *de dicto*) depends upon both what God would do and what creatures would do if placed in different circumstances, much like in traditional Molinist fashion⁶⁵.

This general model, I believe, establishes how a substance's primitive force, as its essence, is compatible with multiple possible series of perceptual states even given the explanatory constraints presented by Leibnizian Causal Determinism. Agential contingency is grounded in agential powers, and part of what it is for an agent S to have an agential power to bring about an option O_1 is for the following conditional to be true of S : if S were to deliberatively conclude that O_1 is the best considered option, then S would determine herself to bring about O_1 on the basis of her judgment of the best. These conditionals illustrate how Leibnizian agents would have acted differently had they come to different deliberative conclusions about what is best. The model presented in this section illustrates, furthermore, how Leibnizian agents could have come to different deliberative conclusions, and thus showing how Leibnizian agents could have acted differently or how agential powers could be exercised. In other words, the model presented here illustrates how unexercised agential powers are not necessarily unexercised powers, even given the constraints of Leibnizian Causal Determinism.

3. Conclusion

Leibniz thinks that everything has an explanation for why it is rather than not, and this demand for explanations also applies to free actions. Some commentators have thought that this commitment precludes an intelligible sense of contingency as a condition for freedom. In this paper I have argued that there is an intelligible, and even plausible,

64 The way I am presenting this point, it appears that I am committing Leibniz to transworld identity (the thesis that substances exist in more than one possible world). Arguably, such a commitment would make the proposal of agential contingency more plausible, but arguing for this thesis is beyond the scope of this paper. For an interesting argument to this effect see: O'Leary-Hawthorne/Cover: "Leibnizian Essentialism" (see note 55). Because of its controversial status, I do not wish to wed the account presented here to this thesis, however. There is indeed a natural fit with this reading, but, if one wishes, one can provide a counterpart-theoretic semantics – roughly *à la* Mondadori or Griffin, say – to the relevant subjunctive conditionals stated in this model.

65 This illustrates well how the proposal advanced here fits well with the one I advanced elsewhere (Garcia: "Leibniz, a Friend of Molinism" (see note 56)).

sense of contingency as a condition for freedom that is allowed by Leibniz's endorsed constraints on explanation of rational action. I labelled this kind of contingency 'agential contingency' – because, I argued, it is required by the very nature of free agency. In brief, an agent is free to the extent that she determines herself to do that which she deliberately judges to be the best from several considered possible options that she could have brought about, had she come to the deliberative conclusion that these options were best. I also developed a model which illustrates how Leibnizian agents could have come to different deliberative conclusions, and thus which illustrates how Leibnizian agents could have acted differently. Leibniz's endorsement of a strong version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, and related commitments on the nature of the explanation of rational action, need not be read as precluding an intelligible and even plausible conception of contingency as a condition for freedom.

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