

THE PLATONISM OF LEIBNIZ'S NEW SYSTEM OF NATURE

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In 1695, Leibniz published for the first time an account of his philosophical system. Or did he? As the full title of the *New System of Nature* suggests, Leibniz is here concerned to explicate only a part of his philosophy, namely, that part that treats 'nature, the communication of substances, and the union of soul and body'. If we follow Aristotle and understand an account of nature to be an explication of the principles of natural change, then the essay of 1695 is presumably Leibniz's attempt to offer a new explication of those principles. Or is it? In a letter of 1706, Leibniz wrote: 'In my essay discussing the system of pre-established harmony ... I consider the soul only as a spiritual substance, and not ... as the entelechy of the body, for this was not relevant to the topic which concerned me, namely, the explanation of the unquestioned agreement between the body and the mind'. And he adds: 'Nor did the Cartesians expect anything else'¹. Comments such as these would suggest that Leibniz's *New System of Nature* is in fact not an account of nature in any general sense, but only a part of nature, namely, that part that treats the relation between the mind and the body. But if Leibniz was concerned to focus on this subset of nature, then why does he spend so much time presenting the motivation behind his conception of substance? In fact, his metaphysics of substance does constitute the general background against which his account of mind-body union must be seen. But only a-part of it. The other, equally important part of the background concerns what I would call his metaphysics of divinity. Where the metaphysics of substance treats substance as an active, self-sufficient thing, the metaphysics of divinity sees it as a created thing into which God constantly emanates his power and his essence. Where the former has its roots in the Aristotelian philosophy, the latter reaches back to the Platonic

¹ GP II, p. 307.

tradition. Leibniz felt it necessary in the *New System of Nature* to explain his 'rehabilitation' of the Aristotelian notion exactly because the Cartesians (and many other contemporaries) had rejected that tradition and put a radically different conception of substance in its place. He was not similarly motivated to explain his metaphysics of divinity because it had not fallen into such disrepute. On the contrary, the vast majority of Leibniz's contemporaries were themselves inclined to turn to the Platonic tradition, both pagan and Christian, for inspiration concerning their own metaphysics of divinity. In brief, I am making two claims: one about the intellectual context of the *New System of Nature*, the other about Leibniz's philosophy in it. The first claim is that the Platonic philosophy of Plotinus, Proclus, Augustine, Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and of course Plato himself was widely known and highly regarded throughout the seventeenth century. The second is that Leibniz's metaphysics of divinity forms an important part of the philosophical background to the *New System*. In the present discussion I will give no support for the first claim except insofar as I argue for the second.² The discussion that follows has three parts. First, a very brief sketch of the historical background to Leibniz's early Platonism; second, an analysis of Leibniz's original views about creation and the relation between God and creatures; third, a brief attempt to show that this metaphysics of creation constitutes an important part of the background to Leibniz's new system of nature.

It is my firm conviction that for any position held by the mature Leibniz the best chance we have to discern its motivation and understand its place in his system is to trace its development. As Leibniz wrote in 1714: it is good to study the discoveries of others in such a way that allows us to detect the source of their inventions and [thereby] to make them in some sense our own. And I wish authors would give us the history of their discoveries and the process by which they arrive at them. When they do not do this, it is necessary to try to guess in order to profit better from their work.³

There has been a lot of guess-work about the influence of Platonism on Leibniz's philosophy and, recently, about the precise role that the Cambridge Platonists in general and their Kabbalistic thought in particular had

² In my *Leibniz's Metaphysics: Its Origins and Development*, Cambridge: forthcoming, I present a more detailed account of Leibniz's relation to the Platonic tradition. It will come as a surprise to many scholars to discover that there was an important Platonic tradition in Protestant Germany during the seventeenth century and that this tradition was quite independent of the English one.

³ GP III, p. 568.

on Leibniz's philosophical development. Many scholars have assumed that the recognizably Platonic flavor of some of Leibniz's mature writings was due to his increasing familiarity in the 1680s with the views of the Cambridge Platonists. For example, in her recent book, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, Allison Coudert correctly identifies a number of Platonic features in Leibniz's mature thought and then assumes that the source of these ideas must be the Cambridge Platonists in general and Francis Mercury van Helmont in particular. Coudert is admirably correct in her recognition of Platonic and Kabbalist elements in Leibniz's later thought; Leibniz's indebtedness to these traditions has too often been ignored. But scholars like Coudert are wrong to assume that Leibniz learned his Platonism, Gnosticism, and Kabbalism from some member of the group of thinkers orbiting around Henry More.⁴ As I will show here, Leibniz imbibed that strange seventeenth-century concoction of Platonism and Kabbalism in Leipzig in 1661-64, long before he became fully acquainted with the ideas of either Henry More, Anne Conway, or Francis Mercury van Helmont.⁵ That is, if I am right in my account of the development of Leibniz's metaphysics of divinity, the basic features of his Platonism were in place in 1672-73; several years before he was familiar with any of the details of the Cambridge Platonists.

There has also been a lot of speculation in the secondary literature about Leibniz's precise relationship to Spinoza's *Ethics* and the extent to which the development of Leibniz's philosophy may have been influenced by Spinoza's metaphysics. Although I will not discuss these topics directly here (there is no time for that), what I have to say here should put an end to much of this speculation. It follows from my brief comments about Leibniz's early Platonism that some of the features which have been considered

⁴ As far as I know, every recent scholar who has discerned the Platonic and/or Kabbalistic elements in Leibniz's mature philosophy has identified its source as one of More's circle. For the full list of these scholars and their views, see CONNERT, *Leibniz und the Kabbalah*, Dordrecht 1995.

⁵ Scholars have disagreed about which member of More's wide circle most influenced Leibniz and when the influence occurred. To cite three examples, Coudert maintains that the relationship between van Helmont and Leibniz became important in the late 1680s; Carolyn Merchant thinks that it was Anne Conway who had the most significant influence and that it took place in the 1690s; while Catherine Wilson argues that Ralph Cudworth had the greatest influence on Leibniz and that it began in 1689. As far as I am aware, no scholar has taken seriously Leibniz's early Platonism, except for Daniel Fouke who notes his early inclination to a theory of causal emanation between God and creatures. See MEEGHAN, 'The vitalism of Anne Conway: its impact on Leibniz's concept of the monad', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, XVII (1979), pp. 255-69; Wilson, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: A Historical and Comparative Study*, Princeton 1989, pp. 160f; and FOUKE, 'Emanation and the perfections of being: divine causation and the autonomy of nature in Leibniz', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, LXXVI (1994), pp. 168-171.

Spinozistic are really Platonic in origin and were extant in 1672-73, roughly three years before Leibniz knew anything about Spinoza's *Ethics*.

There are a number of Platonic and Kabbalistic doctrines discernible in the texts of Leibniz's teachers and in the works of the young Leibniz himself. What I would like to do now is to offer a brief summary of three of the most important of these. The first concerns the creative role of divine Ideas. For Plato, the eternal and immutable Ideas are (somehow) the cause and exemplar of material things. Starting with Proclus and Christianized by Augustine, these Ideas were placed in God's mind so that in creating the world God was (somehow) instantiating divine attributes. Because matter itself was a form of privation or limitation, particular instantiations of the Idea or Finess were necessarily imperfect. Therefore, a physical instantiation of Finess could be more or less perfect according to how well it instantiated the perfect F, but it could never attain the perfection and reality of Finess itself.

The second Platonic doctrine that Leibniz inherited from his teachers and contemporaries (and that I want to focus on here) is the causal theory of emanation. Roughly, the Plotinian notion of emanative causation may be summarized as follows: for any higher being A, if A is or has Finess, then A can emanate Finess to a lower being B. In the emanative relation, A loses nothing while B comes to instantiate F. A remains transcendent and pure, while B becomes an imperfect image of the perfect F. The emanative process is assumed to be continual so that B will participate in Finess only as long as A acts or emanates Finess.⁶

The third doctrine that I want to summarize briefly is found in the Jewish Kabbalistic tradition as well as in the Platonic tradition. According to many Kabbalists, the divine attributes emanate to all levels of creation so that every being participates in all of them. Christian Kabbalists like Raymond Lull and Johann Reuchlin followed in this tradition and maintained that every creature exemplified all the divine attributes. For Lull, each creature is infused with all the divine attributes so that one can grasp the divine features at every level of being.⁷

⁶ For a fuller discussion of emanative causation, especially physical influx, see EUGENE O'NEILL, "Influxus physicus", in ed. S. Nadler, *Causation in Early Modern Philosophy*, University Park, PA 1993, pp. 27-55.

⁷ Johann Reuchlin was a German student of Pico della Mirandola and the first full-fledged modern Christian Kabbalist. For a brief introduction to Reuchlin, see MOSER DEB, "Introduction to the Bison Book edition", and G. Lloyd Jones, "Introduction", both in *Johann Reuchlin: On the Art of the Kabbalah*, trans. Martin & Sarah Goodman, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1993. There is a good deal of secondary literature written on Lull. For a basic introduction, see FRANKS YATES, *The Art of Memory*, Chicago 1966.

With this said, we can now move to Leibniz's Platonism. First, to its sources. It was as a student in Leipzig that Leibniz first drank from this ancient fountain. The works of the two most prominent professors at Leipzig, Johann Adam Scherzer (1628-83) and Jakob Thomastius (1622-84), show a thorough acquaintance with both Platonic and Kabbalistic doctrines.⁸ In a textbook by Scherzer, we find Kabbalistic doctrines as well as Renaissance Platonism and *prisca theologia*.⁹ He refers to Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, Augustine, and Johann Reuchlin, documents the heresies and religious chaos of his age, and asks how 'will the bare truth ever be revealed? His answer is that we will find it in 'the words of the scripture' properly understood, i.e. with the help of the Jewish Kabbalists and what he calls the 'perennial philosophy'.¹⁰ Scherzer's proposals won him the applause of his colleagues. One writes about his work: he has given us 'an Ariadne thread out of the labyrinth' of religious controversy.¹¹ But it is important that Scherzer is not merely a Platonist, like so many of contemporaries, he was happy to use Plato when it came to divine topics, but turned to Aristotle as soon as his attention shifted to more mundane matters. In his *Vale mecum*, Scherzer makes four points that are especially relevant to our discussion: first, God contains all things while remaining fundamentally simple;¹² second, God acts constantly to conserve his creatures while 'nothing in him is changed, nor is it depleted';¹³ third, he distinguishes between the archetypal world and the created world, where the former is the Idea of all things that will be made as it exists in the mind of God and the latter is the coordinated agree-

⁸ For the spring semester of 1663, Leibniz visited the University of Jena where he studied with Erhard Weigel whose works are also a mixture of Platonism, Aristotelianism, and other philosophies. Unlike Thomastius and Scherzer, Weigel's Platonism has been noted in the secondary literature. See K. MOHL, *Der junge Leibniz*, Stuttgart-Bad-Cannstatt 1978, I.

⁹ Scherzer accepts a version of what is often called the ancient theology or *prisca theologia*. The standard account of this tradition remains D. R. WALES, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, Cornell 1972. To oversimplify, it was believed that Moses did not write down everything that was revealed to him and that the unwritten divine truths were passed down among the wise in an oral tradition that influenced Plato and that were finally written down in the form of Kabbalistic texts. For many Renaissance philosophers, the ancient texts of Plato acquired a religious importance. Philosophers like Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, for example, believed that the divine truths were hidden from the uninitiated, but were available to those who knew where and how to look.

¹⁰ *Collegii anti-Sociniani*, third edition, 1702, preface.

¹¹ See the introduction to Scherzer's *Vale mecum sive manuale philosophicum quadripartitum*, Leipzig 1686. This textbook went through at least five editions; the one cited here is the fourth.

¹² pp. 52 f.

¹³ p. 52.

gate of created things.¹⁴ Finally, he describes the emanation of God as what follows 'naturally from a subject as a result of its properties or modes'.¹⁵ Leibniz's mentor, Jakob Thomasiaus, was a well-known Aristotelian who also wrote about Platonism and was familiar with the Kabbalistic tradition.

He refers to the whole range of Platonic philosophers, both pagan and Christian, early and late. In his *Exercitatio de Stoica mundi exstitione*, he compares the ancient philosophies of Plato and Aristotle to that of the Stoics.¹⁶ To over-simplify, his conclusion is that one should stay away from the Stoics, whose philosophy is almost entirely heretical and approach with caution the other ancient systems. He insists that ancients like Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle were pagans however clever they might have been. He agrees with Scherzer that God is the source of all things. He writes that God is 'the fountain of features which flow into creatures',¹⁷ but he insists that this flowing or emanation be understood in the right way, namely, as that which God wills.¹⁸ In short, he is happy to accept Augustine's conclusion that 'God contains all things in himself'.¹⁹

Nor did Leibniz's early exposure to Platonism and Kabbalism end with his university studies. Most of his favorite authors during the 1660s were those who wrote extensively on the Kabbalah and 'the divine Plato'.²⁰ While it is true that during the 1660s Leibniz was primarily interested in developing his metaphysics of substance, his background in the Platonic philosophy is discernible in his writings of the period.²¹ In short, Leibniz's early Platonism is very much over-determined.

¹⁴ p. 137.

¹⁵ p. 66.

¹⁶ We tend to think of Thomasiaus as an Aristotelian because that is how Leibniz described his illustrious teacher. E.g., at A VI, 2, p. 426, Leibniz claims that Thomasiaus is the 'most celebrated German Peripatetic'. But Thomasiaus was much more than that. He wrote a number of books explicating and then comparing ancient philosophies. He was obviously well-versed in Stoicism, Platonism, and other ancient ideas. Although he tends to agree with Aristotle, he takes Platonism very seriously. The full title of the book that I here discuss is *Exercitatio de Stoica mundi exstitione: cui accersuntur argumenti varii sed imprimis ad historiam Stoicæ philosophiæ facientes, dissertationes XXI*, Leipzig 1676.

¹⁷ p. 251.

¹⁸ p. 253.

¹⁹ p. 249.

²⁰ For example, Leibniz often refers to the works of Athanasius Kircher and Johann Heinrich Alsted, both of whom he considers 'most learned'. See e.g. A VI, 2, pp. 416, 420; A VI, 1, pp. 74, 278.

²¹ I will not discuss here the various subtle ways in which Leibniz used his early training in Platonism. One particularly striking case appears in his 'De transubstantiatione' of 1668-69 where he explicitly makes use of Platonic notions and refers to Plato (A VI, 1, pp. 509-10). In my forthcoming book, I discuss Leibniz's early use of Platonism more fully.

Soon after settling in Paris in March, 1672, Leibniz began working on his metaphysics of creation and related theological problems. Like his teachers before him, as soon as he turns his attention away from the mundane matter of substance and toward the realm of divine creation, his Platonism comes to the fore. It was during the winter of 1672-73 that he wrote the *Confessio philosophi* in which he discusses for the first time at length two problems which would engage his attention for the next forty years. I will leave the labyrinths of worldly evil and contingency to braver souls than I and instead focus on the metaphysics of divinity.²² According to Leibniz, 'the series of things', i.e., the state of the world, 'depends on those well known eternal and immutable ideas' which are 'contained in the divine intellect'.²³ where they 'subsist from all eternity'.²⁴ He says that these 'immutable and eternal ideas' are the 'the first source' of the series of things.²⁵ Moreover, he tells us, these ideas are equivalent to the essence of God. What Leibniz suggests here is the following: the divine intellect has in it an unspecified number of Ideas which are eternal and immutable and which constitute the divine nature or essence. These Ideas constitute the materials out of which more complicated essences or Ideas are made. Some possible essences are actualized, some are not.²⁶ He does not explicitly talk about other possible series of things but the suggestion is that each of these unactualized essences is embedded in an unactualized possible series of things (these are the forerunners of possible worlds). According to Leibniz, the series of things that God chose to create was contained 'in his essence' and thereby 'followed directly from his intellect'.

This creation story is fairly sketchy, but it contains the basic structure of his later, more developed account. In particular, it contains the assumption that the world and its creatures are a manifestation of the divine Ideas. In other words, we already find in the *Confessio philosophi* of 1672-73 the view that the created world follows directly from the divine Ideas and that created things contain the divine Ideas. It is this view that I take to be Platonic and not Spinozistic. In other words, Leibniz has developed the core of his metaphysics of divinity nearly three years before he had heard any-

²² As far I know, there has been no discussion in the secondary literature of the fact that the *Confessio philosophi* contains Leibniz's first attempt at a creation story.

²³ A VI, 3, p. 131.

²⁴ A VI, 3, p. 122. In my study of the *Confessio philosophi* I have been greatly helped by Robert Sleigh whose excellent translation of this and related texts will appear as a volume in The Yale Leibniz.

²⁵ A VI, 3, p. 137.

²⁶ The example Leibniz gives of a possible, unactualized essence is that of an animal with unequal legs.

thing about Spinoza's *Ethics* and three and a half years before he saw Spinoza's manuscript.²⁷ In 1676, when Leibniz presents his metaphysics of divinity in more detail, his terminology shifts slightly, but his basic position is the same.²⁸

Between the spring of 1673 and the autumn of 1675, Leibniz spent most of his intellectual energies on mathematical topics. When he made a breakthrough in his work on the calculus in the fall of 1675, he once again turned his attention to metaphysics. The papers which he wrote over the course of the next year are enormously important. In them, we see Leibniz developing the details of his views on the nature of individual active substance and on the relation between God and creatures. It is important that the development of these two aspects of Leibniz's metaphysics went hand in hand.

The Ideas which make up God's essence are here defined as simple, absolute, and positive; Leibniz sometimes refers to them as simple forms and often as attributes of God; they are also now infinite in number.²⁹ Platonists from Proclus to Scherzer had considered both God and divine Ideas to be simple. The assumption was that what is perfect was wholly unified and hence lacking in parts. Leibniz explains the simplicity of divine Ideas in terms of their unanalyzability: other ideas can be analyzed into them; but they cannot be analyzed into any others. In his characterization of these Ideas as 'absolute' and 'positive', Leibniz stands in a long line of Platonists and even Plato himself: the F is what it is without limitation. Finally, Leibniz's insistence that God's Ideas are infinite echoes the Plotinian assumption

²⁷ We know that Leibniz heard something about the *Ethics* from E. W. Tschirnhaus in the winter of 1673-76 (A VI, 3, pp. 384f) and that he talked to Spinoza and saw part of his manuscript in November of 1676 (A VI, 3, p. 580; A II, 1, p. 379).

²⁸ Ludwíg Stehli was one of the first to argue that Leibniz was 'Spinoza freundlich' during this period. See I. Stern, *Leibniz und Spinoza*, Berlin 1890, pp. 60-110. Mark Kulstad has recently maintained that Leibniz does propose a 'monistic pantheism' during the period in KURZAD, 'Did Leibniz incline toward monistic pantheism in 1676?' (presented at the International Leibniz Congress, July 1994). Robert Adams has also suggested (ADAMS, *Leibniz, Determinism, Theism, Idealism*, Oxford 1994, pp. 123-34), that Leibniz's Spinozistic terminology in the spring of 1676 implies the Spinozistic doctrine that creatures are not 'ontologically external' from God. In this connection, it is quite worth remembering that in the *De arte combinatoria* of 1666, Leibniz refers to God as substance and creatures as accident. This is precisely the same relation between God and creatures that we find in Scherzer, e.g., and in many of the Platonists of the period. It should not come as a surprise therefore that Leibniz, after he has heard about Spinoza's *Ethics*, uses the Spinozistic terminology of modes to express this same basic idea, namely, that creatures are merely extensions of the divine nature. But despite his Spinozistic terminology in 1676, this doctrine remains standard Platonic fare. In my forthcoming book, I explicate the use of Platonic doctrines in the theological essays written in Paris, and argue that this Platonism was consistent with a notion of creatures as very much ontologically external.

²⁹ A I, 3, pp. 514fP, pp. 69-71.

tion that God is as full of being as possible: everything good that can be contained in him is.

These attributes of God constitute the building blocks out of which possible series of things are formed.³⁰ According to Leibniz, when these attributes are combined or related to one another, modifications of them arise. He writes: 'from the conjunction of simple possible forms there result modifications, that is, ideas as properties result from essence.'³¹ The point is that when simple forms are combined, modifications of the essence of God result just as properties result from essence.³²

In an essay of April, 1676, entitled *On Forms, or the Attributes of God*, Leibniz elaborates. Concerning the creator, he makes it clear that 'the essence of God consists in the fact that he is the subject of all comparable attributes'. Concerning the creations of God, he claims that 'any property or affection of God involves his whole essence.'³³ Indeed, according to Leibniz, when God produces something, regardless of how small, 'it involves the whole nature of God'. Leibniz is fairly straightforward about how these products come about. He explains that when the attributes of God are 'related to one another, modifications result; hence it comes about that the same essence of God is expressed as a whole in any kind of world and, therefore, that God manifests himself in infinite modes.'³⁴ In another essay of April, Leibniz approaches these points from a slightly different perspective. He writes in *On Simple Forms*: 'modifications ... are what result from all other forms taken together'. They have an 'infinite variety' which 'can only result from an infinite cause', i.e., from the infinitely various forms.³⁵

³⁰ It is noteworthy that in the 'De summa rerum' papers Leibniz is explicit about possible worlds. See A VI, 3, pp. 512-13fP, p. 67.

³¹ A VI, 3, p. 521fP, p. 81.

³² Nor should we get overly excited here about Leibniz's terminology. Although his interest in Spinoza might have inclined him to use the words 'mode' and 'modification', the sense of 'property' and 'modification' are standard fare. The Latin term 'modus' acquired a technical sense in the fourteenth century when Suarez offers a systematic treatment of it. According to Suarez, a mode is, among other things 'what determines the state and manner of something's existing without adding to it a proper new entity, but merely modifying a pre-existing one' (see Disp. VII, Sect. I, 17). In the standard seventeenth century *Lexicons of Philosophy* the term 'mode' is given lengthy treatment, but Godehusius, Miscraelius, and Chauvin agree that, as the latter wrote, 'a substantial mode is a determination of what is in the substance intrinsically'. For Leibniz and his contemporaries, a modification is an extension of the essence of a thing. It does not constitute a wholly new entity, but rather a determinant state of the thing of which it is a modification.

³³ A VI, 3, p. 514fP, p. 69.

³⁴ A VI, 3, p. 514fP, p. 71.

³⁵ A VI, 3, p. 522fP, p. 83.

The core features of Leibniz's metaphysics of divinity may be summarized as follows. Modifications come about when divine attributes are combined; such combinations always *involve* all divine attributes.³⁶ Each modification is a product of the whole essence of God, i.e., of all his attributes; it is in this sense that each modification of God will *involve* his whole essence. Because of its infinite cause, each modification is bound to be infinitely complex itself. So far so good. Modifications result from the whole essence of God and each involves the divine essence. But then what? According to Leibniz, individual substances result when these modifications are instantiated in an active subject. In an essay quoted above, *On Forms, or the Attributes of God*, Leibniz writes: 'It is a wonderful thing that a subject is different from forms or attributes... Thought is not duration, but what thinks is something that endures. And this is the difference between substance and forms'.³⁷ That is, because substances are active things, they are not only the sorts of things that can endure, they can also instantiate properties. Leibniz continues in the next paragraph: 'The correct way of considering the matter is that forms are conceived through themselves; subjects, and the fact that they are subjects, are conceived through forms'.³⁸ And in another essay of the same month, he writes: 'particulars result' when forms 'are combined with a subject'.³⁹ Therefore, according to Leibniz, a subject is that which has a mind or principle of activity.⁴⁰ Each subject or substance will be an instantiated modification or collection of divine attributes. God produces modifications through the combinations of his attributes or forms and then instantiates these in subjects. Leibniz continues in the essay, *On Forms, or the Attributes of God*: 'I cannot explain how things result from forms other than by analogy with the way in which numbers result from units – with this difference, that all units are homogeneous, but forms are different'.⁴¹ But if each subject is an instantiated modification and each modification is somehow a combination of all the divine attributes, then each substance will also be a manifestation of divine essence.

³⁶ At A VI, 3, p. 514/P, p. 68, Leibniz writes: 'proprietas sive affectio Dei totam eius essentiam involvat'.

³⁷ A VI, 3, p. 514/P, p. 69.

³⁸ A VI, 3, p. 514/P, p. 71.

³⁹ A VI, 3, p. 523/P, p. 85.

⁴⁰ As early as 1668-69, Leibniz defines a substance as 'that which has a principle of action per se' (see A VI, 1, p. 508). I have argued at length elsewhere for the fundamental activity of substance. For a summary of my views, see the article co-authored with ROBERT C. SIEGEL, 'Metaphysics: The early period to the Discourse on Metaphysics', *Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, ed. N. Jolley, Cambridge 1995, pp. 72-76.

⁴¹ A VI, 3, p. 523/P, p. 85.

Leibniz embraces this consequence. In another essay of the same month, entitled *On the Origin of Things from Forms*, he writes:

It seems to me that the origin of things from God is of the same kind as the origin of properties from essence; just as $6 = 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1$, therefore $6 = 3 + 3$, $= 3 \times 2$, $= 4 + 2$. Nor should it be doubted that one expression differs from the other... Just as these properties differ from each other and from essence, so do things differ from each other and from God.⁴²

Each creature expresses the same essence, but in a slightly different way; that is, each creature will somehow instantiate all the attributes of God.

But this seems heretical: this metaphysics of divinity appears to populate the world with an infinity of gods. Leibniz offers some help here. He makes it clear that, strictly speaking, the absolute affirmative attributes of God are not *in* the world. He claims that a creature has the immeasurability of God if it can be said to be somewhere; it has the omniscience of God if it can be said to perceive. But even though the immeasurability of God can be 'ascribed to' the creature, Leibniz tells us that this immeasurability is not part of the world anymore than God is part of our mind.⁴³ So how exactly are we to understand this relation between God and creatures? There are two related problems. First, if all creatures contain the essence of God, then they in some sense contain his attributes. As Leibniz says, those attributes can be 'ascribed to' creatures. Yet he also says that the divine features are not in the world. But how exactly are we to understand the difference between the creaturely attribute and the divine one? Moreover, even if we can make sense of how it is that the attributes of God differ from those of creatures, there remains the problem of how to differentiate among creatures: if the essence of all creatures is the same, then it is not at all 'clear' how they are supposed to differ.⁴⁴

In an essay of December, 1675, Leibniz makes a distinction that will be of significant help here. He writes:

we do not have any *idea* of a circle, such as there is in God, who thinks all things at the same time... We think about a circle, we provide demonstrations about a circle, we recognise a circle: its essence is known to us – but only part by part. If we were to think of the whole essence of a circle at the same time, then we would have the idea of a circle. Only God has the idea of composite things.⁴⁵

He goes on to explain that the idea we can have of a circle is deficient. Leibniz makes the same point in 1672 in the *Confessio philosophi*. He writes:

⁴² A VI, 3, pp. 518-19/P, p. 77.

⁴³ A VI, 3, p. 520/P, pp. 79 f.

⁴⁴ It is clear from an essay of April 1676 that Leibniz has accepted what he came to call his principle of the identity of indiscernibles. In this essay, entitled *Meditation on the principle of the individual*, Leibniz writes: 'two things always differ in themselves' (A, VI, 3, p. 491/P, p. 51).

⁴⁵ A VI, 3, p. 463/P, p. 7.

Even complete cognitions can increase, not by novelty of matter, but by novelty of reflection. If you have nine units accessible to you, then you have comprehended completely the essence of the number nine. However, even if you were to have the material for all its properties, nevertheless you would not have its form or reflection [formam seu reflexionem]. For even if you do not observe that three times three... and a thousand other combinations are nine, you have nonetheless thought of the essence of the number nine. ... I will give an example of a finite thing displaying properties that are infinite... Here is a circle: if you know that all the lines from the center to the circumference are equal, in my opinion, you consider its essence sufficiently clearly. Still you have not comprehended in virtue of that innumerable theorems...⁴⁶

I said above that Leibniz's proposal that creatures instantiate all divine attributes leads to two problems: one concerns the difference between the divine attributes of God and those of creatures; the other concerns the individuation among created substances, all of whom are supposed to share the same essence. There are five points to make in response to these problems. The first two are as follows: for any essence *E*, whether infinite or finite, (1) there is a range of possible cognitions of it, from partial to complete, where a partial cognition is to grasp a property of it and a complete cognition is to grasp every such property; (2) there is a range of expressions of it, from partial to complete where a partial expression of *E* is a 'display of a property' of *E* and a complete expression is a display of every property of *E*.

With the distinction between partial and complete expression in hand, we can begin to understand how all creatures contain the essence of God and yet differ from one another. According to Leibniz, each creature is a partial expression of God in much the same way that $3+3$ is a partial expression of 6. If one understands $3+3$, then she understands the essence of 6; if one understood the nature of a substance, then she would grasp the essence of God. But not the whole essence. Each of these expressions is a manifestation of the fundamental nature or essence of God, but only part of it. So, just as to understand a circle fully is to grasp every possible expression of its essence, to understand God fully is to grasp every possible modification of it. Leibniz writes:

Just as the number 3 is one thing, and 1, 1, 1 is another, for 3 is $1+1+1$. To this extent the form of the number 3 is different from all its parts; in the same way things [creatures] differ from God, who is all things. Creatures are some things.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ A VI, 3, pp. 139-40.

⁴⁷ A VI, 3, p. 512P, p. 67.

Suppose the numbers 4, 5, and 6 to be attributes of God. For each of these attributes, there is an infinite number of expressions of each and an infinite number of combinations of these expressions. If we combine one expression of 4 (say, $2+2$) with an expression of 5 (say, $15-10$) with the expression of 6 (say, $486-480+30$ divided by 6), then we have a combination or modification of these divine attributes. Each such modification captures the essence of the relevant number, but only partially. It is in this way that each substance contains the essence of God. Each substance is an expression or manifestation of that essence, but not of the whole essence. Moreover, given the infinite number of possible expressions of each attribute, there could easily be an infinity of different expressions of each attribute; essence, each partial and yet each different from every another.

With this said, we can grasp the final three points to make in response to our problems. (3) Each created substance is a partial expression of the essence of God and each differs from every other. Moreover, according to Leibniz, (4) a thing *a* expresses a thing *b* just in case *a* is (at least) a partial expression of the essence of *b* (and *a* is not identical with *b*).⁴⁸ Finally, Leibniz maintains that (5) for created things, if *a* expresses *b* (and therefore is a partial expression of the essence of *b*), then *b* will express *a* for *b* will also be a partial expression of the essence of *a*. That is, the expressers relation among created substances is reciprocal. On this model, each substance is a modification of the essence of God; it is *one way* in which all the divine attributes may be combined. Each of the infinitely many other substances is a partial expression of the divine essence and the totality of substances is the totality of expressions consistent with harmony. Leibniz writes: 'the essence of all things is the same, and things differ only modally, just as a town seen from a high point differs from the town seen from a plain'.⁴⁹ The town is the essence of God, which can be expressed and hence viewed in an infinity of ways.

What we have here of course is Leibniz's tailor-made version of the three Platonic doctrines noted earlier. For Leibniz, as for his Platonic predecessors (including Thomasius and Scherzer), the creatures of the world are manifestations of the divine Ideas such that each manifests the divine essence and yet each differs from every other. In the essays under consideration, Leibniz is not explicit about the emanative relation between God and

⁴⁸ In his later work, Leibniz describes the interrelations among substances in his system of pre-established harmony in terms of expression. See e.g. GP, II, p. 113. This later sense of expression is related to the one used here in complicated ways. For an account, see my forthcoming book, chapter 7.

⁴⁹ A VI, 3, p. 573P, p. 95.

creatures, but it is clear that creatures insinuate the divine Ideas continually. Leibniz writes:

It seems to me that the origin of things from God is of the same kind as the origin of properties from an essence; just as $6 = 1+1+1+1+1+1$, therefore $6 = 3+3$, $= 4+2$, etc., Nor may one doubt that the one expression differs from the other ... So just as these properties differ from each other and from the essence, so do things differ from each other and from God.²⁰

Creatures are continual manifestations of God.²¹

With this said, let's turn finally to the *New System of Nature*. Between 1676 and 1695, Leibniz had a good deal of time to work out the details of his metaphysics, and surely his metaphysics of substance evolved in important ways. I have argued elsewhere that the basic features of Leibniz's conception of substance are extant by 1676. That is, I claim that the doctrines of the identity of indiscernibles, of marks and traces, and even of preestablished harmony are in place when Leibniz leaves Paris in late 1676, as is his conception of substance as that which is both indestructible and a *unum per se*.²² These are of course, with a couple of significant exceptions, the doctrines which form the background to the *New System of Nature*. What is missing in 1676 are some of the details of the pre-established harmony, the concomitance between body and soul and the notion of substance as that which has a complete concept. But however much he tinkered with the details of his conception of substance between 1676 and 1695, he held steadfast to his metaphysics of divinity. Although he is not explicit about this aspect of his metaphysics in the *New System of Nature*, it is there, sometimes in rather subtle ways. For example, he complains that the Cartesians have confused 'natural things with artificial ones because they have lacked sufficiently grand ideas of the majesty of nature'. The majesty of nature consists in more than just the fact that the machines of nature do not breakdown and are infinitely complex. According to Leibniz, the reason why 'my system alone allows us to understand the true and immense distance between the least production and mechanism of divine wisdom and the greatest masterpieces' of a limited mind is because his system alone places God's essence in the world in an infinity of ways and hence makes that world as

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full of perfection as any could be. Although the God of the *New System of Nature* is primarily the divine architect who has arranged the objects of nature in the harmonious fashion there explicated, the Platonic God who emanates his absolute perfections stands in the wings. Leibniz writes: 'Never has any system made our eminence more evident. Since every mind is like a world apart, self-sufficient, independent of any other creature, containing infinity, and expressing the universe, it is as durable, subsistent, and absolute as the universe of creatures itself.'

I have argued here that the metaphysics of divinity developed by Leibniz during his Paris period is recognizably Platonic. What Leibniz does in Paris is to take his extensive background in Platonism and mold it to fit his own conception of substance. I have also suggested that, although the focus of the *New System of Nature* is his metaphysics of substance, his metaphysics of divinity stands as a backdrop to the system there articulated. The natural objects about which he talks at length in the text cannot be fully understood unless we recognize that each is an expression of the divine essence. By combining his conception of God with his notion of individual substance, Leibniz went beyond the Platonism of his teachers and contemporaries and made that tradition his own. As Paul Oskar Kristeller has written:

ever since classical antiquity, Platonist philosophers have tried not so much to repeat or restate Plato's doctrines in their original form, as to combine them with notions of diverse origin, and these accretions, like the tributaries of a broadening river, became integral parts of the continuing tradition.²³

Leibniz's *New System of Nature* is such a tributary.

²⁰ A VI, iii, pp. 518 f./P, p. 77.

²¹ Daniel Foerke notes Leibniz's early commitment to emanation as do I in my forthcoming book. See Foerke, 'Emanation and the perfections of being: divine causation and the autonomy of nature in Leibniz,' *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, LXXVI (1994), pp. 168-171.

²² For a summary of my views, see the article co-authored with Robert C. Spector, 'Metaphysics: The early period to the Discourse on Metaphysics', *Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, ed. N. Jolley, Cambridge 1995, pp. 67-123.

²³ P. O. KRISTELLER, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains*, New York 1955, pp. 48-49.