

BERKELEY AND LEIBNIZ

STEPHEN PURYEAR

Abstract: This chapter explores the relationship between the views of Leibniz and Berkeley on the fundamental nature of the created universe. It argues that Leibniz concurs with Berkeley on three key points: that in the final analysis there are only perceivers and their contents (subjective idealism), that there are strictly speaking no material or corporeal substances, and that bodies or sensible things reduce to the contents of perceivers (phenomenalism). It then reconstructs his central argument for phenomenalism, which rests on his belief in the infinite division of matter, his doctrine of the ideality of relations, and the traditional principle that *being* and *unity* convert. Finally, it explores Leibniz's belief that a body having its being in one perceiver can be "founded" on other perceivers, and considers Berkeley's reasons for opposing such a view.

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Few issues have generated as much controversy in recent Leibniz scholarship as his views in the area of fundamental ontology. According to some, he is a committed realist, someone who believes that there are real bodies or material beings existing outside of all perceivers (Phemister 2005; Arthur 2018). According to others, Leibniz is a kind of idealist, at least in his later years (i.e., from around 1704 on), although these commentators disagree about the precise nature of his alleged idealism. A few, such as Adams (1994), ascribe to him a view much like Berkeley's, according to which the created world consists only of immaterial perceivers and those things which have their being within them—ideas, phenomena, and the like. Others see him as an idealist only in a weaker sense according to which immaterial perceivers are the fundamental created beings, while denying that bodies or material things have their being only within those perceivers (Rutherford 2008). Finally, still others maintain that Leibniz did not have a single consistent view in this area, perhaps because he was only "window-shopping" (Hartz 2007: 15) or else because, though looking to buy, he simply could not make up his mind (Garber 2009).

As this controversy would suggest, scholars also disagree about the extent to which Leibniz's views on fundamental ontology align with Berkeley's. Leibniz is either an idealist in fundamentally the same sense as Berkeley, or he is an idealist but in a significantly weaker sense, or he is not an idealist at all, and thus stands squarely at odds with Berkeley on this issue, or else he does not stand in any determinate relation to

Berkeley at all. One of my two main aims in this chapter will be to make the case for a version of the first option. That is, I will argue that in the final analysis Leibniz subscribes to a version of idealism that situates him very close to Berkeley.¹ I do so by first considering what Leibniz himself says about Berkeley. I then present what I take to be the most important textual evidence for reading Leibniz, like Berkeley, as a *subjective idealist*, that is, as holding that there are only perceiving subjects and their contents. Next, I reconstruct what I take to be Leibniz's deepest and most instructive argument for his view that bodies reduce to the contents of perceivers, that is, for his *phenomenalism*. Finally, I turn to my second main aim, which is to develop an account of Leibniz's doctrine that bodies having their being in one perceiver can be "founded" on other perceivers, and to consider Berkeley's reasons for opposing such a view.

Leibniz on Berkeley

Berkeley published his first major work of philosophy, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, just six years before Leibniz died in 1716. But we know that Leibniz was familiar with Berkeley and with this work in particular. In late 1714, he received a letter from Bartholomew Des Bosses, a Jesuit theologian, in which Des Bosses notes that when "the hypothesis reducing bodies to phenomena alone [...] was cleverly defended recently by an English [sic] philosopher, it was badly received by many scholars" (GP 2:487/LDB 328–329). In a reply dated 15 March 1715, Leibniz remarks:

The one in Ireland who impugns the reality of bodies does not seem to offer sufficient reasons or to explain his thought sufficiently. I suspect he belongs to that class of men who want to be known for paradoxes. (GP 2:492/LDB 330–331)

It was also around this time, perhaps even in response to Des Bosses' comment, that Leibniz acquired and read a copy of the *Principles*.² This copy is today housed at the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Bibliothek in Hannover (and can be accessed electronically via their online catalog). Besides a number of vertical lines and two deletion marks in the margins, it contains the following summary judgment, scribbled on the final page in Leibniz's hand:³

Much here that is right and close to my view. But paradoxically expressed. For it is not necessary to say that matter is nothing; it suffices rather to say that it is a phenomenon like the rainbow, that it is not a substance but a result of substances, and that space is no more real than time, i.e., is nothing but the order of coexisting things, just as time is the order of successively existing things. True substances are Monads, that is, perceivers. But the author should have gone further, namely to infinite Monads constituting everything, and their pre-established harmony. He wrongly or at least pointlessly rejects abstract ideas, restricts ideas to imaginations, despises the subtleties of arithmetic and geometry. He most wrongly rejects the division of the extended to infinity, even if he rightly rejects infinitesimal quantities.⁴

Although Leibniz acknowledges that much in Berkeley's philosophy is "right and close to my view," he focuses more on the points of disagreement. As in the letter to Des Bosses,

he characterizes Berkeley's philosophy as paradoxical, at least in its expression. He also criticizes Berkeley for not going far enough—to an infinity of monads and their pre-established harmony—and for going too far, namely, in rejecting things he should have accepted, such as abstract ideas, the infinite division of matter, and certain subtleties of mathematics. The most salient remark for our purposes is Leibniz's assertion that "True substances are Monads, that is, perceivers." If perceivers are purely immaterial beings, as Leibniz claims in the contemporaneous *Monadology*, where perception is said to be found "not in the composite or in the Machine" but in unextended, simple substances (GP 6:609/AG 215), then this statement amounts to an affirmation of what Rutherford (2008: 141–42) calls *substance idealism*, that is, the view that the only substances or fundamental entities are immaterial, mind-like beings. But even so, there is no explicit indication here that Leibniz accepts anything like Berkeley's doctrine that there are only minds or spirits and their ideas. For to say that the only substances are immaterial perceivers is not to rule out that there are also certain non-fundamental beings, such as bodies, existing outside of all perceivers.

Still, Leibniz's statement is as remarkable for what it omits as for what it includes. No one who reads the *Principles* can fail to be struck by three central claims that leap from almost every page. The first is the doctrine of *immaterialism*: that there is no matter or material substance. The second is that sensible things are only ideas. The third is Berkeley's subjective idealism, the doctrine that in all of reality there are only spirits and their ideas. Leibniz does comment briefly on the first of these, when he objects that matter is not nothing but rather "a phenomenon like the rainbow."⁵ But he makes no mention of the other two claims, despite their centrality to the work. Had he disagreed with these central claims of the work, it would be rather odd for him to pass over them in silence. The fact that he does not mention them in his judgment strongly suggests that they number among the opinions that he finds "right and close to my view." But let us turn to Leibniz's statements of his own views to see whether they bear this out.

Leibniz's Idealism

A good place to start is Leibniz's extensive correspondence with the Dutch natural philosopher, Burcher De Volder, which commenced in 1698. By 1703 we find Leibniz insisting on an exhaustive division of real beings into things with parts, i.e., *aggregates*, which are phenomena or "apparent beings" (GP 2:250/LDV 260–261), and things without parts, i.e., simple substances, or *monads*. In letters from that year, he maintains both that no aggregate is a substance (GP 2:256/LDV 274–275) and that there is no third type of thing: "since only simple things are true things," he writes, "the rest are only Beings by aggregation, and are thus phenomena" (GP 2:252/LDV 264–265). By "simple" Leibniz means without parts (GP 2:239/LDV 238–239; cf. GP 6:607/AG 213). But at this juncture in the correspondence he has not yet committed himself on the question whether the category of simple substance includes only immaterial, soul-like entities, or whether it also includes corporeal substances, which have both a formal, soul-like constituent and a material constituent or body. There are indications that he sought to remain uncommitted on this point. For instance, in June of 1703 he writes to De Volder that "*even if Monads are not extended*, they nonetheless have a certain kind of situation in

extension” (GP 2:253/LDV 266–267, emphasis mine). Nothing Leibniz has said up to this point would discourage De Volder from thinking that corporeal substances lack parts and are thus simple, even though they do have constituents, and even though their material constituent has parts (cf. LDV 8–9/AG 167; GM 3:542/AG 168).⁶

By 1704, however, it becomes clear that Leibniz is in fact conceiving of simple substances, or monads, as purely immaterial entities. In a letter to De Volder from 30 June of that year we find the oft-quoted remark: “[C]onsidering the matter carefully, it must be said that there is nothing in things except simple substances and in them perception and appetite” (GP 2:270/LDV 306–307). For Leibniz, of course, bodies are not naturally capable of perception, or of appetite, which is the tendency to new perceptions: such things can take place only in *immaterial* substances. So, simple substances here are purely immaterial beings. To paraphrase the line from the 1703 letter quoted above, his position is that only immaterial things are true things, the rest being only aggregates and thus phenomena.

To say this much, however, is not yet to endorse an idealism like Berkeley’s. If only simple or immaterial substances are fundamental, then the other beings—the bodies or aggregates, which are phenomena—are presumably in some way grounded in, dependent on, or reducible to the former. But it does not follow that they have their being *in* those substances. In other words, Leibniz has so far only committed himself to what Rutherford calls substance idealism. It should be noted, however, that throughout his mature period he regularly characterizes phenomena in ways which imply that they have their being in perceiving subjects. To mention just a few examples: he speaks of “the varied phenomena or appearances that exist in my mind” (A 6.4:1500/L 363); he says that our “inner sensations” or “internal perceptions in the soul” are “only phenomena following on external things, or rather true appearances, and like well-regulated dreams” (GP 4:484/WF 18); and he describes phenomena as “internal” and “quite independent of outside things which might make them arise in the soul” (GP 4:476–77/WF 27), and again as “internal”, “in the soul”, and “modifications of our souls” (GP 6:589–91/AG 265–266). Passages like these, in which Leibniz speaks of phenomena as internal to us, as private entities, as beings of perception or of the imagination, as perceptions or thoughts, or as like well-ordered dreams, are quite numerous.⁷ Furthermore, there are few if any texts in which he clearly implies that phenomena have their being outside of perceivers. To be sure, he does occasionally speak of “external phenomena” (GP 3:465/WF 176; GP 6:599/AG 207–208) or “external appearances” (NE 237, 245, 309).⁸ But in one of these contexts, he clarifies that by “external appearances” he means appearances “such as those which consist in what appears to others” (NE 237). These appearances are evidently “external” in the sense that they are external to a given perceiver. But it does not follow that they are external to *all* perceivers. We should therefore take Leibniz’s consistent view to be that phenomena have their being only within perceivers. And so when he asserts that there are only simple substances and aggregates, the latter being phenomena, we should take him to be affirming the view that there are only immaterial substances, along with those things, including aggregates, which have their being within them.

Admittedly, Leibniz rarely draws this conclusion explicitly. He comes close to doing so in the 30 June 1704 letter to De Volder: after remarking that “there is nothing in things except simple substances and in them perception and appetite,” he adds that “matter and

motion are not so much substances or things as the phenomena of perceivers, the reality of which is located in the harmony of perceivers with themselves (at different times) and with other perceivers” (GP 2:270/LDV 306–307). In saying this he clearly implies that matter has no extramental being; for if it did, then its reality would presumably be located at least partly outside the harmony of perceivers.

One place where Leibniz does draw the conclusion explicitly is in a draft letter to De Volder written in January 1706. (The letter he actually sent to De Volder was the last of the correspondence.) He writes:

In my judgment, arguments can prove the existence of nothing other than perceivers and perceptions (if you subtract their common cause), and the things that must be admitted in them, which in a perceiver are the transitions from perception to perception, with the same subject remaining; and in perceptions, the harmony of perceivers. For the rest, we invent natures of things, and wrestle with the chimeras of our minds as if with ghosts. (GP 2:281/LDV 336–337; cf. LDV 334–335)

The common cause here is not a world of mind-independent material objects, but God. So, Leibniz’s point is that arguments cannot establish the existence of anything in creation beyond perceivers, their perceptions, and that which must be admitted within them. Anything else, he says, is but a fiction. This is as clear an affirmation of subjective idealism as one could hope to find.

Moving forward eight years, Leibniz draws the conclusion explicitly again in a précis that he prepared for, but apparently did not send to, Nicolas Remond. The purpose of this précis, Leibniz indicates, was to clarify his views on “my Unities or Monads” (GP 3:622). He begins by stating once again that on his view there are in all of nature only simple substances and aggregates of them:

I believe that the whole universe of creatures consists only in simple substances or Monads, and in their Assemblages. These simple substances are what we call Mind in us and in Spirits [*Genies*], and Soul in Animals. They all have *perception* (which is nothing other than the representation of the multitude in the unity) and *appetite* (which is nothing other than the tendency of a perception to another), which is called *passion* in animals, and *will* in cases where the perception is an understanding. We cannot even conceive of there being anything other than this in simple substances and consequently in all of nature. (GP 3:622)

Leibniz goes on to explain that the assemblages of simple substances are what we call bodies, and that these bodies are not substances but phenomena, though well-founded in the sense of being in agreement [*consentans*], like exact and steadfast dreams (GP 3:622–23). He then asserts that these bodies, like dreams, are nothing outside perceptions:

Plato seems to have seen something of this, in that he considers material things to be hardly real, and the Academic skeptics have doubted whether they are outside of us, which can be explained reasonably by saying that they are nothing outside of perceptions [*elles ne seroient rien hors des perceptions*], and that they have their reality from the agreement of the perceptions of apperceiving substances. (GP 3:623)

Material things, Leibniz says, are nothing outside of perceptions, and their reality comes not from their having an extramental existence, but from the agreement of perceptions (cf. GP 2:451–542/LDB 256–257). His position in this précis is thus unequivocally that there are only simple, immaterial substances together with assemblages of them, which, being phenomena, have their being only within those substances.

In light of these texts, it should come as little surprise that in his judgment on the *Principles*, Leibniz does not take issue with Berkeley's idealism, his rejection of material substance, or his reduction of bodies to ideas, three of his most striking positions in that work. Like Berkeley, Leibniz holds that there are only immaterial perceivers and that which they contain, including the immediate objects of our perceptions, which he calls "phenomena" and Berkeley calls "ideas". He thus also denies that there are genuine corporeal or material substances. And, like Berkeley, he maintains that bodies or sensible things are "nothing outside of perceptions." As I have already noted, they do disagree on various points, some of which I will discuss further below. But all things considered, those differences are relatively minor. Below their surface lies a core of broad and substantial agreement.

To say this much is of course only to scratch the surface. The textual situation is extremely complicated, and as many commentators have emphasized, one can point to other texts which seem to count against such a reading of Leibniz. Most significantly, there are many passages in which he seems to speak as if he grants the existence of corporeal substances, which have a material or bodily constituent and thus are not purely immaterial; in other words, he seems to *deny* that the only substances are purely immaterial perceivers.⁹ A full defense of the idealist reading I have offered here would need to come to grips with these texts. It would also need to explain why he seems so reluctant to divulge his idealism to others. On my view, the key to solving most if not all of these difficulties lies with the various dialectical strategies that Leibniz employs in his writings, in particular his tendency to withhold from others those views which he considers most likely to offend, as well as his practice of accommodating what he takes to be the views of his (real or imagined) audience (A 2.2:851/AG 308), often by engaging in a kind of loose talk that conflicts with what he considers true in metaphysical rigor.¹⁰ But it would take me too far afield to pursue these issues any further here. Instead I will simply take the reading of Leibniz as a subjective idealist as an established fact and turn my attention to issues that are of greater interest in relation to Berkeley.

Why Subjective Idealism?

In the draft letter to De Volder from January of 1706, Leibniz claims that arguments can establish only the existence of perceivers and their perceptions, together with whatever should be admitted within them (GP 2:281/LDV 336–337). In other words, he claims that arguments cannot establish the existence of anything outside of all perceivers. Let us now consider why, from his point of view, this would be the case.

In the first place, Leibniz obviously believes we have good reason to posit perceivers, and within them, perceptions and appetitions. It is not hard to see why. For I am myself a perceiver, and I find within myself both perceptions and appetites. Further, it stands to reason that there are other perceivers, containing their own perceptions and appetitions,

associated with each of the many organic bodies that display comparable sense organs.¹¹ Still further, Leibniz thinks we have good reasons to suppose that perceivers are immaterial beings. To mention just one, he offers his famous “mill argument” to show that perception, being inexplicable in mechanical terms, must be found “in the simple substance, and not in the composite or in the Machine” (GP 6:609/AG 215). The arguments therefore establish the existence of immaterial perceivers and their contents. But why does he think that arguments can establish nothing more than this? The answer is evidently that anything beyond immaterial perceivers would be material in nature, that is, would be a body. But the arguments show that bodies are only phenomena, and thus have their being within perceivers; they are “nothing outside of perceptions.” Arguments can therefore establish the existence of perceivers and their contents, but nothing more. Indeed, Leibniz goes so far as to say that anything else is just chimeras in our mind. Evidently he thinks that what cannot be established by arguments should be denied.¹²

But why think that bodies must be phenomena? What is the argument for that? Leibniz’s writings in fact suggest several possible routes to the conclusion that bodies are phenomena. One of them proceeds by arguing first for the phenomenal nature of the qualities of bodies, both sensible and intelligible, and then for the phenomenality of bodies themselves, on the ground that what has only phenomenal modifications must itself be a phenomenon.¹³ Another stems from Leibniz’s strategy for escaping from what he likes to call the “labyrinth of the continuum”, which requires supposing that monads alone are substances and that bodies are only well-founded phenomena.¹⁴ But his most instructive argument for the phenomenality of body, and the one on which I want to focus here, is what I will call his *unity argument*.

The basic idea of the unity argument is that bodies must be phenomena because they are *aggregates*—i.e., aggregates of the smaller bodies into which every body is divided—and because aggregates are phenomena. Bodies are aggregates, according to Leibniz, because every body is actually divided into smaller bodies. And aggregates are in turn phenomena, he claims, because they have their unity and thus their being only in the mind. We find this line of thought at least adumbrated in a letter to Arnauld dated 30 April 1687, where Leibniz notes that “one and being are reciprocal things” and then claims that “beings by aggregation [...] have their unity only in our mind” (A 2.2:186/AG 86).¹⁵ Though he does not explicitly draw the inference, the implication would seem to be that aggregates also have their *being* only in our mind. In a passage from the *New Essays*, he explicitly draws the inference. After noting that relations are “of the understanding” and “constituted only in relation to the understanding” (NE 145), he (Theophilus) remarks:

[A]t bottom it must be admitted that this unity of collections is only a respect or relation the foundation of which is in that which we find in each of the individual substances taken alone. Thus these *Beings by Aggregation* have no other achieved unity than the mental, and consequently their being is also in some way mental or phenomenal, like that of the rainbow. (NE 146)

As before, Leibniz here claims that the unity of an aggregate is only a mental unity. This is because its unity is “only a respect or relation” and is thus “constituted only in relation to the understanding.” In other words, it has its unity only in the mind, just as he says to

Arnauld. But since *unity* and *being* convert, it follows that an aggregate has its being only in the mind as well. In short, an aggregate is a kind of mental being, specifically a phenomenon. In this way, Leibniz derives the phenomenalist conclusion from (i) his belief that matter is infinitely divided, (ii) his doctrine of the ideality of relations, and (iii) the traditional principle that *being* and *unity* convert.

This argument is particularly interesting because it shows not only why, on Leibniz's view, bodies must be phenomena, but why phenomena must be understood to have their being only within us. For phenomena are aggregates and as such have their unity only in the mind. But *being* and *unity* convert: hence, phenomena must have their being only in the mind as well. It stands to reason therefore that Leibniz would speak of phenomena in ways which imply that they have their being within us.

As I have reconstructed it here, Leibniz's overall argument for the conclusion that there are only perceivers and their contents foreshadows in important ways Berkeley's own argument for the conclusion that there are only minds and their ideas. In the *Principles*, for example, he argues that we ourselves are immaterial minds (PHK 2:41–42; 139:104–105) and that we have good reason to posit other minds as well (PHK 140:105; 145:107). He also argues that the things and qualities we sense are only ideas in minds (PHK 3–15:42–47) and that (besides the other things we find within minds, such as notions) we have no good reason to posit anything else, and in particular no good reason to posit material substances (PHK 16–24:47–51; 67–81:70–76). Of course, Berkeley develops these points in different ways from Leibniz, and in particular his arguments for the claim that sensible things are ideas focus on considerations other than that of the unity of composites. But what would he have made of Leibniz's unity argument? It is interesting to note that his writings yield evidence of sympathy for each of its premises. In the later *Siris* we find him noting with apparent approval the Platonic principle that "*ens* and *unum* are the same" (S 346:156). He also asserts that whereas minds are true unities, "sensible things are rather considered as one than truly so" (S 347:156). Several sections later, after reiterating the Platonic principle, he adds that "[i]n things sensible and imaginable, as such, there seems to be no unity, nothing that can be called one prior to all act of the mind; since they being in themselves aggregates, consisting of parts or compounded of elements, are in effect many" (S 355:160). Lying in the background here may even be the thought that the unity of an aggregate involves relations; for in the *Principles* he claims that "all relations includ[e] an act of mind" (PHK 142:106; cf. Flage 1985). These passages are at the very least strongly evocative of the unity argument.

Despite all this, there is good reason to doubt that Berkeley would have considered the unity argument as such to be sound. For in his earlier and more canonical writings, he appears to deny that all sensible things are aggregates or composites. All sensible *objects* are collections of qualities, to be sure, and Berkeley explicitly grants that their unity comes from the mind (DHP 249; cf. PHK 12:46). But the qualities from which these objects are collected do not, on his view, resolve into smaller and smaller qualities *ad infinitum*. As he explains in the *Principles*, ideas and therefore sensible things can have parts only if the mind that perceives them can distinguish those parts. And since finite minds are only capable of distinguishing parts up to a point, it follows that "I cannot resolve any one of my ideas into an infinite number of other ideas, that is, that they are not infinitely divisible" (PHK 124:98; cf. NTV 54:191). Even if many sensible things are aggregates,

therefore, many of them, the *minima sensibilia*, are not. And thus from Berkeley's perspective the principles that drive the unity argument would establish at most only that *some* sensible things have their being in the mind. In the absence of a belief in the infinite division of the sensible, we would need something more to establish that the *minima sensibilia* are ideas having their being in the mind.

Reality and Well-founding

On the view for which I have argued here, Leibniz and Berkeley stand in agreement on several key points. They agree that there are only perceivers and those things which have their being within them—phenomena in Leibniz's case, ideas in Berkeley's (together with notions, concepts, and the like). They agree that (at least strictly speaking) there are no material or corporeal substances. And they agree that bodies or sensible things have their being only within perceivers. They also agree, it may be added, that bodies are in a sense real, despite having their being only in the mind. But here we come to a key difference between the two philosophers, namely, their rather different accounts of the nature of this reality.

How can something which has its being only within perceivers be accounted real? Berkeley answers this question in the *Principles* by offering a subjective, more precisely *intrasubjective*, conception of reality for bodies. He clarifies that in calling sensible things real, what he *means* by "real" is just that these ideas satisfy two conditions. The first is that they have certain phenomenological qualities, namely, those of being strong, lively, vivid, affecting, and distinct rather than faint and weak (PHK 30–36:53–56). The second is that they cohere with other ideas of the same perceiver so as to form "a regular train or series" (PHK 30:53). So, on Berkeley's view, what it means for a body to be real is just for it to satisfy these two conditions. And since it seems that we cannot possibly be wrong about whether our ideas do in fact satisfy these conditions—that is, cannot possibly be wrong about whether they have these phenomenological qualities or whether they cohere with other ideas of ours—it seems that we cannot be wrong about whether our ideas are real. This intrasubjective conception of reality thus serves Berkeley's anti-skeptical purposes well (Puryear 2012).

Leibniz strikes a similar note in an undated essay titled *On the Method of Distinguishing Real from Imaginary Phenomena*. He claims that real phenomena are distinguished from imaginary ones by being "vivid, complex, and internally coherent" as well as by cohering with other phenomena that appear to us or have appeared to us in the past (A 6.4:1500–2/L 363–64). These are the same two criteria that Berkeley invokes. But Leibniz emphasizes that these are only *marks* of reality: the reality of a phenomenon does not *consist in* its having these qualities and standing in these relations, as with Berkeley, who probably for this reason draws the charge that he "impugns the reality of bodies" (GP 2:492/LDB 330–331). Rather, the reality of a phenomenon consists in something else, with which the possession of these qualities and the bearing of these relations can be supposed to correlate. Thus, Leibniz admits that the presence of these criteria does not suffice to *demonstrate* the reality of a phenomenon; for one's entire life could be a vivid, complex, and perfectly coherent dream and yet lack reality. Such a dream would be "real enough" and "equivalent to truth so far as practice is concerned" (A 6.4:1501–1502/L 364; cf. A

6:4:1550/AG 47), he admits, but it would not actually be real. For that we need something more.

It is unfortunately no easy matter to pin Leibniz down on exactly what more is required for the reality of bodies. This is because he seems to offer not one but four accounts of the matter, namely:

1. *Substantial Constituents*. Bodies are real in virtue of having ultimately real constituents from which they derive or borrow their reality: “Anything that can be divided into many (actually already existing) things [...] has no reality except what has been borrowed from what it contains. I then inferred from this that there are indivisible unities in things, because otherwise there would be [...] no reality not borrowed, which is absurd” (GP 2:267/LDV 300–301; cf. A 2.2:114–15, 169; GP 4:478–79/AG 139; GP 3:69/WF 129–130; GP 2:261/LDV 284–287).
2. *Substantial Foundations*. Bodies are real in virtue of being founded on substances, which have their reality in themselves: “matter or extended mass is only a phenomenon founded in things [*fundatum in rebus*], like a rainbow or parhelion. All reality is only that of unities. [...] True substantial unities are not parts but foundations [*fundamenta*] of phenomena” (GP 2:268/LDV 302–303).
3. *Perceptual Harmony*. Bodies are “the phenomena of perceivers, the reality of which is located in the harmony of perceivers with themselves (at different times) and with other perceivers” (GP 2:270/LDV 306–307), that is, in not just intrasubjective but intersubjective agreement. (Cf. GP 2:521/LDB 378–379; GP 3:623)
4. *Divine Phenomena*. Bodies are real in virtue of being the phenomena of God: “If bodies are phenomena, and are judged by our appearances, they will not be real, since they will appear differently to others. Thus, the reality of bodies [...] seems to consist in this: that they are the phenomena of God, that is, the objects of his knowledge of vision” (GP 438–439/LDB 230–233; cf. GP 2:474/LDB 296–297; GP 2:482/LDB 320–321).

It is far from obvious that these accounts are compatible. The last three in particular seem to conflict, insofar as they locate the reality of phenomena in, respectively, their substantial foundations, the harmony among (finite) perceivers, and God’s knowledge. There is nonetheless good reason to think that Leibniz considers at least the first three accounts compatible, since he endorses all three in a single letter to De Volder (GP 2:267–270/LDV 300–307). In point of fact, it is not difficult to see how accounts (1) and (2) can be harmonized. We need only suppose that being the foundation of a phenomenon, that is, the reality behind the appearance, or what corresponds to the appearance on the side of reality, is equivalent to being a substantial “constituent” of the phenomenon. For, then, for a phenomenon to borrow its reality ultimately from its substantial constituents is just for it to be founded on (or result from) such substances. But the fact remains that it is difficult to see how (1) and (2) could be fully reconciled with either (3) or (4).¹⁶ It is not my intent to solve that puzzle here, however. I instead want to focus on account (2), the substantial foundations account. It is easy to see how accounts (3) and (4) can be accommodated within a subjective idealist framework, since they locate the reality of

bodies either in one particular perceiver, God, or in the harmony of the perceptions of finite perceivers. But what about (2)? The question I want to consider is whether Leibniz has the resources to make sense of how a body, being a phenomenon in a perceiver, or in perceivers in general, could be “founded in things” which are themselves immaterial perceivers. If I am right about (1) and (2) being equivalent, then an affirmative answer to this question will show that (1) can also be accommodated within a subjective idealist framework.

How, then, does a phenomenon come to be founded on immaterial perceivers, that is, on monads? To answer this, let us first reflect on his favorite example of a well-founded phenomenon—the rainbow—and let us assume for the sake of argument that the water droplets in the sky are not themselves phenomena, as on Leibniz’s view, but rather, in keeping with the more usual view, the substances on which the appearance we call the rainbow is founded. On a first pass, it would seem that the water droplets satisfy three conditions that are relevant to them being a proper foundation for the appearance. In the first place, they are (*ex hypothesi*) real, that is, real in themselves and not just real because they are founded on something more fundamental. Second, the droplets are located in (roughly) the same space that the rainbow appears to occupy. If light reflected by water droplets in the Northern sky somehow caused me to see a rainbow in the Southern sky, then presumably this would not be a well-founded appearance. It therefore seems necessary that the foundations of a phenomenal body be located where the body appears to be.¹⁷ Finally, the water droplets are the cause, or at least a salient cause, of my perception of the rainbow: they reflect and refract the light that, upon reaching my eyes, causes me to see a rainbow. Consideration of the rainbow example thus suggests that a phenomenal body is well-founded just in case there are one or more beings that are (i) real in themselves, (ii) located in space where the body appears to be, and (iii) causes of the appearance, that is, the body.

These three conditions are not, however, sufficient as such for the well-founding of a phenomenon. For suppose there were an evil genius who caused me to be presented with a certain appearance, say that of a large doughnut, whenever I looked in his direction. The genius would satisfy each of the three conditions: he would be real in himself, would be located in space where the doughnut appears to be, and would be the cause of the appearance. Yet we would not want to say that this appearance is real or well-founded. To complete the account of well-founding, therefore, we need a fourth condition that will rule out this sort of deceptive scenario.

Now it seems to me we find just such a condition suggested by Leibniz’s account of sensible qualities and our confused perceptions of them. In opposition to the view held by many in his day, according to which such qualities are only arbitrarily connected to the mechanical qualities of bodies that cause them, he maintains that our sensations and ideas must bear a *natural* or *intelligible* connection with their causes. That is, they must in some way *resemble* them. As he explains in the *New Essays*, in reply to Locke,

It must not be supposed that these ideas such as those of color and pain are arbitrary and without natural relation or connection with their causes: it is not the way of God to act with so little order and reason. I would say rather that there is a kind of resemblance, not entire and so to speak *in terminis*, but expressive, or a relation of order, just as an ellipse

and even a parabola or hyperbola resemble in some way the circle of which they are the projection on the plane, since there is a certain exact and natural relationship between that which is *projected* and the projection, which is made from it, each point of the one corresponding according to a certain relation to each point of the other. (NE 131; cf. GP 4:574–577/WF 140–142; NE 132–133, 403–404; GP 6:326–327)

Our ideas and sensations of sensible qualities must therefore resemble their causes, which are certain complexes of mechanical qualities in bodies. But what is true of our ideas and sensations is also true of the phenomena which are their contents. On Leibniz's view, God would not allow a reality to be presented as an appearance to which it is only arbitrarily connected. His wisdom requires that there be a natural and intelligible connection, a resemblance, and so the appearance must resemble the realities on which it is founded. It's just this which prevents the evil genius from being the proper foundation of the appearance of the doughnut. Further, as long as this resemblance obtains, it would seem that the reality need not be the cause (or a salient cause) of the appearance, thus rendering condition (iii) irrelevant. Accordingly, we may say that on Leibniz's view, a phenomenon is well-founded just in case there are one or more beings that are (i) real in themselves, (ii) located in space where the phenomenon appears to be (at least in the case of visual or tactile phenomena), and (iv) so constituted as to resemble the phenomenon.¹⁸

With this account in place, let us now consider whether Leibniz's simple substances can sensibly be supposed to satisfy these conditions with respect to those appearances that we call 'bodies'. Of course, these substances are by definition real in themselves, so they satisfy condition (i). Further, even though monads are immaterial, they do have a kind of situation in extension or space in virtue of their having a body. As he explains to De Volder in the letter from 20 June 1703: "Even if Monads are not extended, they nonetheless have a certain kind of situation in extension, i.e., they have a certain ordered relation of coexistence to other things, namely through the machine over which they preside" (GP 2:253/LDV 266–267). So, monads do in a sense satisfy condition (ii) as well.¹⁹ Condition (iv), however, seems to pose a special difficulty for Leibniz's account. For how can we make sense of the idea that a body, being a phenomenon, *resembles* the monads on which it is founded? How can an extended body resemble immaterial, unextended substances? Or, to put the point in Berkeleyan terms, how can an idea be like anything other than another idea (PHK 8–9:44–45; DHP 206)?

To answer this question, it will be helpful to consider what Leibniz says in the case of sensible qualities. As we have seen, he claims that between our sensations of these qualities and their causes there is a precise, orderly, and natural relationship, one which amounts to a kind of resemblance. And he likens this resemblance to that between a figure and its projection on a plane, with "each point of the one corresponding according to a certain relation to each point of the other" (NE 131). What he appears to have in mind is a kind of structural correspondence between the sensation and its cause. But how is this possible? According to Leibniz, it is possible because our sensations of such qualities, despite appearing simple, are in fact composed of many smaller perceptions, which are the perceptions of the individual mechanical qualities which together cause the sensation. Hence, the sensation has a hidden complexity, or structure, which corresponds

to the structure of its cause. In this way, the sensation bears an “expressive” resemblance to its cause.²⁰

Now it seems to me that in the case of bodies resembling the monads on which they are founded, Leibniz’s account will proceed along similar lines. Our sense-perceptions of bodies, he will say, are always complex; indeed the resolution of them into smaller and smaller perceptions goes to infinity. Likewise, the *contents* of these perceptions, the phenomena, that is, the bodies themselves, resolve into smaller and smaller parts *ad infinitum*. As he writes to De Volder, “Phenomena can [...] always be divided into smaller phenomena which could appear to other, more subtle animals, and a smallest phenomenon will never be reached” (GP 2:268/LDV 302–303). So, within any given body a certain structure will obtain in virtue of the various relations that its parts bear to one another, for example, spatial and mereological relations, and this structure will approach infinite complexity as the resolution into parts goes to infinity. At the same time, the monads on which this body is founded will form an infinitely complex structure in virtue of the relations they bear to one another. As we have already seen, Leibniz holds that monads have a kind of situation in extension, and so it would seem to follow that they also bear spatial relations of a kind to one another. He also holds that monads bear relations of domination and subordination to one another, and more generally, of greater or lesser perceptual distinctness. And so at least in general terms we can see how it is possible for a phenomenon to resemble its foundation. All that needs to happen is that the phenomenon have an internal structure, a structure that obtains among its parts, which corresponds in some way to the structure that obtains among the infinitely many monads that constitute its foundation.²¹ If this structural resemblance obtains, and if the monads also satisfy conditions (i) and (ii), then the phenomenon will succeed in being well-founded, and will thus achieve the greater degree of reality that Leibniz seeks.

Berkeley’s Perspective

Berkeley’s scattered comments on Leibniz tend to focus on the topics of motion, force, infinity, and infinitesimals.²² He was no doubt aware of Leibniz’s metaphysical views up to a point, but they do not appear to have made much of an impression on him. This was no doubt due in part to the fact that Leibniz published relatively little, and in what he did publish, was not particularly forthcoming about some of his more controversial metaphysical views. The vast majority of his corpus, including nearly all of the texts I have relied on in my interpretation, would have been unavailable to Berkeley. Consequently, he would hardly have been in a position to recognize Leibniz as a fellow idealist; nor would he have been in a position to know, much less criticize, Leibniz’s attempt to found appearances in the mind on other immaterial perceivers. Based on what we do know about Berkeley, however, it is not hard to anticipate what he might have said about this part of Leibniz’s account. Here I will limit myself to three main points.

In the first place, we have seen that on Berkeley’s view it is not true that every idea has parts, i.e., smaller ideas into which it resolves. As he remarks in the *Principles*: “Every particular finite extension, which may possibly be the object of our thought, is an *idea* existing only in the mind, and consequently each part thereof must be perceived” (PHK 124:98). For Berkeley, to perceive an idea is to be conscious of it. Yet some ideas are so

minute that we cannot consciously perceive any parts or ingredients within them, from which it follows that “they are not contained in it” (ibid.). Hence, these *minima sensibilia* cannot have an internal structure in virtue of which they resemble some complex of perceivers. They could not therefore satisfy the conditions for being well-founded, and so they would not be real, in Leibniz’s sense, but imaginary. Further, even though the ideas composed of them might still have a structure in virtue of which they resemble their substantial foundation, it seems that they too would fail to be real, since they would be composed of unfounded and thus imaginary ideas. From this point of view, then, Leibniz’s account of well-founding threatens to collapse.

A second feature of Leibniz’s account to which Berkeley would likely object is its ontological extravagance. For that account to work, Leibniz needs to posit not only minds and the non-rational souls of animals, but an infinity of other mind-like substances that perceive but are incapable of sensation or thought. Indeed on Leibniz’s view no two non-overlapping bodies can be founded on the same substances; hence, given his belief that every body divides into smaller bodies, it follows that every real body is founded on an infinity of substances, none of which are among the substances on which any non-overlapping body is founded. Further, most of these foundational substances will be the sort that perceive but do not sense or think, what Leibniz calls “bare monads” (GP 6:611/AG 216). In order for bodies to be well-founded in the way he wants, therefore, Leibniz must posit not just infinities but infinities of infinities of these substances. Now, Berkeley is happy to admit that there are many other minds, which we know of by their operations (PHK 145:107). But to suppose a theory of the reality of bodies that requires us to posit, besides these minds, infinities and even infinities of infinities of other perceivers, perceivers that do not reveal themselves to us by their operations in the way that minds do—that he is likely to view as an excessively high theoretical price to pay. On his view, everything one could hope to explain, including the existence and reality of sensible things, can be explained to our satisfaction just in terms of minds and their ideas. To posit anything further would be to indulge in an unnecessary and untoward ontological extravagance.²³ Of course, Leibniz does not view this ontological extravagance as a drawback, but rather as just what one would expect if God is a supremely perfect being; for on his view such a being would create the best of all possible worlds, and a world is more perfect to the extent that it contains more things or reality (GP 7:303–304/AG 150–151). On Berkeley’s view, however, experience should be our guide to what exists, not *a priori* speculations about what a supremely perfect being would or wouldn’t do.

Finally, perhaps Berkeley’s most pressing objection to Leibniz’s account of well-founding would be that it leaves the door open to skepticism. One of his main aims in both the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues* is to defeat the skeptic, or rather to deny the skeptic a foothold. He accomplishes this by doing away with material substances, locating sensible things in the mind, and construing their reality in terms of their possession of certain phenomenological qualities and their agreement with other ideas, matters about which one could not possibly be mistaken. But in supposing that a body having its being in one perceiver is real in virtue of being founded on other perceivers, Leibniz throws himself back on the rocky shoals of skepticism; for we cannot be certain that these other perceivers even exist, much less that they exist in such a way as to found our appearances (cf. PHK 86–88:78–79; DHP 246). For his part, Leibniz is happy to concede the point; the

best we can hope for in this life, he admits, is a high degree of probability (or “moral certitude”) that our appearances are real (GP 1:373/L 154; A 6.4:1501–1502/L 363–364). From Berkeley’s perspective, however, the inability to refute the skeptic once and for all constitutes a serious drawback.

Leibniz’s attempt to found bodies on perceivers in virtue of a kind of structural resemblance is a clever idea. But it works only if bodies are divided to infinity and there are, in addition to minds, an infinity of other mind-like substances. This is why Berkeley “should have gone further, namely to infinite Monads constituting everything.” Further, the view works only if we are willing to live with the prospect that the skeptic might be right after all. From Berkeley’s perspective, these are all serious problems for the account. Bodies are not divided to infinity; there are not, besides minds, infinities of other simple substances; and it is critical that we be able to offer a conclusive answer to the skeptic. We must therefore eschew the thought that an idea could be founded on substances, and instead conceive its reality in terms of features internal to one’s own mind. This is a key point on which the two metaphysical systems diverge. All things considered, however, we should still see Leibniz and Berkeley as fundamentally on the same side.²⁴

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¹ Others who see Leibniz and Berkeley as fundamentally in agreement include MacIntosh (1971), Adams (1994), and Daniel (2007). For a dissenting view, see Wilson (1999), who maintains, implausibly, that the two philosophers "are fundamentally at odds with each other with respect to both motivation and doctrine" (309). Further discussion of respects in which Leibniz and Berkeley disagree can be found in Carlin (2006), McCracken (2011), and Carlin (2017).

² Although the *Three Dialogues* were published within Leibniz's lifetime, there is no evidence that he possessed or was familiar with that work.

³ For the details on these marginalia, see Robinet (1983). The first deletion mark appears beside a passage in which Berkeley denies that one "can conceive the extension and motion of a body, without all other sensible qualities" (PHK 10:45). The second appears beside Berkeley's remark that "*great and small, swift and slow, are allowed to exist no where without the mind, being entirely relative, and changing as the frame or position of the organs of sense varies*" (PHK 11:45). It is difficult to tell exactly to what Leibniz is objecting here, but on my view it is most likely the doctrine that these qualities are

“entirely relative” and not the suggestion that they exist nowhere outside the mind. Leibniz does indeed hold that our notions of size, shape, and motion “contain something imaginary and relative to our perception” and that “we can doubt whether they are truly found in the nature of things outside of us” (A 6.4:1545/AG 44; see also A 2.2:202/WF 55). But I doubt that he would concede that they are *entirely* relative to our perception, since they are after all founded in the modifications of monads.

⁴ My translation from the Latin at Robinet (1983: 218); cf. AG 307.

⁵ Even here, the disagreement is more a matter of terminology than perhaps Leibniz recognizes. When Berkeley denies the existence of matter, he means matter in the sense of an unperceiving substance. On my reading, Leibniz rejects matter in that sense too. On the other hand, Berkeley is happy to admit the existence of matter in the sense of a sensible extension (DHP 237), which is roughly what Leibniz means by matter when he characterizes it as a phenomenon or resultant of substances.

⁶ On Leibniz’s view, a part must be homogeneous with the whole, that is, roughly, must belong to the same ontological category (A 6.4:1673; GP 7:503; GP 2:252/LDV 264–265; GP 2:435/LDB 226–227; GP 2:451/LDB 254–255). So, a part of a body must be a body, and so forth. But arguably neither a body nor a simple substance is homogeneous with a corporeal substance. So, these would not be parts of the corporeal substance, though they would nonetheless be its constituents. (A thing and its constituents need not be homogeneous.)

⁷ See, *inter alia*, A 2.1:391/AG 4; A 6.4:1549–51/AG 46–47; A 2.2:91/WF 53; A 2.2:178; A 2.2:185; GP 4:519/WF 81; GP 7:467–468; GP 6:404; GP 2:435–36/LDB 226–227; GP 3:622–623; GP 2:516/LDB 368–369.

⁸ On the notion of external phenomena, see Phemister (2005: 165–169).

⁹ For further discussion of this problem, see Adams (1994: 262–307), Rutherford (1995: 265–288), Hartz (1998), Hartz (2007: 156–192), Phemister (2005), Garber (2009), and McDonough (2013).

¹⁰ For a detailed account of these and other dialectical strategies in Leibniz, as well as an application of them to various allegedly anti-idealist statements in his correspondence with De Volder, see Whipple (2017).

¹¹ Leibniz argues for this in some detail at A 6.4:1503/L 365, though the argument is not easy to pin down. For helpful discussion, see Westphal (2001).

¹² Leibniz does acknowledge the possibility that theological considerations might compel us to go beyond just monads and their modifications to corporeal substances (GP 2:435–36/LDB 224–227; GP 2:461/LDB 278–279). It seems to me, however, that he does not take very seriously the possibility that any *true* theological doctrine would require this. For a nuanced discussion of these issues, see LDB lxxii–lxxix.

¹³ Leibniz’s reasons for regarding the qualities of bodies as phenomena include that they are “relative to our perceptions” (A 6.4:1545/AG 44; cf. A 6.4:1465/LC 262–263, GP 4:365/L 390–391), that motion lacks coexistent parts and thus at no time exists as a whole (GM

6:235/AG 118; GP 3:457/WF 201), and that there is no precise shape in bodies (GP 1:392/WF 55; A 6.4:1613–1614/LC 296–297).

¹⁴ See A 2.2:249–250/L 343; GP 2:281/LDV 338–339; GP 2:450–451/LDB 254–255; GP 3:612/L 656; GP 2:517/LDB 370–371.

¹⁵ The latter quotation appears only in Leibniz’s copy of the letter.

¹⁶ For attempts to reconcile some of these accounts of reality, see Adams (1994: 255–61) and Pearce (2016: 8–11).

¹⁷ In the case of tastes and smells, the foundations would presumably need to be co-located with the respective sense-organs.

¹⁸ From Leibniz’s perspective, condition (iv) is in fact implicit in (iii), because on his view causes and effects must bear an intelligible connection to one another.

¹⁹ The monads on which an appearance is founded can also be considered to satisfy condition (iii). Although it is true that monads are not “real” or “physical” causes of the appearances of them in other perceivers, they are “ideal” causes of those appearances, and in particular, the monads that collectively found a given phenomenon—its “foundational monads”—would be the ideal causes of that phenomenon as it exists in other perceivers. As Leibniz writes to Des Bosses, “the modifications of one monad are the ideal causes of the modifications of another monad, insofar as reasons appear in one Monad which moved God to establish modifications in another monad from the beginning of things” (GP 2:475/LDB 306–307). On this kind of causation, see Puryear (2010).

²⁰ On the expressive resemblance between our ideas or perceptions of sensible qualities and their causes, see Puryear (2013: 332–36) and Pearce (2016: 2–5).

²¹ This latter structure, among the monads, may plausibly be viewed as the relational structure they would have from God’s ichnographic perspective (see A 6.4:1549–1550/AG 46–47; GP 2:438–439/LDB 231–233), whereas the internal structure of the phenomenon would be the relational structure of the monads from the perceiver’s scenographic perspective. The resemblance on which the well-founding of the phenomenon would be based would then be the correspondence between these two structures.

²² See N 333:40; BW 4:236–237; DM 8:12–13, 16–20:14–15, 43–44:21–22; Alc 7:6:295; An 18:75–76.

²³ This is not to deny that Berkeley’s ontology is, in its own way, extravagant. As Rickless (2013: 69–79), for example, emphasizes, Berkeley posits vastly more sensible objects than we would ordinarily take there to be. Still, this extravagance seems to pale in comparison to Leibniz’s infinities of infinities of unconscious (and unsensed) perceivers.

²⁴ My thanks to Kenny Pearce and especially Sam Rickless for many helpful comments on drafts of this chapter.