Philosophy 203: History of Modern Western Philosophy Hamilton College
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Leibniz, *Monadology* and *Discourse on Metaphysics*

I. The Complete-World View of Substance

We have seen that Leibniz claims that true statements are ones in which the predicate is contained in the subject.
This claim has profound ramifications for the nature of a substance.
It means, in particular, that the concept of any substance has to contain all the properties that might be predicated of it.

> We can say that the nature of an individual substance or of a complete being is to have a notion so complete that it is sufficient to contain and to allow us to deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which this notion is attributed (D8, AW 228a)

Leibniz considers the subject and concept of Alexander the Great.
The substance must correspond to a complete concept, in order for Alexander to be a substance.
These complete concepts will differentiate individual substances.
The individual substance contains all of the attributes of Alexander.
The concepts may be analyzed down to true predications.

> When we consider carefully the connection of things, we can say that from all time in Alexander's soul there are vestiges of everything that has happened to him and marks of everything that will happen to him and even traces of everything that happens in the universe, even though God alone could recognize them all (D8, AW 228b).

The history of the universe, past and future, can be seen in every individual substance.
We can call this claim the complete-world view of substance

Leibniz draws a remarkable series of consequences from the complete-world view:

> A substance can begin only by creation and end only by annihilation...
> A substance is not divisible into two...
> One substance cannot be constructed from two...
> The number of substances does not naturally increase and decrease...
> Every substance is like a complete world and like a mirror of God or of the whole universe, which each one expresses in its own way (D9, AW 229a).

Leibniz does not argue for each of these claims, though we can see how they can hang together.
Since monads reflect the entire history of the universe, they must exist from creation to destruction, for all eternity.
Leibniz's arguments for monads rely on his rejection of Descartes's doctrine of infinite divisibility, so their indivisibility is apparent.
Similarly, monads are simple substances, so can not have parts, can not be composites.

II. The Plenum

Leibniz's complete-world view is further explained by the interaction between the inter-connectedness of the universe and the independence of individual monads.

> Everything is a plenum, which makes all matter interconnected. In a plenum, every motion has some effect on distant bodies, in proportion to their distance. For each body is affected, not only by those in contact with it, and in some way feels the effects of everything that happens to them, but also, through them, it feels the effects of those in contact with the bodies with which it is itself immediately in contact. From this it follows that this communication extends to any distance whatsoever (M61, AW 280b).

The interconnectedness of all bodies continues today in physical theories, such as universal gravitation, which extend the force of one body on others to infinity.
In practice, this force is often negligible.
It is not clear that Leibniz thinks that the effects of one thing on another is ever quite that small.
Moreover, there is a problem interpreting Leibniz's statements about the plenum, since, strictly speaking, he believes that there are no bodies.

III. Minds and Bodies

We have been talking about bodies, and interactions.
For instance, Leibniz writes that organized bodies are divine machines.

> A machine constructed by man's art is not a machine in each of its parts. For example, the tooth of a brass wheel has parts or fragments which, for us, are no longer artificial things, and no longer have any marks to indicate the machine for whose use the wheel was intended. But natural machines, that is living bodies, are still machines in their least parts, to infinity (M64, AW 281a).

But, this is casual talk, and we should be know how to speak most seriously.
Strictly speaking, Leibniz is an idealist; he believes that there are no bodies.
Bodies are the appearances of monads.

> I don't really eliminate body, but reduce it to what it is. For I show that corporeal mass, which is thought to have something over and above simple substances, is not a substance, but a phenomenon resulting from simple substances, which alone have unity and absolute reality. (Leibniz, Letter to de Volder, in *Philosophical Essays*, Ariew and Garber eds.: 181).

For Leibniz, there is a real world (monads), a phenomenal world (bodies), and an ideal world (space and time).
Monads are not in space because the concepts of space and time do not apply to the world of the monad.

The activity of monads is internal, which is what makes them substances.
Each monads has a series of perceptions.
Having perceptions is what makes them distinct from atoms, and what grounds the possibility of thought.
The life of a monad is like unfolding its inner core.
Human minds are monads of a particular sort.
For ordinary monads, the series of their perceptions are all unconscious.

Our internal perceptions often come to us, like well-ordered dreams, from ourselves.
Even for conscious monads, the series is often unconscious, as when we sleep.

Still, unlike Berkeley, Leibniz talks about bodies in a way that he does not think is illegitimate.
He argues that minds and bodies are subsumed by distinct laws.
Minds obey laws of final causes; bodies are governed by efficient causes.
Thus, Leibniz has still to resolve the problem of interaction between mind and body.

If bodies really were *just* the appearances of monads, then Leibniz wouldn't have much of a problem of interaction.
But, given that they obey different laws, the question of why minds and bodies seem to be so finely attuned arises: why are the laws governing final causes just the same as the laws governing efficient causes?

Leibniz's response to the problem of interaction is guided by his understanding of three predecessors.
In addition to Descartes and Spinoza, Leibniz is influenced by Malebranche's occasionalism.

IV. Malebranche's Occasionalism

Descartes's work raises the problem of interaction.
Spinoza solves the problem of interaction by positing a parallelism that results from the unity of substance: mind and body are two different ways of looking at the same thing.
The part of Spinoza's claim that takes the body to be another perspective on the mind is amenable to Leibniz.
But, Leibniz rejects Spinoza's singularity of substance, embracing the multiplicity.
So, he can not say that bodies and mind are each perspectives on the same thing.

Malebranche argues for occasionalism.
Occasionalists argue that communication of motion among substances is impossible.
They see the problem of interaction (between mind and body) as a special case of a general problem of causal interaction (between any two things).

Let's take a moment to see the general problem.
The occasionalists were generally dualists, and the problem of interaction arises mainly for dualists.
Within a dualist framework, there are four kinds of causal interactions:

CI1. Body-body (e.g. when one curling stone transfers momentum to the next)
CI2. Body-mind (e.g. when one's body is harmed and the mind feels pain)
CI3. Mind-body (e.g. when I decide to take a walk, and my body gets up and goes)
CI4. Intra-mental (e.g. when I think about my children and that causes me joy)

We have seen that CI2 and CI3 are problems for the dualist.
But, CI1 is also a problem for Descartes.
Descartes claims that God both creates and preserves the universe, and that no one moment in any way necessitates the next.
Thus it appears that God is the immediate cause of what appear to be physical interactions.
The same problem arises for CI4, since there appears to be no more necessity in the order of my thoughts than in the order of events in the world.

The occasionalist argues that all types of causation are problematic.
Their central argument against CI1 is that bodies are passive, and thus can exert no force on each other.

> When I see one ball strike another, my eyes … seem to tell me, that the one is truly the cause of the motion it impresses on the other… . But when I consult my reason I clearly see that since bodies cannot move themselves, and since their motor force is but the will of God that conserves them successively in different places, they cannot communicate a power they do not have and could not communicate even if it were in their possession. For the mind will never conceive that one body, a purely passive substance, can in any way whatsoever transmit to another body the power transporting it. (Malebranche, *The Search for Truth and Elucidations of the Search for Truth*, p 660).

On occasionalism, bodies themselves can do nothing but respond to the will of an active substance.
Whenever a body is affected, there must be an agent to manage that interaction.
In body-mind events, CI2, God intervenes to create a mental events whenever the body is affected.
Thus, God does the moving.
Some people read Descartes as an occasionalist.

V. Transeunt and Immanent Causation

Leibniz accepts that the problem of causation among passive bodies is a serious one, but he rejects the occasionalist's recourse to appeals to God to guide every interaction.

> In solving problems it is not sufficient to make use of the general cause and to invoke what is called a *Deus ex machina*. For when one does that without giving any other explanation derived from the order of secondary causes, it is, properly speaking, having recourse to a miracle (*New System of Nature*, AW 273a).

Instead, Leibniz claims that monads are independent, and cannot affect one another.

> Nothing ever enters into our mind naturally from the outside; and we have a bad habit of thinking of our soul as if it received certain species as messengers and as if it has doors and windows...The mind always expresses all its future thoughts and already thinks confusedly about everything it will ever think about distinctly (DM 26, AW 240b).

This isolation of each monad is essential to their character, to their completeness.
The universe is multiplied many times over, in each monad.

> There is also no way of explaining how a monad can be altered or changed internally by some other creature, since one cannot transpose anything in it, nor can one conceive of any internal motion that can be excited, directed, augmented, or diminished within it, as can be done in composites, where there can be change among the parts. The monads have no windows through which something can enter and leave (M7, AW 275b)

Transeunt causation is a term used to describe the interactions among substances, as when one billiard ball transfers its momentum to another billiard ball.
Immanent causation, in contrast, describes the connections among states within a substance.
The series of thoughts in one's mind might be described as immanently caused.

Leibniz denies the possibility of transeunt causation.
He argues that all causation is immanent.

The denial of the real existence of bodies, then, entails that CI1 - CI3 are all moot.
Leibniz holds on to CI4, arguing that while there is no transeunt causation, there is internal, or immanent, causation.
Immanent causation is, as we have seen, guided by the will.

The problem of interaction, then, for Leibniz, is not, like Descartes's problem, to describe the interaction between mental substances and physical substances.
Strictly speaking, there are only mental substances.
Nor is Leibniz's problem of interaction, like the occasionalist's problem, to account for causation generally.
Instead, Leibniz's problem of interaction is to explain why, given the laws governing the series of perceptions and representations in the monad there is a parallel series in the appearances of the monad (i.e. the body) which are governed by strict physical laws.
In other words, he must explain why there appear to be transeunt efficient-causal interactions when there are only immanent, final-causal sequences of perceptions.

VI. Pre-Established Harmony

Leibniz solves his problem of interaction by proposing a system of pre-established harmony, much like Spinoza's parallelism.

> The soul follows its own laws and the body also follows its own; and they agree in virtue of the harmony pre-established between all substances, since they are all representations of a single universe (M78, AW 282a).

Leibniz's argument for parallelism is clearer in *New System of Nature*, 273a-b, than it is in either the *Monadology* or the *Discourse on Metaphysics*; you might look at it there.
The central claim is that the appearances of bodies seem to follow the laws of efficient causation since they are designed by God to do so, in parallel with the pre-programmed series of perceptions of the soul.

Without transeunt causation, the relations among monads are just pre-established harmony.
God puts the universe in motion in such a way that the mind and body seem to affect each other, and such that monads seem to affect each other.
Immanent causation, the relations among perceptions of a monad, are not impugned.
But, the appearance of transeunt causation is, as it was for Spinoza, an illusion.
While this pre-established harmony undermines the freedom of the will, by positing a determined sequence of events, it also makes that freedom easier to describe, since interactions among bodies need not be taken as governed by external laws.

VII. Leibniz and Descartes on Interaction

This section is a short aside.
Leibniz criticizes an error in Descartes's claim that the soul can affect the body.
Descartes had argued that it would violate the laws of physics for souls to add motion into the universe, but that it would not violate laws for a soul to change the direction of a body.
Descartes believed correctly that quantity of motion (momentum) was conserved in a physical interaction.
In that, he anticipated Newton's laws of motion.
But Descartes misinterpreted momentum as a scalar quantity, ignoring its vector (or directional) qualities, and leaving open the option for a soul to interact with bodies without violating physical laws.
Leibniz believes that Descartes would have adopted his view of pre-established harmony, if he had seen the error in his physics.

> Descartes recognized that souls cannot impart a force to bodies because there is always the same quantity of force in matter. However, he thought that the soul could change the direction of bodies. But that is because the law of nature, which also affirms the conservation of the same total direction in matter, was not known at the time. If he had known it, he would have hit upon my system of pre-established harmony... (M80, AW 282b).