

Lecture 5 Oh, Dear, What Can the Matter Be?

In the last lectures I concentrated on the development of Leibniz's views in the Correspondence with Arnauld and other private papers in the 1680s. By the mid- and late 1690s, Leibniz had gone public with some of his ideas about the physical world. In 1695 he had published the "Specimen Dynamicum," where he argued for the inherent activity of substance, and a conception of body grounded in the idea of force, active and passive. This argument was continued in "On Nature Itself," published in 1698, where Leibniz drew out some of the more metaphysical aspects of this position, arguing explicitly against occasionalism and the Cartesian view of body as extension alone. A companion piece to these, published in Latin in the technical journal, *Acta eruditorum*, was the more popular "New System," published in French in the *Journal de sçavans* in 1695, where he presented his pre-established harmony, a consequence of the dynamical view of substance, presented explicitly as an alternative to the doctrine occasionalism, as well as arguments for the introduction of substantial forms based on unity.

In the late 1690s, Leibniz entered into correspondence with the Dutch mathematician and physicist Burcher de Volder. Though taken with Newton, Boyle, and English experimental philosophy, de Volder remained at heart a Cartesian. One area in which he diverged from the Cartesians, though, was over the issue of occasionalism, the idea that God is the only genuinely active agent in nature, which he rejected. This, no doubt, is why de Volder found Leibniz's thought initially attractive. The correspondence was to last until 1706, and contains some of the most important statements of Leibniz's views on body and substance. [I should say at the very beginning that in my account of Leibniz's exchanges with de Volder I owe an enormous debt to Paul Lodge's writings and to the important translations of the letters that he has shared with me.]

The two big themes in the correspondence are the proper measure of force and the nature of body and substance, in particular, the question of the activity of substance and how it can be established that substances are genuinely active. In the early letters, Leibniz was attempting to argue for a conception of body grounded in corporeal substances composed of active and passive force, essentially the conception that I have been outlining in the previous lectures. Against that, de Volder was urging a more Cartesian conception of body, conceived of as essentially extension, the objects of geometry made real. But at a certain moment, something seems to have changed radically.

The exchange is rather complicated, and I will skim quickly over the details. In the course of their discussions, de Volder offered Leibniz a definition of substance which, Leibniz argued, only applies to what he calls "the most simple or primary substance," that is, God. [G II 232] But, Leibniz confessed, "I concede that every substance is simple, in a certain sense." [27 Dec. 1701, G II 233] De Volder at first took this as a concession to his own view. [G II 236] But Leibniz did not mean it in that way at all: "When I say that every substance is simple, I understand by this that it lacks parts." [L to de Volder, April 1702, G II 239] Though de Volder was very slow to recognize this fact (it took him more than a year to do so), this represented a radical change in the doctrine that Leibniz was explaining in the earlier letters.

In his next letter to de Volder, written in Winter 1702/3, though not received until the following June, Leibniz began to sketch out this new world. In explaining himself to

de Volder, Leibniz began with something that looks very much like an exposition of the corporeal substance view that we saw in the letters with Arnauld and de Volder saw in the earlier letters he had received from Leibniz:

When I say that a substance, albeit a corporeal one, contains an infinity of machines, at the same time I think that it must be added that it embraces the one machine composed from them and that it is actuated by one entelechy without which there would be no principle of true unity in it. [L to de Volder, 20 June 1703, G II 250]

But pretty soon it is clear that things are a bit different. On the corporeal substance view, the individual substance, the ground of reality is the whole corporeal substance, soul and organic body. But now Leibniz seems to be saying something else. Later in that letter he writes, using his recently-coined term, “monad:”:

For the rest, in the Monad, or complete simple substance, I do not unite anything with the entelechy except a primitive passive force, which is related to the whole mass of the organic body. Indeed, the remaining subordinate monads placed in the organs do not make up a part of [the organic body], although they are immediately required for it, and they come together with the primary monad for the organic corporeal substance, or animal or plant. I therefore distinguish: (1) the primitive entelechy or soul; (2) matter, namely primary matter or primitive passive power; (3) the monad completed by these two things; (4) the mass or secondary matter, or organic machine for which innumerable subordinate monads come together; and (5) the animal, or corporeal substance, which the monad dominating in the machine makes into one thing. [L to de Volder, 20 June 1703, G II 252]

Here the body of the corporeal substance is sharply distinguished from the “monad or complete simple substance,” something rather different from the corporeal substance view. Earlier in the letter he had written:

I regard substance itself, endowed with primitive active and passive power, like the ‘I’ or something similar, as the indivisible or complete monad.... [L to de Volder, 20 June 1703, G II 251]

Together with the passage I earlier quoted, it now seems that Leibniz is conceiving of the unities that ground his world on the model of souls rather than animals. At the end of the letter Leibniz confirms this by informing de Volder that, strictly speaking, his monads or simple substances are non-extended:

For even if monads are not extended, they nonetheless have a certain kind of situation in extension [T]hings that are simple, even if they do not have extension, must have a situation in extension, although it may not possible to designate it precisely, as with incomplete phenomena. [L to de Volder, 20 June 1703, G II 253]

And if, as Leibniz had written, *all* substances are simple in this sense, then these mind-like monads are now what there really is in the world: these, not the corporeal substances are the active unities that ground reality. In the letters that follow Leibniz expands on his position. This culminates in June 1704 with what I take to be a canonical statement of his newly revealed idealism:

Indeed, considering the matter exactly carefully it should be said that there is nothing in things except simple substances and in them perception and appetite; moreover, matter and motion are not so much substances or things as phenomena of perceivers, whose reality is situated in the harmony of perceivers with themselves (at different times) and with other perceivers. [L to de Volder, 30 June 1704, G II 270]

The position that Leibniz is outlining to de Volder in these letters starting in April 1702 represents an enormous change in Leibniz's position. On his earlier position, the basic entities in the world are corporeal substances, each of which is made up of smaller parts, and so on to infinity: bugs in bugs forever. These are the active unities that ground the reality of the world around us, genuine unities insofar as they are indivisible and unified by virtue of a substantial form, and active insofar as they are the sources of their own activity. These substances are individuals, and they are indivisible (think here of Leibniz's response to Arnauld's worm objection), but they are *not* simple in the sense of having no parts. They are composed of corporeal substances smaller still, to infinity, and so there is no bottom level of substances in the world, there is no ground. But in the world of simple substances that Leibniz is explaining to de Volder, things are altogether different. The basic units of the world, monads or simple substances, are not composed of anything more basic; they are the ultimate bottom layer of things. They are also non-extended, mindlike and endowed with perception and appetite alone. The extended things around us are reinterpreted on this picture as being, in some way to be made more precise, the phenomena of genuine substances, and not themselves substantial realities.

In the next lecture I want to discuss the details of this view in more detail. But before doing so, I want to ask two questions: *when* did Leibniz adopt this view, and *why* did he do so?

It is unlikely that Leibniz invented the view at the precise moment when he announced to de Volder in December 1701 that all there are are simples.¹ But it also seems unlikely to me that the kind of monadological idealism that comes out in the letters that follow represents Leibniz's considered position for very much earlier than that. It has been a standard view that the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and Correspondence with Arnauld of the 1680s offer fundamentally the same idealistic doctrine that his later writings do, a world grounded in mind-like monads. On the view that I favor, though, in the 1680s and probably through much of the 1690s (if not all) Leibniz's view of body and substance is a world of corporeal substances, substances understood on analogy with organisms, not minds, organic bodies transformed into substances by virtue of containing souls.

My best argument for this position is the developmental story that I have been working out in the earlier lectures. As I read him, in the 1670s Leibniz was, for the most part, a heterodox Hobbesian, someone who held a broadly Hobbesian conception of

¹ In the letter that follows de Volder's outburst of incomprehension, De Volder to L, 14 Nov. 1704; G II 272, Leibniz writes: "You say that you 'noticed many unexpected things in my most recent letter.' But perhaps you will find that that the same things have already been introduced sufficiently in previous letters, and that only prejudice prevented you from reaching the same point before now." [G II 275] This might suggest that the monadological view can be found throughout the earlier letters with de Volder. In that way, it might be seen to support the view that Leibniz's idealism was really hidden behind the corporeal substance view, if we only read it right. But remember that Leibniz had been expressing the more idealistic position in his letters for more than a year at that point before de Volder finally noticed it. It seems more plausible to me that Leibniz is referring to that, rather than to its presence in letters even earlier.

body, supplemented with minds, perceiving things taken to exist at a point. The main problems that he faced were two: (1) these Hobbesian bodies are infinitely divisible, and contain no genuine unities, and (2) they also contain no genuine ground for force and activity. Leibniz solves these two problems in one fell swoop by introducing substantial forms into the world. These substantial forms, understood on analogy with souls, transform organic bodies into genuine unities, and give them a source of activity. So far as I can see, there is no reason to attribute to Leibniz any kind of idealism here: a world of corporeal substances, in their own way extended, is an elegant solution to the knotty problems that Leibniz faced with his earlier view of the world.

Though it is generally assumed without argument that Leibniz was an idealist from the early 1680s on, Robert Adams has offered sophisticated arguments for this conclusion. Unfortunately there isn't time to consider his careful case in the detail it deserves. However, I would like to go through some passages, many of which Adams cites, that might be construed as suggesting that the kind of idealism that Leibniz will eventually adopt may have been on his mind in the years before announcing it to de Volder. These texts will also give us some idea of the considerations that might have driven Leibniz toward his later idealism.

Charting the pre-history of Leibniz's idealism is not as simple as simply finding out when he first began to talk about monads. The word "monad" was not invented by Leibniz; it was used earlier by Platonist philosophers, and can be found scattered among various of Leibniz's contemporaries. [Becco 1975] When it first enters Leibniz's vocabulary in about 1695, it is simply a synonym for a genuine unity, such as a corporeal substance. The word first appears in print in *On Nature Itself*, published in the AE in September 1698. In a letter he wrote to Johann Bernoulli in that same month explains clearly what it means:

What I call a complete monad or individual substance [*substantia singularis*] is not so much the soul, as it is the animal itself, or something analogous to it, endowed with a soul or form and an organic body. [L to Bernoulli, 20/30 September 1698 GM III 542 (AG 168)]

Eventually 'monad' will be used to designate the simple, mind-like and non-extended substance without parts that will replace the corporeal substance as the foundation of his system. But the term 'monad' enters his vocabulary before that happens.

More interesting, and, I think, more revealing of Leibniz's thought is an investigation of the idea of the simple substance, substance without parts. The term 'simple substance' doesn't really enter Leibniz's philosophical vocabulary until surprisingly late as a genuine technical term. If we are to trust the Akademie editors, it appears in Leibniz's philosophical writings only three times before 1690. And when it appears, it refers to the soul or substantial form of a corporeal substance; in none of these passages does Leibniz claim that the simple substance is the ultimate constituent of reality.² After 1700 it appears 130 times in the texts edited in the Gerhardt edition. This suggests that after 1700, it became a technical term for Leibniz. But between 1690 and

² See A6.4 pp. 635, 1673, 1584. In the first two occurrences, the Akademie editors note that 'simple' is a later addition. The last is in the heading to DM 35. Becco claims on the basis of an inspection of the ms. that it, too is a later addition. See *Du simple* pp. 66-8.

1700, ‘simple substance’ appears only three times in texts that we have available. Let us look at that decade.

All three occurrences are found in a text associated with the “New System” of 1695. While the term ‘simple substance’ doesn’t appear in the “New System,”³ something else just as interesting does. In the “New System,” Leibniz presents a version of the aggregate argument for substantial forms we saw earlier:

In addition, by means of the soul or form there is a true unity corresponding to what is called the self [*moy*] in us. ... [I]f there were no true substantial unities, there would be nothing substantial or real in the collection. [AG 142]

He goes on to say that extended material atoms cannot constitute such unities because they have parts:

Furthermore, they are still composed of parts, since the invincible attachment of one part to another (if we can reasonably conceive or assume this) does not eliminate diversity of those parts. [AG 142]

Leibniz then writes the following remarkable passage:

There are only atoms of substance, that is, real unities *absolutely destitute of parts*, which are the source of actions, the first absolute principles of the composition of things, and, as it were, the final elements in the analysis of substances. We could call them metaphysical points: they have something vital, a kind of perception, and mathematical points are the points of view from which they express the universe. But when corporeal substances are contracted, all their organs together constitute only a physical point relative to us. Thus physical points are indivisible only in appearance; mathematical points are exact, but they are merely modalities. Only metaphysical points or points of substance (constituted by forms or souls) are exact and real, and without them there would be nothing real, since without true unities there would be no multitude. [“New System” G IV 482-3 (AG 142)]

What is new here is the claim that real unities are “absolutely destitute of parts.” The unities that ground reality are clearly not corporeal substances, which do have parts, and are thus not appropriate to play the role of the real unities that ground reality. But that said, it is not entirely clear what to make of this passage. We can look at it from the point of view of where Leibniz will go, toward the monadological idealism that is so prominent in the next decade, and we can certainly see an anticipation of his later idealism in this paragraph. But we can also look at it from the corporeal substance view that is so prominent in the Correspondence with Arnauld and see it as a continuation of that. The “real unities absolutely destitute of parts” can be read not as the ultimate constituents of reality, but as the substantial forms that transform organic bodies into genuine (corporeal) substances. Which is the right reading? I don’t want to answer that question now, but instead, move on to the text that I signaled earlier, where Leibniz explicitly introduces simple substances.

The “New System” appeared in the *Journal des sçavans* in June and July 1695. The September issue featured a reply to Leibniz by Simon Foucher, a friend who had corresponded with Leibniz about philosophical issues for some years. The text I want to

³ Note that the occurrence of ‘simple substance’ in G IV 479 is a later addition; in the version that Leibniz published in the *Journal des sçavans*, it is simply ‘substance.’

look at are some notes that Leibniz wrote on Foucher's reply. Unfortunately, Leibniz never published these notes (he published a much shorter reply), but the notes constitute one of the most interesting texts from the period.

In this important text, Leibniz is discussing the difference between mathematical extension and real concrete bodies. Mathematical extension is not composed of parts, but is divisible into parts; in mathematics we don't have to worry about how extension can be grounded in something smaller or more basic. But the situation is different with concrete things. Leibniz writes:

*[I]n actual substantial things, the whole is a result or coming together of simple substances, or rather [ou bien] of a multitude of real unities. ... Those who make up a line from points have looked for the first elements in ideal things or relations, something completely contrary to what they should have done; and those who found that relations like number or space ... cannot be formed by the coming together of points were wrong, for the most part, to deny that substantial realities have first elements, as if the substantial realities had no primitive unities, or as if there were no simple substances. ... [I]n realities in which only divisions actually made enter into consideration, the whole is only a result or coming together, like a flock of sheep. It is true that **the number of simple substances which enter into a mass, however small, is infinite**, since besides the soul, which brings about the real unity of the animal, the body of the sheep (for example) is actually subdivided--that is, it is, again, an assemblage of invisible animals or plants which are in the same way composites, outside of that which also brings about their real unity. Although this goes on to infinity, it is evident that, in the end, **everything reduces [revenir a] to these unities, the rest or the results being nothing but well-founded phenomena.** [Notes on Foucher (1695/6), G IV 491-2 (AG 146-7)]*

Interesting passage. Here Leibniz does *seem* to put something that he calls 'simple substances' at the ground of everything. But it still isn't entirely clear what is going on here. First of all, what are simple substances? At this moment 'simple substance' isn't really a technical term, so there are no other texts to which we can turn for clarification. And as with the passage from the "New System," we can read this two ways. Read through the eyes of the later monadological idealism, this can look very idealistic: the simple substances can be read as the non-extended ultimate constituents of things. But Leibniz here also brings up animals, their souls, and the genuine unities that result from adding a soul to an organic body. This suggests a reading much more like the corporeal substance view.

Does this passage show that Leibniz was really an idealist in the mid-1690s? Hard to say. In September 1698, Leibniz wrote the following remarkable passage to Johann Bernoulli:

(3) You ask me to divide for you a portion of mass [*massa*] into the substances of which it is composed. I respond, there are as many individual substances in it as there are animals or living things or things analogous to them. ...

(5) You ask how far one must proceed in order to have something that is a substance, and not [a collection of] substances. I respond that such things present themselves immediately and even without subdivision, and that every animal is such a thing. For none of us is composed of the parts of our bodies.

[L to Bernoulli, 20/30 Sept. 1698; GM III 542 (AG 167-8)]

This could hardly be a more explicit statement of what I have called the corporeal substance view. This, of course, is not to say that he didn't toy with idealism in 1695/6, and then backed off. Or that he may have been consciously or unconsciously *tending* toward idealism in 1695/6. (Remember here that these passages *can* be interpreted in line with the corporeal substance view.) Or that it was something that he held but hid from his contemporaries, or even from himself. Or that certain of his philosophical commitments *implied* idealism in 1695/6, even if he himself was not fully aware of the implications.

I want to remain agnostic about whether or not Leibniz was an idealist at that moment in the mid-1690s. But whatever we think these texts indicate, they are important for understanding Leibniz's development, and read properly, they may show us one motivation for Leibniz's later idealism. As I have emphasized earlier, from 1679 on, Leibniz was concerned with genuine unity as a criterion of substancehood. In these passages that we have been examining, Leibniz moves subtly from an emphasis on *individual* substance to an emphasis on *simple* substance. And for the first time, Leibniz is beginning to worry about the way in which having parts may undermine genuine unity, something he didn't worry about in earlier texts. In these texts Leibniz seems to be taking genuine unity as now implying that a genuine substance has no parts. And if a substance has no parts, then it can only be a non-extended, soul-like being. And if all substances must be genuine unities in this stronger sense, if all substances must be *simple* substances, as Leibniz was later to write to de Volder, then we are in idealism. In this way pressing the unity criterion of substancehood does lead us directly to idealism. I think that Leibniz certainly didn't think so in 1686 and 1687 when he was writing to Arnauld, and *may* not have thought so in 1695 and 1696 when he was working through the issues connected with the "New System." But by 1702 he had certainly reached that conclusion: "When I say that every substance is simple, I understand by this that it lacks parts." [L to de Volder, April 1702, G II 239] And simplicity in this precise sense has become for him a central part of what it is to be a genuine unity and thus a genuine substance:

I regard substance itself ... like the 'I' or something similar, as the indivisible or complete monad. ... And if there is nothing that is *truly one*, then every *true thing* will be eliminated. ... [S]ince simple things alone are true things, the rest are only beings through aggregation, and therefore phenomena, and, as Democritus used to say, exist by convention not by nature. [L to de Volder, 20 June 1703, G II 251, 252]

In this way taking unity seriously leads Leibniz from individual substances to simple substances, which eventually leads him to idealism.

But so does activity, the other main approach that lead Leibniz to his new metaphysics of corporeal substance in 1679. For Leibniz, as I have argued, individual substances are genuinely active. In this respect, Leibniz was a solid opponent of occasionalism. But Leibniz shares something important with his occasionalist opponents. Since, for the occasionalists, God is the only genuinely active cause, finite individuals do not genuinely interact with one another; one billiard ball is only the *occasional* cause of the motion of another billiard ball. Leibniz puts activity back into the world, but, one might say, he does it so effectively that substances don't require causes external to

themselves in order to act. As he puts it in a celebrated image from the *Discourse on Metaphysics*,

[E]ach substance is like a world apart, independent of all other things, except for God. ... We could therefore say in some way and properly speaking, though not in accordance with common usage, that one particular substance never acts upon another particular substance nor is acted upon by it [DM 14]

The apparent relations between one substance and another, for Leibniz are due not to any direct interaction between them, but to pre-established harmony: God, in the beginning, creates things in such a way that what happens in one substance corresponds appropriately with what happens in the others. While the best-known example of this occurs in mind/body interaction, the view covers all kinds of apparent causal interaction. Leibniz reinterprets causal relations as follows:

[W]hen a change takes place by which several substances are affected (in fact every change affects all of them), I believe one may say that the substance which immediately passes to a greater degree of perfection or to a more perfect expression exercises its power and acts, and the substance which passes to a lesser degree shows its weakness and is acted upon [*pâtit*]. [DM 15]

As Leibniz puts it somewhat more concretely in a draft letter to Arnauld:

[T]here is good reason to say that my volition is the cause of the motion of my arm, and that a dissolution of the continuity of the matter in my body is the cause of my pain, since the one expresses distinctly what the other expresses more confusedly, and one should attribute action to the substance whose expression is the more distinct. [Notes for L to Arnauld, 28 November/8 December 1686, GP II 71]

One might also say that when the mind causes the arm to raise, it passes to a greater degree of perfection insofar as it has clearer perceptions.

Finally, let me introduce another variation on this theme. In a previous lecture I discussed a passage from the essay, “On the Method of Distinguishing Real from Imaginary Phenomena,” written in the years leading up to the composition of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and the Correspondence with Arnauld. The essay ends with the following curious statement:

Substances have metaphysical matter or passive power to the extent that [*quatenus*] they express something confusedly, and active power to the extent that they express something distinctly. [“On the Method of Distinguishing Real from Imaginary Phenomena,” A6.4.1504 (L365)]

There are complexities with this passage. It seems somewhat disconnected with the rest of the themes of the essay, and there are reasons, both of content and of paleography to suggest that it may be a later addition.⁴ But in a way, it is quite consistent with the other passages I have just quoted. Since Leibniz identifies primitive passive force with primary

⁴ The essay is written on paper whose watermark led the Akademie editors to date it between 1683 and 1686. But this last sentence is in a rather different handwriting than what goes before, suggesting a later addition. But how much later is hard to say: it could be the next day or the next decade. After more than 300 years these fine distinctions are hard to make on a piece of paper.

matter in a number of texts, this seems like a direct continuation of the earlier passages that connect passivity with confused perception.

These passages certainly look idealistic in spirit; they seem to connect passive power and primary matter closely with a feature of the perception of a mind-like entity. They echo what Leibniz will say later in the explicitly idealist “Monadology”:

49. The creature is said to act externally insofar as it is perfect, and to be acted upon [*patir*] by another, insofar as it is imperfect. Thus we attribute action to a monad insofar as it has distinct perceptions, and passion, insofar as it has confused perceptions.

50. And one creature is more perfect than another insofar as one finds in it that which provides an a priori reason for what happens in the other; and this is why we say that it acts on the other.

51. But in simple substances the influence of one monad over another can only be ideal, and can only produce its effect through God's intervention, when in the ideas of God a monad rightly demands that God take it into account in regulating the others from the beginning of things. ...

52. It is in this way that actions and passions among creatures are mutual. For God, comparing two simple substances, finds in each reasons that require him to adjust the other to it; and consequently, what is active in some respects is passive from another point of view: active insofar as what is known distinctly in one serves to explain what happens in another; and passive insofar as the reason for what happens in one is found in what is known distinctly in another

[“Monadology” §§ 49-52]

Once again, though, I don't think that we are required to give them an idealistic reading. While the non-interaction claim quite naturally follows in a world of non-extended perceivers, Leibniz held that it was true for the physical world as well. As Leibniz wrote in the “Primary Truths” paper:

[N]o created substance exerts a metaphysical action or influx on any other thing. ... What we call causes are only concurrent requisites, in metaphysical rigor. ... For bodies really rebound from others through the force of their own elasticity, and not through the force of other things, even if another body is required in order for the elasticity (which arises from something intrinsic to the body itself) to be able to act. [“Primary Truths” A6.4.1647 (AG 33).]⁵

Furthermore, the account of activity and passivity (and thus primary matter) in terms of distinct and confused expression in that which acts and that which is acted upon requires at most that substances *have* souls, in which such distinct and confused expression can be registered, but it doesn't require that they *be* souls.⁶ On this reading, confused expression is not what *constitutes* matter, but a substance or its form has confused

⁵ See also *Specimen Dynamicum* II (AG 134-5) and Leibniz's remarks to de Volder, G II 205-6. Cf. Brown 1992.

⁶ Actually, it doesn't require even that. The definition that Leibniz offers of expression in the Correspondence with Arnauld (G II 112) holds for relations of expression between bodies (a map and the territory) as well as it does to the perception of a soul and its object.

expression because it *has* matter; confused expression, on this reading, is the mark of the material embodiment of the soul.

However, these passages are interesting nevertheless. Whether the close link between primary matter, passivity, and confused thought is an expression of an idealism Leibniz believed when he wrote them, or whether it is a suggestion and anticipation of what he later came to be his considered view, it is worth exploring how and why Leibniz might have come to identify passivity and thus primary matter with the confused perceptions of a non-extended simple substance, as he eventually came to do.

What follows is a story, and it may be just a story. Unfortunately, we don't have the documents yet to be able fully to substantiate the conjectures that I am making about what is driving Leibniz. But it is an interesting way of seeing how Leibniz's thinking about activity and passivity may have moved him in the direction of his later idealism.

I have attributed to Leibniz a metaphysical view in his middle period, the 1680s and 1690s in which what is basic are corporeal substances composed of form and matter. But from the very beginning, matter is conceived of in two rather different ways, corresponding to the two principle arguments that he uses to establish this view in the period. Corresponding to the argument from unity, the matter is conceived of as the organic body of the corporeal substance: by adding form to an organic body, we transform it into a genuine unity. But, if you remember, Leibniz also introduces corporeal substances because "certain things take place in body which cannot be explained from the necessity of matter alone," as he wrote in the "Conspectus libelli." When we think of corporeal substances in terms of force, rather than unity, then the matter in question is conceived of as the passive force of a corporeal substance, as opposed to the active force that is its form.

At first I suspect that Leibniz identified these two different notions of matter, and assumed that they were just two aspects of one notion, just as unity and activity were just two aspects of the form. In a fragment now dated as coming from the same years as the "Conspectus Libelli," Leibniz has the following sentences within a few lines of one another:

The substantial form or soul is the principle of unity and duration, while matter is the principle of multitude and mutation.

...

Matter is the principle of passion. Form is the principle of action.

["Definitiones cogitationesque metaphysicae," A6.4.1499]⁷

But only a few years later, Leibniz will separate these two notions out and identify them with different notions of matter in scholastic philosophy: the matter as body will be identified with secondary matter, while the matter as passive force will be identified with primary matter.

This distinction can be found in a passage from a letter that Leibniz wrote for Arnauld:

... [I]f one considers as matter of corporeal substance not mass without forms but a second matter which is the multiplicity of substances of which the mass is that of the total body, it may be said that these substances are parts of this matter, just

⁷ The textual note to the first sentence suggest that Leibniz at first had intended to characterize form and matter in terms of active and passive force in this text.

as those which enter into our body form part of it, for as our body is the matter, and the soul is the form of our substance, it is the same with other corporeal substances. ... But if one were to understand by the term 'matter' something always essential to the same substance, one might in the sense of certain Scholastics understand thereby the primitive passive power of a substance, and in this sense matter would not be extended or divisible, although it would be the principle of divisibility or of that which amounts to it in the substance. But I do not wish to argue over the use of terms. [L to Arnauld 9 Oct. 1687, G II 119-20]

Secondary matter is relatively unproblematic here. The secondary matter, the body of the corporeal substance, is just a collection of other, smaller corporeal substances, each of which, in turn, has an organic body and a soul. This is the first conception of matter that I noted earlier, the matter considered as the body which is united with the form or soul. The second conception of matter to which he refers, the primitive passive power, is meant to be the primary matter of the schoolmen. But, one might ask, *what can the primary matter be?* How does it fit into the picture?

There is a real problem to be faced here. As standardly understood, primary matter is matter without form "the first subject of anything," to quote an Aristotelian textbook that Leibniz knew. [Eustachius, *Physica*, pp. 119-20] In an Aristotelian world, as you analyze a substance into more basic constituents, from human being to muscle, liver and blood, to their smaller constituents, you eventually reach the elements themselves, forms attached to primary matter, itself without form, at the very bottom level. But in Leibniz's world of corporeal substances, there is an infinite chain of animate creatures, bugs in bugs with souls (forms) and bodies (secondary matter, aggregates of animate creatures) that goes to infinity. In this Leibnizian world without end, there seems to be no room for primary matter.

Leibniz never sent this part of the letter to Arnauld. Perhaps he was afraid of the questions that Arnauld might raise about the issue of primary matter in relation to the secondary. Nevertheless, Leibniz continued to make the distinction between primary and secondary matter in the years that followed, and repeated in essence what he had once contemplated telling Arnauld. He continued to distinguish primary matter from the substantial form or entelechy, and he continued to hold the bugs in bugs, always extremely vague about exactly where primary matter belongs in his scheme of things.

But it is interesting to note that one very prominent feature of the new view that he begins to outline to de Volder in 1702 is precisely a place for primary matter.

For the rest, in the Monad, or complete simple substance, I do not unite anything with the entelechy except a primitive passive force, which is related to the whole mass of the organic body. Indeed, the remaining subordinate monads placed in the organs do not make up a part of [the organic body], although they are immediately required for it, and they come together with the primary monad for the organic corporeal substance, or animal or plant. I therefore distinguish: (1) the primitive entelechy or soul; (2) matter, namely primary matter or primitive passive power; (3) the monad completed by these two things; (4) the mass or secondary matter, or organic machine for which innumerable subordinate monads come together; and (5) the animal, or corporeal substance, which the monad dominating in the machine makes into one thing. [L to de Volder, 20 June 1703, G II 252]

The primary matter (primitive passive power), united with the entelechy (primitive active power), now constitutes the non-extended simple substance that Leibniz wants to call a monad. While he doesn't say so explicitly in this passage (he does in others), insofar as the monad contains only perception and appetite, primary matter must be understood as a feature of those mentalistic notions. Secondary matter is now an aggregate of such monads. As I argued earlier, with the new monadology comes a new sub-basement in his ontology, a genuine foundation. Leibniz still has an infinite chain of animate things, bugs in bugs, going to infinity, as we shall discuss in more detail next week. But this is now at what Leibniz calls the phenomenal level. In the new picture he can now say that there is a foundation to everything, simple substances without parts, something below the phenomenal level of bodies and below which one cannot go, the level of the monads. And with that he finally has a place to put primary matter.

In an earlier lecture I talked about how Leibniz wanted to take the mechanist's analysis of bodies one step deeper. For the mechanists, color, heat, sound, etc. are eliminated in favor of size, shape, and motion. In the 1680s Leibniz takes another step forward and analyzes the geometrical qualities of body, size, shape and motion in terms of forces, active and passive. With this new picture Leibniz goes one step deeper still and analyzes force in terms of the confused and distinct perceptions of non-extended and mind-like monads.

Let me summarize the rather intricate argument of this lecture. I have argued that sometime after about 1695 and before he announces it in late 1701, Leibniz became an idealist and added a new subbasement of non-extended and mind-like simple substances or monads to his metaphysics of animate things. There were, I think, two main motivations for his enchantment of the world, which correspond closely to the two main motivations he had for introducing substantial forms into his world in 1679. One motivation came from the requirement of unity. Originally, substantial forms were introduced to provide genuine individuals in the world, corporeal substances, souls and bodies. But Leibniz came to believe that the requirement of unity on substance required that we go beyond *corporeal* substances, unities *with* parts, to *simple* substances, non-extended monads which *lack* parts. The second motivation came from his reflections on force. The need for resistance in bodies led Leibniz to posit passive force, which he identified with primary matter. My speculation (and it is something of a speculation) is that the need to find a place to put primitive passive power or primary matter in the world of bugs within bugs led Leibniz again to a world of simple substances, substances without parts that could constitute a secure bottom level, prior to and grounding the infinitely nested animate beings, something in which Leibniz could place his primary matter. In 1679 unity and activity conspired to lead Leibniz to the world of corporeal substances. In the late 1690s or early 1700s, these same two considerations conspired once again to lead Leibniz to the next step of his journey, to his idealism. Corporeal substances turned out to be only a half-way house in the path from Cartesian or Hobbesian mechanism to a full-blown idealism.

Why do I resist attributing the full-blown monadology to Leibniz earlier, in the 1680s, for example? There are indeed passages which suggest idealism in writings before he announces it to de Volder. And it is not implausible to see in them some ideas that will come to be important later. But we must be very careful. While with the benefit of

knowing his later writings, we see exactly where Leibniz is going, Leibniz himself may not always have been able to. We can pick out the elements that may suggest or imply idealism in his early work, interpret them in terms of his later idealism, and see them as especially prominent. But that isn't to say that Leibniz did so at the time, or that he could connect the dots and make the inferences that we do or that he will later make. Had Leibniz's thought gone in a different direction (which it might well have done) we would probably ignore those seemingly idealist passages, and focus on others which reflect that path that he actually took. Reading Leibniz teleologically, in terms of the positions we know he will eventually take has caused us to misunderstand his earlier writings, and in focusing on the anticipations of his later views, we have missed the great riches of the earlier periods in his thought.

Just as we humans can't see what God can in our souls, how what we are now will lead naturally to our future state, there is no reason to believe that Leibniz could see what *we* can in his earlier writings, the doctrines that his earlier commitments eventually led him to accept.

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