

Leibniz on Divine Causation

In metaphysical rigor, transeunt causation is restricted to God's operations and comes in three forms: creation, conservative causation, and the production of miracles.

Introduction

I open the paper with Robert Sleight's rendering of a passage Leibniz struck from a draft of his 30 April letter to Arnauld.¹ It is important to note that Leibniz *struck* this remark. Did he hold this view? It is not clear. He certainly appears to have entertained it. Leibniz appears in other passages to hold the view that there is no transeunt, or intersubstantial, causation whatsoever. So he would certainly give pause before making a claim that could involve him in an explicit contradiction. In what follows, I will try to determine to what degree Leibniz did, and to what degree he could, hold the view expressed above.

Leibniz distinguished two kinds of causation: (i) *transeunt causation*, in which substances act on one another to cause change, and (ii) *immanent causation*, in which a substance causes change in itself. Leibniz seems to hold that all changes in created substances are immanently caused, but that God exercises causation on created substances in three ways: creation, miracles, and what Leibniz calls 'emanation' or sometimes 'continual fulguration'. *Prima facie*, Leibniz's denial of transeunt causal interaction rules out God's action on substances. I will argue, based on Leibniz's statement of the denial in *Monadology* 7, that he has left room to distinguish a special kind of transeunt causation, to which his general denial does not apply. I then proceed to show that each of the three ways God acts on created substances can be understood as an instance of this special kind of transeunt causation.

¹ R.C. Sleight: *Leibniz and Arnauld: A Commentary on Their Correspondence*, New Haven, 1990, p. 134.

I motivate the paper by noting the following. Leibniz seems to have held each of these views, which are jointly inconsistent:

- 1) Individual substances, or monads², do not causally act on one another.
- 2) God is a substance.
- 3) God causally acts on other substance.

In section 1, I will canvass the textual evidence and basic motivation for each claim above. Additionally, I will try to clarify Leibniz's arguments for the claim that substances do not interact. In section 2, I will closely examine a key passage of text often interpreted as one of Leibniz's main arguments against transeunt causation. I will offer a rival interpretation, in which Leibniz seems to leave room for at least one kind of transeunt causation. Finally, in section 3, I will discuss how each of three kinds of divine causation can be understood as the kind of causation Leibniz seems to leave room for

1. *Motivating the Inconsistency*

Claim 1: *Substances do not causally interact.*

Leibniz's most explicit statement of this claim comes in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*:

"...one particular substance never acts on another particular substance, nor is it acted on by it..."(DM 14; L 312; GP 4: 440). And in the *Monadology*³ we get:

There is no way of explaining how a monad can be altered or changed internally by any other creature...Monads have no windows through which anything could enter or depart (Mon 7; L 643; GP 6: 607).

...the natural changes in monads come from an internal principle, since an external cause could not influence their interior (Mon 11; L 641; GP 6: 608).

There are a number of reasons attributed to Leibniz for holding this view. I will focus on two in this paper. First, and perhaps most famously, Leibniz is supposed to have thought the causal isolation of substances is a direct consequence of the concept-

²I will use 'substance' and 'monad' interchangeably throughout. See the next note for a related point.

³ In this paper I draw freely on texts spanning the period of Leibniz's mature metaphysics. It is, however, controversial to what degree the doctrines of the *Monadology* are present in earlier texts like the *Discourse* and the correspondence with Arnauld. For one discussion of some differences between the earlier and later period, see Ch. 5 of C. Wilson: *Leibniz's Metaphysics: A Historical and Comparative Study*, Princeton, 1989.

containment theory of truth. Second, Leibniz sometimes seems to think that causal interaction amongst substances entails that substances are not true unities, or simples, and that substances are simple is a fundament of his metaphysical system. I will discuss these arguments in more detail below.

Claim 2: *God is a substance.*

Leibniz makes numerous claims to the effect that God is a substance:

Thus the final reason for things must be in a necessary substance... It is this substance that we call God. (Mon 38; L 646; GP 6: 613)

So only God is the primary unity or the simple original substance... (Mon 47; L 647; GP 6: 614)

Since Leibniz holds that only substances exist (NS 11; GP 4: 483), so God, insofar as he exists, is a substance.

Claim 3: *God causally acts on substances.*

There are three ways in which Leibniz imagines God to have causal influence over created substances. The first is creation. The standard account of Leibniz's creation story is that God pre-conceives totalities of states of affairs, or worlds, and chooses to actualize the most perfect one. For Leibniz these totalities are sets of inter-related causal chains,⁴ each chain belonging to a substance.⁵ So to actualize a world is to create substances. "Substances have been created with the world..." Leibniz says (NS 4; GP 4: 479).

Secondly, Leibniz repeatedly speaks of "continual fulgurations" or "emanations" of created substances from God's being:

...created substances depend on God who preserves them and indeed even produces them continually by a kind of emanation, as we produce our thoughts (DM 14; L 311; GP 4: 439).

So only God is the primary unity or the simple original substance of which all the created or derivative monads are products, and from whom they are born, so to speak, by continual fulgurations of the divinity from moment to moment (Mon 47; L 647; GP 6: 614).

⁴They are inter-related only insofar as they "harmonize", or appear to intersect at the appropriate places. This is the famous pre-established harmony. These chains are not inter-related in the sense that there is genuine causal overlap.

⁵The standard account of creation is generally compiled piecemeal from across the canon. For some key elements, see PNG 10-14 and DM 1-6.

Leibniz seems to think of this as some kind of sustaining action by which God preserves the unfolding sequence of events he initiated at creation.

Thirdly, Leibniz allows that God may at times perform miracles: "God works a miracle when he does something that surpasses the forces that he has given to creatures." (LA p. 116; GP 2:93)

These texts together generate the inconsistent triad. I would like now to turn to discussing in greater detail Leibniz's motivations for the first claim, the denial of intersubstantial interaction.

1.1

To begin, it needs to be made clear what Leibniz is denying, and what he is not. Leibniz is *not* denying that there is causation in the universe. Leibniz thinks there is change, and changes must have causes. What Leibniz denies is that substances causally interact with one another—he denies *inter*-substantial causation, or as I shall call it hereafter, *transeunt* causation. So he denies that changes in one substance are brought about by other substances. His account of change is rather that it is caused by the subject in which the change occurs--each substance causes *itself* to change (Mon 11, 16, 18; L 644; GP 6: 608, 609). This is *intra*-substantial, or *immanent*, causation. So we might think of each created substance as an isolated causal chain, a series of states each of which is caused by and only by the substance to which it belongs.

Next, I should try to address an early objection. The objector will say: "You are attacking a straw man. The problem you raise is not even a *prima facie* problem. Leibniz is nearly always explicit that *created* substances do not interact, and that *created* substances are independent of every influence save God's. For example, in the *Discourse* he says '...each substance is as a world apart, independent of everything else outside of itself except God.' (DM 14; L 312; GP 4: 439) So you cannot say that Leibniz holds claim 1. His language may sometimes suggest that he does, but it is clear such language is careless, since we have statements like DM 14. His official position is that created

substances do not interact. And this, if substituted for claim 1, results in no inconsistency, because God is not a created substance."

By way of response, I would like examine the arguments that are often attributed to Leibniz in support of claim 1. There are two such arguments I will discuss.

(i) *The concept-containment argument*

Some have argued, and the texts of the *Discourse* and the Arnauld correspondence support the view, that Leibniz's position on substance is a consequence of his theory of truth. Simply, his theory is that for every true proposition, the predicate is contained in the concept of the subject (DM 8; LA 63; GP 2: 56). From this it seems to follow that everything that is truly predicated of a substance is conjoined in a "complete concept" of that substance. God creates substances in accord with their complete concepts, pre-conceived by God as possibilities. So everything that happens to a monad, every change that befalls it, is the realization of a predicate contained in its concept.

Leibniz at times seems to think that the concept-containment theory is sufficient to warrant a denial of transeunt causation. For if a substance were the cause of a change in another substance, then the change would be a consequence of something other than the complete concept. In the *Discourse*, Leibniz says:

We might say, then,...one particular substance never acts upon another particular substance, nor is it acted upon by it, if we keep in mind that what happens to each is solely the result of its own complete idea or concept, since this idea already includes all the predicates or events and expresses the whole universe (DM 14; L 312; GP 4: 440).

It should be noted that this argument only works if a restriction on causal overdetermination is assumed. Without such a restriction, there is no reason to suppose each change that befalls a monad is not the result of both its complete concept and the action of another substance. But provided such an assumption is made, the denial of transeunt causation may be understood as a consequence of the concept-containment principle.

What does it mean for a change to be a consequence of the complete-concept of a substance? Essentially, Leibniz thinks that substances cause themselves to change, and there is plan according to which a substance does this. This plan is the complete concept.

So the complete-concept argument seems to claim that for a substance S, other substances cannot cause S to change because if they did, S would not be following the plan of its complete concept. This would appear to open the possibility that some predicates, those true in virtue of transeuntly caused changes, would not be contained in the concept of a substance. And so Leibniz's theory of truth would be jeopardized.⁶

What I should consider next is whether the concept-containment argument will extend from created substances to God. If it does not, then the above objection is good, at least as far as this argument is concerned.

A simple attempt to extend this argument would claim that if other created substances cannot act on S, neither can God. For then there would be a change to S not caused by S, i.e., not a consequence of S's complete concept.

But here Leibniz can respond that he never intended this argument to exclude God's action. In fact, the entire doctrine of concept-containment presupposes an initial act of creation by God, in which substances are created exactly so that they move from state to state according to the divine plan. So the principal at work in the concept-containment argument is a principal that will allow an exception for God that need not be *ad hoc*.

(ii) *The true unity argument*

Leibniz holds what I will call the *true unity thesis*. This thesis is that substances have no parts of any kind (physical or metaphysical). Leibniz thinks that, in metaphysical rigor, something exists only if it is a *unum per se*, that is, a true unity.⁷ The only things that exist are monads, and monads are true unities. The true unity argument against transeunt causation can then be rendered, in a very general form, thus:

⁶The threat of circularity always looms in Leibniz, and never more than here. There is some reason to think that concept-containment is a reason for the denial of transeunt causation, and vice versa. But let us bracket this concern for now.

⁷ Here I shall show sympathy with Donald Baxter's argument that Leibniz does not allow either that corporeal aggregates are real, or that monads are composites. The only 'parts' to be recognized in monads are 'aspects', which are strictly speaking not parts (D. Baxter: 'Corporeal Substance and True Unities', in: *Studia Leibnitiana*, XXVII/2 (1995), pp. 157-184). Moreover, Leibniz says in NS 11 (L 456-457; GP 4: 483): 'only metaphysical points or those of substance (constituted by forms or monads) are exact and real, and without them there could be nothing real, for without true unities there could not be multiplicity.'

- (1) If substances causally interact, then substances must have parts.
- (2) Substances do not have parts.
- (3) So substances do not causally interact.

The key to understanding this argument is to understand why transeunt causation requires monads have parts. Leibniz lays out his full argument in Mon 3-7 (see p. below for the text). A detailed examination of this argument will occupy most of section 2 of this paper. For now it will suffice to summarize the argument as it is usually attributed to Leibniz. Since monads have no parts, they cannot undergo any kind of change that involves a re-arrangement, acquisition, or deprivation of parts. Most forms of intersubstantial causation involve such changes: things lose or gain physical parts, or undergo some change to internal structure. A common Scholastic view held that attributes passed from one substance to another when one substance caused another to change.⁸ This view seems to think of attributes as something like metaphysical parts. If these exhaust the kinds of change substances may cause in one another, then Leibniz is right to ban transeunt causation in light of the true unity thesis. These changes all seem to require substances that are not true unities. We must still consider whether Leibniz did think that these changes exhaust the possibilities, however, and that will be part of the detailed discussion of the true unity argument in the next section. For now, I want to see if the very general form of the argument provides a response to the objection I raised above.

The true unity thesis suggests that it is the nature of all substances to be true unities. This is because only simple things really exist for Leibniz. Composites are less "real" for Leibniz than their constituents, so only things with no parts are real. Now according to Leibniz, God also is a substance. Therefore God is a true unity. If it is in the very nature of substantial interaction that it require parts, then no substance, not even God, may participate in such interaction. Here I seem to have what I was looking for—a

⁸This is sometimes called *influx*, and the classic proponent was Suarez. Leibniz has much to say against influx, most of which is tendentious (See the 2nd and 3rd *Explanation of the New System* (L 459-60; GP 4: 498-499; GP 4: 500)). Some cite Leibniz's rejection of influx as a reason for his denial of intersubstantial causation (See N. Jolley: 'Causality and Creation in Leibniz', in: *The Monist*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 591-611; S. Brown: *Leibniz*, Minneapolis, 1984.). However, Leibniz's remarks at Mon 7, which ridicule influx, seem to suggest that the impossibility of transeunt causation is a *reason* for rejecting influx. Because of the confusion surrounding this issue, I have chosen not to dwell on influx in this paper.

denial of transeunt causation that seems to apply without exception to all substances insofar as they are substances. That they cannot act on one another is entailed by what it means to be a substance—to act on one another would go against their natures. So making an exception for God, in this case, seems *ad hoc*.

Now Leibniz of course needs God to be able to interact with substances, as we saw when we looked at the concept-containment argument. One way he might allow for this is to claim that there is something special about the way God interacts with substances, some way that does not involve a movement of physical or metaphysical parts. I next turn to looking in detail at the argument in Mon 3-7, to see if Leibniz leaves room to distinguish such a way.

2. *The True-Unity Argument and Kinds of Causation*

Here is the text (Mon 3-7; L 643; GP 6: 607-608):

3. But where there are no parts, it is impossible to have either extension, or figure, or divisibility. The monads are the true atoms of nature; in a word, they are the elements of things.
4. We need fear no dissolution in them, and there is no conceivable way in which a simple substance can be destroyed naturally.
5. For the same reason there is no way in which a simple substance can have a natural beginning, since it cannot be formed by composition.
6. So one can say that monads can begin or end all at once, that is, they cannot begin except by creation or end except by annihilation. That which is compounded, instead, begins and ends in parts.
7. (a) There is likewise no way of explaining how a monad can be altered internally by any other creature, since nothing can be transposed in it, and we cannot conceive in it, as we can in composite things among whose parts there may be changes, that any internal motion can be excited, directed, increased, or diminished from without. (b) Monads have no windows through which anything could enter or depart. Accidents cannot be detached from substances and march about outside substances, as the sensible species of the Scholastics once did. So neither substance nor attribute can enter a monad from without.⁹

To begin, let us take note of what happens in paragraphs 3-6. In 3, Leibniz reminds us of the true unity thesis: monads have no parts, they are the "true atoms of nature". In 4, he tells us that monads cannot be destroyed "naturally". What does

⁹The labels '(a)' and '(b)' are my own, added for ease of reference.

"naturally" mean, and what is Leibniz's reason for thinking monads cannot be destroyed this way? Leibniz says at DM 16 (L 315; GP 4:441-442) that "everything that is called natural depends on the less general maxims that creatures can comprehend." These less general maxims Leibniz generally takes to be equivalent to natural law¹⁰, which he further understands as a version of Newtonian mechanics. On such a view, matter is neither created nor destroyed, and so anything that comes to be does so from previously existing bits of matter, (it is *composed*) and anything that ceases to be has its composing matter dispersed into the universe (it is *dissolved*). Admittedly, this is a schoolboy's version of the story, but it will suffice here.

So in Mon 4, Leibniz is claiming that no monad is dissolved, or destroyed by having its parts dispersed. Why? The reason is packaged with the thesis: a *simple* substance, Leibniz claims, one with no parts, cannot be dissolved, because it has no parts to disperse. So the true unity thesis of 3 provides the reason for the claim in 4 that monads are not destroyed naturally.

In Mon 5, Leibniz claims that "for the same reason", i.e., on account of the true unity thesis, monads cannot be created naturally or composed. This is of course because if they were composed, they would have parts.

But substances must come to be (and presumably cease to be) somehow. In 6, Leibniz tells us how: monads "begin and end all at once". They are *created* or *annihilated*, rather than *composed* or *dissolved*.¹¹

For the moment, let us set aside annihilation and dissolution. Now it is fair to assume that composition and creation must be caused. Recall that we have two kinds of causation available to us: immanent and transeunt. So it is possible to distinguish four modes of change here:

(ICM): immanently caused composition

(ICR): immanently caused creation

(TCM): transeuntly caused composition

¹⁰ Or more correctly, these maxims constitute God's plan for the universe according to which the *appearance* of natural law obtains. See Adams, p. 86.

¹¹ Similar remarks are found at PNG 2 (L 636; GP 6: 598): 'Monads, having no parts, cannot be formed or decomposed. They cannot begin or end naturally.' Also in NS 4 (L 454; GP 4: 479): 'For as every simple substance which has true unity cannot begin or end except by a miracle, it follows that it cannot begin except by creation, nor end except by annihilation.'

(TCR): transeuntly caused creation

We can also say a few things about some of these. ICR is not of particular interest, as it is not clear that something can create itself.¹² ICM and TCM cannot generate substances because substances are simple--no composition of any kind can generate a true unity. TCR will interest us greatly in what follows, but let me postpone remarks about it until we examine Mon 7.

In 7, Leibniz gives what is usually taken to be his clearest statement of the true unity argument against transeunt causation. He begins by claiming "there is likewise no way of explaining how a monad can be altered internally by any other creature." "Likewise" suggests a link with the arguments in 3-6. The link seems to be the true unity thesis. Leibniz denies internal alteration "since nothing can be transposed in [a substance]," like there can be in a composite thing. There is nothing, no parts, to be transposed. So no substance can undergo internal alteration, *a fortiori*, no substance can undergo internal alteration by another creature (created substance).

For further simplicity, let me define *alteration* as follows. *Alteration* is a kind of change in a substance that involves movements of some parts of the substance. So composition and dissolution will be kinds of alteration: composition will be movement of all parts "into" a substance, and dissolution will be movement of all parts "out" of a substance. Let me define *internal alteration* as alteration that is neither composition nor dissolution. So internal alteration will include "internal motion" that is "excited, directed, increased, or diminished".¹³

Accordingly, we can further distinguish:

(IA): immanently caused alteration

and

(TA): transeuntly caused alteration.

¹²The standard problem here is that if x creates y , x must exist at some time prior to the first time y exists. Let y come to be at t . So x must exist at some time prior to t . But if $x=y$, y must exist at some time prior to t , but this is impossible if t is the time at which y comes to be.

¹³There are of course other distinctions to be drawn here, but to do so would be needlessly pedantic. For example, we might want to call *any* increase of parts composition, and make the coming together of parts to form a substance a special case of composition.

It should be clear, of course, that TCM is a species of TA, while TCR is not (the corresponding relations amongst IA, ICM, and ICR will not be relevant).

We can take Mon 3-7 jointly as an argument against alteration, which uses the true unity thesis as its vital premise: no substance may undergo a change that involves a movement of parts, because substances do not have parts. But notice that we have not seen an argument against transeunt causation as such. Only if transeunt causation involves alteration is it ruled out by this argument.

What is striking about this is that it is common for scholars to treat this passage as a paradigm statement of the doctrine of causal isolation.¹⁴ And it is not without some justification that they do so. In fact, Leibniz himself seems to betray some confusion about exactly what he has shown here. There was no mention of other substances or creatures in the discussion of creation and annihilation. The claims of 4-7 were just that the true unity thesis rules out composition and dissolution. A natural progression for Leibniz to make would be to answer the question: what about alterations *within* a substance? And the answer would of course be that the true unity thesis rules those out, too. But Leibniz, in introducing the subject of internal alteration explicitly mentions other substances. He makes it clear that the object of his next attack is internal alteration *caused by other creatures*. His focus seems to shift from the *kind* of change to the *source* of change, and it is easy for the reader's focus to be carried with Leibniz's.

Leibniz further diverts attention by concluding Mon 7 with a string of metaphors, including one of his most famous, about parts coming from and going outside substances. Once again the emphasis is placed on the source of the changes, and not the kind. Leibniz shifts, with no explanation or warning, from talk about alteration to talk about intersubstantial causation.

Of course, the metaphorical claims are supported by the true unity thesis: if accidents are like metaphysical parts, then they can no more come or go than physical parts. Monads are not metaphysically composed, as some Scholastics thought they were, any more than they are physically composed. So, *a fortiori*, metaphysical parts cannot

¹⁴ Examples of scholars who take this view, or seem to assume it, include M. Kulstad and L. Carlin: *Leibniz's Philosophy of Mind*, in: the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1997, 2000, p. 6.; B. Mates: *The Philosophy of Leibniz: Metaphysics and Language*, New York, 1986, p. 39. Also see D. Rutherford: *Metaphysics: The Late Period*, in: *Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, ed. Nicholas Jolley, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 132-133.

come or go through monadic "windows", nor march about outside substances. But it easy to lose sight of the fact, with all this talk about transeuntly caused alteration, that it is alteration that is the issue, and not transeunt causation.

But is the argument *supposed* to be aimed at all transeunt causation? It is difficult to answer questions about Leibniz's intentions. But the idea is worth considering, and it is worth the attempt to save the traditional reading of the passage. So we might try to make the argument of Mon 7 read validly as an argument against transeunt causation. The attempt will not be successful, but it will be instructive, and open the door to seeing the solution to the problem posed by this paper. Let us render the argument as follows. First, here is what we are given explicitly:

- (1) If a substance is altered, then it has parts (composite of Mon 4-7a).
- (2) No substance has parts (Mon 3, the true unity thesis).
- (3) So no substance is altered.

Here is the conclusion Leibniz seems to want, or at least what many seem to think he wants:

- (4) There is no transeunt causation.

So we need a premise to bridge (3) and (4). An effective one would be:

- (3.1) If there is transeunt causation, then some substance is altered.¹⁵

(3.1) tells us that all transeunt causation involves alteration. If we follow Leibniz in his shift of focus, it is tempting to think he held this view. But notice how this view returns our original inconsistency to the fore: if God (*qua* substance) acts on other substances, then he alters them. Leibniz clearly wants to hold that God acts on substances, but it appears he can only do so on pain of contradiction, at least if we attribute (3.1) to him.

Also notice another reason we should be cautious in attributing (3.1) to Leibniz. Leibniz has already argued in Mon 5 that monads may be created all at once, but not

¹⁵Some might like more care here. A more precise rendering would be as follows. Let variables range over substances, let $A(x)$ represent x is altered, and let $C(y,x)$ represent y causally acts on x .

(3) $\sim\exists xA(x)$

(3.1) $\forall x (\exists y C(y,x) \supset A(x))$

(4) Therefore, $\sim\exists x\exists yC(y,x)$

composed. I noted above that it is not clear that such creation understood as immanently caused is coherent: *prima facie*, something cannot create itself. So if Leibniz thinks substances are created, he must either think this creation is immanently caused, which is questionably coherent, or he must again be faced with contradiction: transeuntly caused creation would entail alteration by (3.1), and alteration would in turn entail that monads have parts.

If however we are willing to reject that Mon 7 is an argument against all forms of transeunt causation, we are under no pressure to attribute (3.1) to Leibniz. And in fact there are more benefits to making this rejection than there are drawbacks. The sole drawback, that I can see, is that we must abandon or revise a traditional interpretation of the passage. I have offered a plausible story of why the passage may easily be taken to be an argument against all transeunt causation, a story that nonetheless yields no commitment to interpreting the argument that way. Since Leibniz's conclusion about TA follows from a general argument against alteration, there is little need to perform interpretive gymnastics to explain why he says what he does: his conclusion follows from his premises. And further, Leibniz does not say that all transeunt causation is ruled out by his argument, so he leaves open the possibility that the argument is not *meant* to rule out all transeunt causation. But Leibniz uses language that emphasizes transeuntly caused alteration, so it is easy to think TA is the target of the argument.

So what are the advantages to abandoning the traditional interpretation? Firstly, we do not need to add anything to the text, or import any premises or assumptions, in order to read the argument validly. This is a rare occurrence in the interpretation of historical philosophy. Secondly, we avoid making the passage conflict with other views Leibniz held. Thirdly, and closely related, we can use this passage as key to understanding Leibniz's views on divine causation. Let me say more about this.

Leibniz tells us in Mon 3-7 that substances can be created or annihilated, but not altered. Moreover, we know Leibniz thinks that if created substances were to interact, they would alter one another (though on my view he does not argue for, but only declares, that view here). So it is very tempting to propose this interpretation of Leibniz: he thinks that created substances do not interact because all such interaction would involve alteration. God, however, may interact with substances, because his interaction does not

involve alteration. How can this be? We know one mode of divine action is *ex nihilo* creation. By definition, this could involve no alteration (specifically, no composition), because there are no previously existing parts. But what about other forms of divine action? It turns out that there are some rather striking passages in Leibniz that suggest that he understands all divine action as creative in nature. If this were the case, then Leibniz has an easy way out of the original inconsistency. Created substances, he may claim, do not interact, because they only alter. But God, even though a substance, may act on other substances because his actions are confined to creative acts, acts that involve no composition or other kind of alteration. So the exception made for God when Leibniz claims "...each substance is as a world apart, independent of everything else outside of itself except God..." turns out not to be ad hoc after all. Gods ways of interacting with other substances are very different from the ways created substances interact with one another.¹⁶

So can we understand God's acts as essentially acts of creation? In the remaining section I will argue that we can.

3. *Creation, Emanation, and Miracles*

I need to take some time here to try to be clear about what I will try to accomplish in this section, and about what I will not try to accomplish. In section 1, I pointed to an inconsistency in Leibniz's views on causation. In section 2, I interpreted a passage of text

¹⁶I have left the door open for a damaging accusation: although I have said that Leibniz thinks all interaction amongst created substances involves alteration, I have not been clear about his reasons for thinking this. One might worry that amongst these reasons, there might be a one that rules out some divine action. So I will make a simple case here that I think will suffice. Substances appear to interact. But Leibniz must deny that they really do on account of the true unity thesis. But I think he assumes that if they did interact, they would interact just as they appear to, i.e., mechanistically, according to natural law. And Leibniz thinks this kind of interaction is always a matter of changing or rearranging physical parts. Because we *see* no non-divine modes of substantial interaction that do not involve alteration, Leibniz assumes there are not any (I think he further believes we can not conceive of any).

But what if natural law is not the whole story? What if there are other ways substances might interact that are not in explained in the physical story of the universe? I think Leibniz intends to cover this contingency in his attacks on the Scholastics. Other accounts, too, of intersubstantial causation involve making substances have parts, e.g., Suarez's story of metaphysical influence. This is why, perhaps, Leibniz includes his window metaphor in Mon 7: however one understands substantial interaction, physically or metaphysically, it will involve giving substances parts, either physical parts or metaphysical parts.

in such a way that allowed for a resolution of the problem. But there is a final task to be performed. Our problem arose because Leibniz insists God acts on substances in three ways: creation, emanation, and the performance of miracles. I argued that Mon 7 leaves the door open for divine action on substances. So we had better check to see if Leibniz's specific accounts of creation, emanation, and miracles harmonize with the kind of causation Mon 7 permits.

Strictly speaking, Mon 7 permits any kind of causation that does not alter. But there are two kinds of non-altering causation that Leibniz explicitly mentions: creation and annihilation. Our final task is now reduced by one-third: what is the original creation of the world but creation "all at once" from no previously existing parts?¹⁷ So creation easily harmonizes with my reading of Mon 7. But what about emanation and miracles?

It would be sufficient for success to show that emanation and miracles are not alterations. But as I mentioned at the end of the last section, there are some striking passages in which Leibniz suggest both emanation and miracles are creative acts. This is interesting, given the content of Mon 7, and the emphasis there on creation as a non-altering mode of change. It would be elegant to show that Leibniz thought of emanation and miracles as kinds of creation. If they were, they would *a fortiori* not be alterations, and it would be easier to believe that Leibniz had all three modes of divine action in mind in Mon 3-7. So this will be my strategy: to suggest that Leibniz thinks of all divine action as creative in nature. This will also prove more philosophically interesting than taking the weaker line, that emanation and miracles are not alterations. This is because there are no passages I am aware of in which Leibniz discusses divine action with this weaker thesis in mind. So there would be very little to discuss at all.

But in tackling Leibniz on divine action we face a difficulty. Leibniz has much to say about divine actions, especially about emanation and miracles. And, as one might expect, there is much scholarly debate about the correct interpretation of these passages. It is unfeasible to develop my own account of the divine actions in the space I have here, and nearly as unfeasible to undertake an inquiry extensive enough to settle on an existing

¹⁷Let us put objections from a literal "six-day" scriptural account aside. Or let us, plausibly, take "the heavens and the earth" of the first day to be "the world".

interpretation. So my approach will be as follows. I will only show that there are respectable, independently motivated accounts of emanation and miracles that are consistent with my reading of Mon 7, and that specifically suggest that emanation and miracles are creative acts. I will take no further steps to argue that they are the best accounts, or try to solve esoteric difficulties with these accounts. It is worth noting, however, that if such accounts already have independent motivations, and taken together with my reading of Mon 7 they rescue Leibniz from an embarrassing inconsistency, then certainly such accounts have a lot to recommend them.

So my plan for this section is this. There is little need to discuss *ex nihilo* creation further. So I will proceed, for each of emanation and the production of miracles, to summarize some of the main hurdles to understanding them. Then I will present an existing account of each, and explain how it clears these hurdles, if it does, and discuss how it is compatible with the work I did in section 2.

3.1 *Emanation*

Leibniz suggests in several places that we are to understand emanation as a continuous conservation of created substances by God. In turn, continuous conservation is to be understood as continuous creation:

...created substances depend on God, who preserves them and indeed even produces them continually by a kind of emanation...(DM 14; L 311; GP 4: 439)

..all created or derivative monads are products, and born, so to speak, through the continual fulgurations of the Divinity...(Mon 47; L 647; GP 6: 614)

On the face of it, then, my account of divine causation as transeunt creative causation accommodates emanation; for if emanation is simply reducible to an act of creation, it fits Mon 3-7 perfectly.

But it would be nice to say more. Any account of emanation will have to say something about what exactly continuous creation or production is supposed to amount to. Will this be the same kind of act described in Mon 5, a bringing into being all at once?

It is very hard to see how it could be. Leibniz sometimes says that in continuous creation each creature "is produced anew at each instant." (T33) So whatever emanation is, it happens at each instant of time. This seems to mean emanation cannot be *ex nihilo* creation. If a creature is created at t , then it exists at t . But if a creature is created from nothing, there must be times prior to its creation when it did not exist (unless it was created at the first instant of time). So for every time (after the beginning of time) at which a substance is created, there must be some prior times at which the substance does not exist. But since every substance is created anew at every instant, these prior times, too, will be times at which the same substance is created. So there will be many times (indeed every instant) at which the same substance both does and does not exist.

But of course, emanation cannot be gradual creation of a single substance over an interval, either. This would just be composition.

So any account of emanation that takes Leibniz's claim at T33 at face value has a serious hurdle to clear: how can anything be *created* anew at each instant?

There is an account that makes a noble attempt to do this. We need to lay down a few preliminaries before we discuss it, however. First, let us recall our basic picture of the structure of a monad. Although there are competing views on this, one standard and reasonably well-motivated view is that a monad contains an entelechy or a sort of active force. This active power moves the monad through each of the states represented in its complete concept. In this sense the monad's entelechy causes the monad to undergo change, as it moves the monad from state to state.

In light of all we have said in this paper about true unity, I should caution the reader here not think of neither the entelechy nor the monad's states as parts of the monad, however tempting it may seem. They of course cannot be parts if monads are true unities. I cannot say much to explain how they are not parts; I can only repeat Leibniz:

The simplicity of substance does not prevent multiplicity of modifications, which must be found together in this same simple substance,...just as in a point, although simple as it is, there is found an infinity of angles formed by the lines which there meet. PNG (L 636; GP 6: 5 98):

Leibniz thinks it is possible to distinguish aspects of monads that are not parts. So when the entelechy causes a monad to change states, we can understand this as immanent causation, because the entelechy is not distinct from the monad itself.

Secondly, we need to say something about Leibniz's views on time. Leibniz, like Kant, maintains a distinction between a *noumenal* and a *phenomenal* realm. The phenomena are the way things appear to created substances, and include things like causal interaction. Substances do not really interact, they only appear (to themselves) to do so. The noumenal realm is the realm of the monads; noumena are how things really are. Monads windowlessly unfold their state-sequences, powered by their entelechies, in noumenal reality.

Leibniz maintains that time is merely phenomenal. It is, as Rescher puts it, the 'order of succession' of monadic states.¹⁸ Monads themselves do not exist in time, but give rise to the appearance of time (somehow) by passing through their various harmonized states.

Now why does God undertake conservative action in the first place? Why do monads need continuous re-production at all? What God contributes to substances is only perfection, because God not imperfection can come from God. But finite substances are imperfect. How do they become this way, if God can only contribute perfection when he creates them? Leibniz claims that the imperfections of a substance are contributed by the substances themselves. It is in the unfolding of the state sequences, which monads cause themselves, that monads become corrupted.

Leibniz considers existence a perfection. Insofar as substances corrupt themselves they, to greater and lesser extents, tend toward non-existence (i.e., they are finite). Leibniz views emanation as a kind of correction action on God's part, to compensate for the imperfection and consequent tendency to non-existence that substances bring on themselves.¹⁹

¹⁸N. Rescher: *Leibniz: An Introduction to His Philosophy*, New Jersey, 1979, p. 86). Also see Leibniz's 5th letter to Clarke (L 696-717; GP 7: 389-420).

¹⁹This is a template of Sleight's view (p. 185). Also consider this passage:

God is the conserver of all things. That is, things are not only produced by God when they begin to exist, but they also would not continue to exist unless a certain continuous action of God terminated in them, on the cessation of which they themselves would also cease.

(Adams' translation, p. 95, from *Textes Inédits*, ed. By Gaston Grua. Paris, 1948, p. 307).

Another relevant text may be DM 15.

One final preliminary should be noted. Activity is also a perfection for Leibniz. In creating a substance, God gives to the substance its active power, which in turn moves the monad through its changes. God's corrective action, consequently, is often thought to be directed at the entelechy. When God creates a monad, he creates the entelechy so that the entelechy will follow the plan of the universe—it will move its monad through each state necessary to the pre-established harmony to obtain. When God exercises emanation, he sustains the entelechy as an active force in the monad, counteracting the monad's own tendency toward imperfection.

We can now look at an account of emanation in which all emanation can be understood as an act of creation. Jacques Jalabert²⁰ makes use of Leibniz's view of time to get around the problem with continuous creation we saw above. Jalabert proposes that there is only one divine act of creation that brings the world to be. This act happens outside of time, as it is noumenal act, an action involving God and substances. Emanation, Jalabert claims, is no additional act of God. The compensatory addition of perfection is simply built in to the plan by which each monad proceeds through its states. So God contributes these perfections, only once, at creation. But the perfections distributed, or executed, only at moments in phenomenal time indeed at each moment).

We think of emanation as creation described from the monad's point of view. God, in creating the active power outside of time, tells the entelechy, as it were, what to do at each moment of time. These instructions will include the compensatory increases in perfection. But from "inside" the monad, these perfections appear to be counteracting, at each moment of time, the ever-increasing imperfections of the monad.²¹

So on this view, emanation is a creative act. It is in fact none other than the original *ex nihilo* creation.

²⁰J. Jalabert: *La théorie leibnizienne de la substance*, Paris, 1946. I take my account of Jalabert from Daniel Fouke, as, to my knowledge, there is no English translation of Jalabert's treatise: D. Fouke: 'Emanation and the Perfections of Being: Divine Causation and the Autonomy of Nature in Leibniz', in: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 76 (1994), pp. 168-194.

²¹ Jalabert's basis for this view is a letter from Leibniz to Bourguet (GP 3:558). Further support, arguably, may be found in this paragraph from the *Theodicy* (388; GP 6: 346):

Suppose that the creature is produced anew at each instant; grant also that the instant, being indivisible, excludes all temporal priority. But let us notice that it does not exclude priority in nature, or what is called priority *in Signo rationis*, and that is enough. The production or action by which God produces is prior in nature to the existence of the creature that is produced; the creature taken in itself, with its nature and its necessary properties, is prior to its accidental affections, and its actions; and yet all these things occur in the same moment.

There will of course be problems with Jalabert's view, not the least of which is articulating it clearly and non-metaphorically. Fouke also worries it is that it is dismissive of Leibniz's repeated emphasis on continuous action when he speaks of emanation. But as with many debates in Leibniz interpretation, one will eventually be forced to treat some significant portions of text as metaphorical, careless, or as slips.

So I offer Jalabert's view as a way of understanding emanation that harmonizes with my reading of Mon 7. It is motivated primarily by the need to understand how creation could in any sense operate continuously. It is a happy consequence that the view gives a story of emanation that makes it simply a kind of creation.

It should be noted that, despite the difficulty of making sense of emanation, any account would feature its creative aspect prominently, as it is emphasized by Leibniz as much as its continuity. So although the proposal I have advanced in this section is perhaps not the best one, a better will no doubt also treat emanation as essentially creative. For this reason, however it is to be understood, emanation will likely be amenable to the model of causation permitted by Mon 3-7 .

3.2 *Miracles*

There are two dominant views on Leibniz's attitude to miracles, both suggested by things Leibniz himself has written. Here, too, I will discuss a few preliminaries before turning to the views.

Leibniz draws a distinction between plans for the universe. He recognizes the *general* or *universal* order "governs the mutual relations of absolutely all substances and events in the universe. By definition, it is without exception." (Adams, p. 85, supported by DM 16, 17). Leibniz also recognizes the *subordinate* or *natural* order. It differs from the universal order in that "the general order of the actual world... cannot be comprehended by any created monad (DM 16)...On the other hand, 'everything that is called natural depends on the less general maxims that creatures can comprehend' (DM 16; GP 4: 441-442). These less general maxims include the 'laws of nature' that human science can in principle discover. And there can be exceptions to them." (Adams, p. 86)

We know that Leibniz thinks that everything that happens to a substance is a ‘consequence’ of its complete concept. We also know that each monad contains an active power or entelechy that motivates or causes the monad to pass through its sequence of states.²² It has been further suggested that God’s creative action generates an entelechy, and the entelechy generates the monad’s states; the entelechy is created in such a way that it generates those states that are contained in the concept of the monad.

Leibniz repeatedly claims a monad’s states in some reflect the states of all the other monads, from its own point of view. Or in other words, a monad’s own states map onto all the changes that appear to take place in the world: ”Now each individual substance in my opinion is an expression of the whole universe in accordance with a certain viewpoint...” (LA 44; GP 2:41) If the universe unfolds according to a plan, and each monad’s state sequence also unfolds according to a plan, and further, there is to be a mapping of states of a monad onto changes in the universe, then there must be monadic counterparts the plan of the universe. This leads to the natural question: to which plan does the monadic version correspond, the universal or the natural?

It turns out there is a monadic counterpart to each:

We can therefore define our essence or idea as that which includes everything which we express. And since our substance expresses our union with God himself, it has no limits and nothing is beyond it. But whatever is limited in us could be called our nature or power, and in this sense, whatever surpasses the natures of all created substances is supernatural (DM 16; L 314; GP 4: 442).

This distinction, between the *essence* and the *nature*, is what gives rise to the two interpretations of Leibniz’s view on miracles. Some argue that the plan according to which a monad’s active power propels the monad is the essence. Others argue that it is the nature. Which plan you think governs the monad will determine what view you attribute to Leibniz.

Leibniz thinks that miracles are a part of the universal order, but not the natural. He says they ”are in conformity with the universal laws of the general order’ (DM 16; GP

²² NS 14 (GP 4: 484); Mon 15, 18.

4: 441). but not, he claims, with certain ‘subordinate maxims or laws of nature’ (DM 16; GP 4: 441).²³ So when Leibniz says:

...strictly speaking God works a miracle when he does a thing that surpasses the forces he has given to creatures and conserves in them (LA 116; GP 2: 93)

it is tempting to think that the monadic plan is the nature, not the essence.

If the monadic plan is the nature, however miraculous states are ”extra“ states in a monadic state sequence. They are not included amongst those states that God instructs the entelechy to take monads through at creation. When God performs a miracle, he must ”add“ the miraculous state to a monad’s sequence.

Adams presents the following objection to this view. Recall that each monad expresses the entire universe from its own point of view. If a miraculous state is added to one monad, this state must be reflected by all the other monads as well. So God must add customized version of the miraculous state to all monads, when he adds it to one. No problem for God, one might think. Adams responds:

Does the divine ‘clock-maker’ have to intervene in each of us at every instant to cause us to perceive the miracles that occur in the universe? Or does he adjust us all only once, when the miracle occurs, in which case our perceptions after the miracle do not perfectly agree or harmonize with those before? Each of these would certainly be unpalatable to Leibniz. (p. 93)

Why would these be unpalatable to Leibniz? Primarily because Leibniz was an opponent of occasionalism, and this view seems to amount to a version of occasionalism.²⁴

Instead, Adams proposes that we think of the monadic plan as its essence.²⁵ On this view, the plan according to which monads moved through their state sequences would include miraculous states, and these states would properly be reflected in every other monad without occasional intervention by God: ”Now each individual substance in my opinion is an expression of the whole universe in accordance with a certain viewpoint, and *consequently it is also an expression of the miracles mentioned above*“ (LA 44; GP 2: 41).

²³”...miracles nonetheless belong to the general order, are in conformity with God’s main plans, and consequently are contained in the concept of this universe, the latter being a result of those plans“ (LA 43; GP 2: 40).

²⁴ Cf. *2nd Explanation of the New System*, L 460 (GP 4: 499).

²⁵He dismisses the passage at LA 116. He claims that Leibniz does not mean to describe the monadic plan or complete concept when he speaks of ‘forces’.

It is easy to see how this second view, that miracles are contained in the monadic plan, harmonizes with the my reading of Mon 7. Like emanation, the performance of miracles is no additional act of God. Miracles are built-in to the causal sequences of monads at creation, and the active power of the monad, not God, causes the monad to move into its miraculous state. So miracles, too, can be seen as essentially creative acts.

In the end, it appears there are ways to reduce all divine action in Leibniz to the original act of creation. It is therefore very interesting to recall the passage from the *Monadology*, in which Leibniz explicitly mentions only creation and annihilation as possible alternatives to alteration.

If I have made a plausible case in what has preceded, we may have some reason after all to think that Leibniz did more than entertain the view expressed in the passage he struck. His argument at Mon 7 may be a careful attempt to leave room, amidst an otherwise global ban on intersubstantial causation, for God's actions.

Primary Sources:

(L) *Philosophical Papers and Letters*. Trans. and ed. by Leroy Loemker, 2nd ed. Dordrecht and Boston, 1969.

All from the Loemker edition:

(DM) *Discourse on Metaphysics*

(N) *Preface to Edition of Nizolius*

(NS) *New System of Nature*

(PNG) *Principles of Nature and Grace*

(Mon) *Monadology*

Additionally:

(LA) *The Leibniz-Arnauld Correspondence*. Ed. and trans. by H.T. Mason, Manchester, 1967

(T) *Theodicy*. Trans. by E.M. Huggard, LaSalle, 1985.

All primary source citations are cross-referenced to the Gerhardt edition of Leibniz's complete works:

(GP) *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*. Edited by C.I. Gerhardt. Berlin: Weidman, 1875-1890. Cited by volume and page.

