

Activity and Ends in Leibniz

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Leibniz's rehabilitation of Aristotelian metaphysics

"I perceived that it is impossible to find the principles of a true unity in matter alone, or in what is only passive [...] Therefore, in order to find these real unities, I was forced to have recourse to a real and animated point, so to speak, or to an atom of substance which must include something of form or activity [*forme et actif*] to make a complete being. [I]t was necessary to restore, and, as it were, to rehabilitate the substantial forms which are in such disrepute today, but in a way that would make them intelligible, and separate the use one should make of them from the abuse that has been made of them." (*Système nouveau de la nature...* (1695), GP IV 479/AG 139)

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The realm of final causes

"Souls act according to the laws of final causes, through appetitions, ends, and means. Bodies act according to the laws of efficient causes or of motions. And these two realms [*règnes*], that of efficient causes and that of final causes, are in harmony with each other." (*Monadology* (1714) #79)

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Plan

- (1) A prevalent view of Leibnizian final causes or ends as *future states*
- (2) Ends as *atemporal*: some Aristotelian distinctions
- (3) *Activity* (proper operation) as an atemporal end for Leibniz
- (4) Ends and the unity of substance
- (5) Some differences between Leibniz and Aristotelians

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Ends as future states

Martha Bolton:
"The final cause of an agent's act is a future state insofar as the agent has a desire for it which causes the agent to act if means are at hand."
("Change in the Monad," in Watkins (ed.), *The Divine Order, the Human Order, and the Order of Nature: Historical Perspectives*, 2013, p. 178)

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- "[E]verything happens mechanically in the body, or in accordance with the laws of motion, and [...] everything happens morally in the soul, or in accordance with the appearances of good and evil, to the point that even in our instincts or in involuntary actions, where only the body seems to be involved, there is in the soul an appetite for good or an aversion to evil which pushes it, even though it is too confused for our reflection to distinguish it." (Letter to Sophie Charlotte 1704, GP III 347)
- Monads as (something like) Cartesian minds?
- Does the future state conception really capture the essence of Leibniz's notion of final causes? No, Leibniz as trying to recover a notion of end as "atemporal."

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Some Aristotelian distinctions

First actuality: the substance, constituted by its form as having a set of potencies/powers

Second actuality: operation, the exercise or actualization of potencies

- “[T]he less perfect is always for the sake of the more perfect: and consequently as the matter is for the sake of the form, so the form which is the first act, is for the sake of its operation, which is the second act; and thus operation is the end of the creature [*operatio est finis rei creatae*].” (Thomas Aquinas, ST Ia 105.5co, transl. Fathers of the English Dominican Province)
- “a thing is desirable insofar as it is perfected, for all things desire their own perfection.” (ST Ia 5.1co)

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Proper operation as end

- “[T]he final good of everything is its ultimate perfection, and the form is its first perfection while its operation is the second [...] Accordingly, the final good of everything must be found in its operation. If then man has some proper operation [*operatio propria*], his final good which is happiness must consist in this”. (*In Ethica* I.X.2, transl. Litzinger)
- “Now it is evident that each thing has an operation proper which belongs to it according to its form. But the form of man is his soul, whose act is living [*vivere*], not indeed living as the mere existence of a living thing, but a special vital operation, for example, understanding or sensing.” (*In Ethica* I.X.6)
- “In fact, all other human operations seem to be ordered to this one [contemplation], as to an end.” (SCG III:37, transl. Bourke)

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Operation as an end in itself

- “[A]n action may sometimes terminate in something which is made, as a building does in a house, and as healing does in health. Sometimes, however, it does not, as in the cases of understanding and sensing. Now, if an action does in fact terminate in something that is made, the inclination of the agent tends through the action towards the thing that is produced. But, if it does not terminate in a product, then the inclination of the agent tends toward the action itself.” (SCG III.2)
- Aristotle’s distinction between kinesis and energeia (*Metaphysics* IX.6):
 - *Kinesis* is an operation with an internal limit in the sense of being directed to a further end-state.
 - *Energeia* is an operation lacking internal limit, there is no further end-state to which it is directed. An energeia is an end in itself.

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Leibniz: “New System” passage

“I perceived that it is impossible to find the principles of a true unity in matter alone, or in what is only passive [...] Therefore, in order to find these real unities, I was forced to have recourse to a real and animated point, so to speak, or to an atom of substance which must include something of form or activity [*forme et actif*] to make a complete being. [...] It was necessary to restore, and, as it were, to rehabilitate the substantial forms which are in such disrepute today, but in a way that would make them intelligible, and separate the use one should make of them from the abuse that has been made of them. I found then that their nature consists in force, and that from this there follows something analogous to sensation and appetite, so that we must conceive of them on the model we have of souls. [...] Aristotle calls them *first entelechies*; I call them, perhaps more intelligibly, *primitive forces*, which contain not only act or the completion of possibility, but also an original activity [*activité originale*].” (*Système nouveau de la nature...* (1695), GP IV 479/AG 139)

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- What commentators usually focus of: the nature of substantial forms “consists in force, and that from this there follows something analogous to sensation and appetite, so that we must conceive of them on the model we have of souls.”
- “Cartesian” reading: Leibniz’s point as being that we should cash out the notion of substantial form/final cause in terms of that of mind/mental representation.

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Force, activity, energeia

“Aristotle calls them [substantial forms] *first entelechies*; I call them, perhaps more intelligibly, *primitive forces*, which contain not only act or the completion of possibility, but also an original activity [*activité originale*].” (*Système nouveau de la nature...* (1695), GP IV 479/AG 139)

- ‘Activity’ is Leibniz’s rendering of the Aristotelian *energeia*.
- Force is to be understood in terms of activity. Force is not a power in the Aristotelian sense of a potency (or more generally some sort of dispositional property) but force is an operation.

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Activity and living

- “And so beyond extension, which is the seat or principle of shapes, we ought to posit a seat or first subject of actions, namely a soul, a form, a life, a first entelechy, as I would like to call it.” (To Bernoulli 1698, AG 169/A III.vii 944)
- “[...] entelechy, that is, a primitive activity [*Activitatis primitivae*], soul, life.” (To Bernoulli 1698, AG 169/A III.vii 944)
- “[T]his primitive active force, which one can call life, is [...] exactly what is contained in what we call a soul, or in simple substance” (*Entretien entre Philarete et Ariste* 1712, AG 264/RML 451)

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Soul

Back to the “New system” passage: the nature of substantial forms “consists in force, and that from this there follows something analogous to sensation and appetite, so that we must conceive of them on the model we have of souls.”

- “Cartesian” reading: Leibniz’s point as being that we should cash out the notion of substantial form/final cause in terms of that of mind/mental representation.
- Alternative “Aristotelian” reading:
 - soul as invoking the idea of principle of life
 - Force as activity/proper operation: natural way of understanding appetite as “following” from force, i.e. as ordered to/for the sake of a substance’s proper operation (the hierarchical structure of appetites/operations)

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Unity and final cause

- Recall: In the “New system” Leibniz starts out by considerations about “true”/“real” unity. How is force connected to unity?
- **Teleological unity:** final cause as proper operation, as that around which an agent’s other operations are organized, explains the the unity of the agent.
- Teleological unity is “top-down”
- Mechanistic universe as “bottom-up”
- If real unity for Leibniz is teleological, this explains the need to move beyond the mechanistic order in order to find real unity.

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Ends without first/second actuality?

- In the “New system” passage Leibniz explicitly targets the distinction between first and second actuality:

“Aristotle calls them [substantial forms] *first entelechies*; I call them, perhaps more intelligibly, *primitive forces*, which contain not only act or the completion of possibility, but also an original activity.”
- Activity is not the realization of the potencies of a first actuality, but is constitutive of the form (the substance) itself.
- Motivation: Leibniz is trying to do is to work out the metaphysical foundations of the plenum mechanistic view.

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Some implications

- A realm of final causes: insofar as the very nature of substance consists in an activity, which is also its final cause or end, this yields a very literal sense in which the realm of substances is a realm of final causes.
- What is a monad? Not (something like) a Cartesian mind, but a life activity.
- An alternative account of the reason for attributing perception to all substances?

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The End

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