Activity and Ends in Leibniz
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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 (régnes), that of efficient causes and that of final causes, are in harmony with each other." (Monadology [1714] #79)

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 acte] to make a complete being. [...] it was necessary to restore, and, as it were, to rehabilitate the substantial forms which are in such dispute 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)

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

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."

• "[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 1764, GP II 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.”
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

- Aristotle's distinction between kinesis and energeia (Metaphysics XI.8):
  - Kinesis is an operation lacking an internal limit, there is no further end-state to which it is directed. An energeia is an end in itself.

- What commentators usually focus on: 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.

Proper operation as an end

- "If the 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 there has some proper operation (operatio propria), its final good which is happiness must consist in this." (Thomas Aquinas, ST Ia 105.5co, transl. Fathers of the English Dominican Province)

- "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 (actio originale)." (Système nouveau de la nature… (1695), GP IV 479/AG 139)

- "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 original activity (actio originale).

  - "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.
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)

* “[. . .] this 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 Philarère et Ariste 1712, AG 264/RML 451)

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 such.”

* "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 form, i.e. as ordered to/for the sake of a substance’s proper operation (the hierarchical structure of appetites/operations)

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”
  • Mechatronic universe as "bottom-up"
  • If real unity for Leibniz is teleological, this explains the need to move beyond the mechatronic order in order to find real unity.

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 mechatronic view.

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?

The End