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Modes, Monads and Nomads: Individuals in Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze

A Dissertation Presented

by

Adam Wilkins

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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The dissertation is a comparative study of the theory of individuals (in the most general ontological sense) in Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze, aiming to reach a better understanding of all three of these theories. The parallels drawn between them serve to illuminate all three, but this study is especially oriented towards the understanding of Deleuze, whose theory, being about three hundred years younger, has received the least philosophical attention.

My comparison is structured by parallel subdivisions into essence, existence and actual individuals. That is, for each of the three philosophers to be studied, I consider what they propose as the essence of an individual, how they conceive its existence to come about, and what activity characterizes the actual individual once it exists. Based on readings of key primary texts, I show that all three philosophers share a conception of essence as the principle of activity of the individual of which it is the essence. Their accounts of how existence comes about, however, are widely divergent, and as a result the way the essence acts as a principle of activity for the actual individual is distinctive in each philosopher's account.

As a secondary task, I undertake to criticize a few points in Deleuze's reading of Spinoza and Leibniz. I contend, through a careful consideration of Deleuze's claims and a comparison with the relevant texts in Spinoza and Leibniz, that Deleuze's introduction of the concepts of intensity and extensity into his reading of Spinoza, and his account of the relationship between individual and world in Leibniz, do more to obscure Spinoza and Leibniz's claims than to clarify them.

As might be expected, the overall picture that emerges is a complicated one. Deleuze is not as close to Spinoza or Leibniz as his own comments on them might at times suggest. Spinoza and Leibniz differ on many specific points. And yet all three philosophers share a broad conception of the role of the essence of an individual.

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List of Abbreviations

Spinoza

References to Spinoza are to *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Vol. I, edited and translated by Edwin Curley, unless otherwise indicated. References to the *Ethics* are made with the usual system of abbreviations, in which, for example, 1d1 refers to definition 1 of part 1 of the *Ethics*, 4p34 refers to proposition 34 of part 4 of the *Ethics*, and 3p7d refers to the demonstration of proposition 7 of part 3 of the *Ethics*. The numbers 1-5 refer to the parts of the *Ethics*, and a second number refers to the particular definition, proposition, etc. The following abbreviations are used:

a = axiom
c = corollary
d (followed by a numeral) = definition
d (not followed by a numeral) = demonstration
p = proposition
s = scholium
exp = explanation

Leibniz

The following abbreviations are used in citing Leibniz:

- A: *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Ed. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, Darmstadt, Leipzig, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923 –. (Series number, volume number, page number.)
- AG: G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, Trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989.
- G: *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, Ed. C. I. Gerhardt, Berlin: Weidmann, 1875-90. Reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1978. (Volume in roman numerals followed by page number).
- GM: *Leibnizens Mathematische Schriften*, Ed. C. I. Gerhardt, Berlin: A. Ascher; and Halle: H. W. Schmidt, 1949-63. Reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1971. (Volume in roman numerals followed by page number).
- Grua: *Textes inédits d'après la bibliothèque provinciale de Hanovre*, Ed. Gaston Grua, Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1948. Reprint, New York and London:

Garland Publishing, 1985.

- Huggard: G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, Trans. E. M. Huggard, Chicago: Open Court, 1985 (First published London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1951).
- Klopp: *Die Werke von Leibniz*. Edited by O. Klopp. Erste Reihe. 11 vols. Hannover: Klindworth, 1864-1884.
- L: G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, Ed. Leroy E. Loemker, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989. (First edition: Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956; Second edition: Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1969).
- Mason: *The Leibniz-Arnauld Correspondence*, ed. and trans. H. T. Mason, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985. (Originally published: Manchester: Manchester University Press; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967.)
- NE: G. W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Ed. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (The page numbers given in the margins of this edition are equivalent to the page numbers of A 6.6.)
- Riley: *The Political Writings of Leibniz*. Edited and Translated by P. Riley. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.
- Schrecker: G. W. Leibniz, *Monadology and Other Philosophical Essays*, Trans. Paul Schrecker and Anne Martin Schrecker, Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965.
- WF: G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Texts*, Trans. and Ed. R. S. Woolhouse and Richard Francks, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Deleuze

The following abbreviations are used in citing Deleuze:

- DR: Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Originally published as *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968).
- LS: *The Logic of Sense*. Edited by Constantin V. Boundas. Trans. by Mark Lester and Charles Stivale. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990. Originally published as *Logique du sens* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969).

Introduction

What follows is a comparative study of the theory of individuals in Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze. Its purpose is simply a better understanding of all three of these theories. Of the three philosophers to be studied, Leibniz is the only one who is well known for his theory of individuals. My hope is that parallels drawn between them will serve to illuminate all three, but this study is especially oriented towards the understanding of Deleuze, whose theory, being about three hundred years younger, has received the least philosophical attention.

A secondary aim will be to criticize Deleuze's reading of Spinoza and Leibniz with regard to a few key points relating to the theory of individuals. Since Deleuze's aim in reading other philosophers was generally creative appropriation rather than accuracy of interpretation, these criticisms will be beside the point in that respect. However, as far as the understanding of Deleuze goes, it is helpful to be able to distinguish between a comparison with Spinoza and Leibniz, and a comparison with Deleuze's version of Spinoza and Leibniz. It seems to me that some of the secondary literature on Deleuze would gain in clarity by making this distinction.

My comparison will be structured by parallel chapter subdivisions into essence, existence and actual individuals. That is, for each of the three philosophers to be studied, I will consider what they propose as the essence of an individual, how they conceive its

existence to come about, and what activity characterizes the actual individual once it exists. This frame will provide a way to highlight similarities and differences, hopefully without distorting the theories to be presented too severely.

To give some context to the main discussion, it might be helpful to provide a very quick overview of the context in which Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze develop their respective theories of individuals.

Spinoza's main work is the *Ethics*, and although I will be considering it only for a section of the ontology it presents, it is oriented by the much grander goal of laying out the path to human blessedness. To this end, Spinoza begins by giving an account of the nature of God, demonstrating God's existence, and more or less identifying God, substance and nature. Finite individuals, such as human beings, are then shown to be 'modes' of God or substance, characterized by their dependence on God both for their essence and their existence. They also depend on, and are at the mercy of, one another, as far their existence is concerned. The main thrust of Spinoza's discussion is then aimed at identifying the forces that destabilize and threaten human existence and at studying the means for promoting those forces that stabilize and improve human existence. The ultimate goal is to achieve a kind of eternal existence through one's relation to God. Within this project, the ontology of individual finite modes is a small step along the way, one with significant consequences for Spinoza's project, but which receives relatively little direct discussion.

Leibniz's project is much less unified than Spinoza's, and he has no single primary philosophical work. One of his main motivations seems to have been the goal of

establishing a unified metaphysical theory that would undermine sectarian divisions within Christianity, and perhaps also attenuate other religious conflicts as well. Leibniz also wanted to unify ancient and modern philosophy, and he was motivated by the goals of scientific inquiry, making significant contributions to mathematics and physics, besides having intellectual pursuits in numerous other areas as well. His metaphysics was conceived, then, with various interests in view, and his goal was that it should harmonize with all of them. Leibniz had a more orthodox view of God than Spinoza, conceiving of God as a transcendent creator who chose to create the world of finite things in which we find ourselves. Finite individuals are not modes, but substances, which depend for their existence only on God. These individuals are unextended and do not interact causally with one another. They are simple and imperishable except through direct annihilation by God. Their internal complexity is conceived on the model of perception. The extended world of everyday experience is a phenomenal one, resulting from the perceptions of these unextended substances. Leibniz's theory of individual substances is one of the most striking theories of individuals in the history of philosophy, because of the extreme self-containment and isolation that he ascribes to them on the strict ontological level.

Leibniz was only fourteen years younger than Spinoza, although he outlived him by almost forty years. The context of Deleuze's philosophy, coming almost three hundred years later, is radically different. A good candidate, at least, for Deleuze's main work of philosophy is *Difference and Repetition*. There Deleuze tries to develop a philosophy of difference, one that does not accord the notion of identity its traditional

privilege, and he promotes an ethical vision that privileges transformation and instability over stability, identity or unity. Arguably something in Deleuze's ontology does take up the role played by God in the ontologies of Spinoza and Leibniz, but in his case it would have to be called Becoming or Life or Process or Event – a non-unifying dynamic level of reality that is not an entity independent of the finite individuals that actualize it. Individuals, then, are understood in relation to this process of difference, as actualizations of it. Deleuze uses this theory to undermine both traditional philosophical ideas about individual identity and common sense ideas on the same topic. His focus in *Difference and Repetition* is rarely on the actual individuals themselves, but rather on the processes and events which contribute to their genesis and transformation.

I will be abstracting from these significant differences of context in comparing the work of these three philosophers. Given these differences, it is not surprising that the parallels I will be able to draw will be far from perfect; but against this background the similarities that do exist should seem all the more striking.

Three concepts that structure my whole discussion are those of individual, essence and existence. A few brief remarks in advance may be in order.

We will be looking at three complex metaphysical answers to the question of what an individual is. However, it should be noted that I am not using 'individual' in the sense of 'rational human agent' or in any sense that would imply personhood, but rather in a much more general ontological sense. Briefly, individuals are the basic, finite, actually existing things of each of our three philosophers' respective ontologies. Their individuals do not necessarily correspond to what would normally be called an

individual. Strawson proposed a rough distinction between descriptive and revisionary metaphysics; if we adopt Strawson's distinction, the three philosophers I will be considering here clearly fall on the revisionary side. Strawson writes, "Descriptive metaphysics is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world, revisionary metaphysics is concerned to produce a better structure."¹ Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze all contend that our usual way of thinking about individual things is misleading, and propose challenging alternatives defined within the conceptual structures they themselves work out.

As for essence, there are strong similarities in the way that Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze think of essences or their equivalents. They all use the term in a way that has ontological import, that is, essences for them are part of reality and not just mental constructs. Also, for all of them, essences, in the sense with which I am concerned, are referred to individuals rather than to, say, species or categories of things. Finally, for all of them, one of the main things an essence does is account for the activity of the individual of which it is the essence; this can be contrasted with theories of essence aimed mainly at securing identity. The notion of essence that is relevant here, then, is ontological, tied to individuals, and provides a principle of activity. Essences form a domain of reality that can be contrasted with the domain of existence, which corresponds at least partially to the spatio-temporal world of everyday experience. Essences have neither the same temporal structure nor the same spatial structure as existing individuals.

¹ P. F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Routledge, 1990; First published in 1959) 9.

Also, for all three philosophers we will be looking at, existence will require an additional ground or cause that is not needed to ground the reality of essences alone.

Existence, I have said, is that domain of reality that has approximately the spatio-temporal structure of everyday experience. It is the domain in which an essence becomes the principle of activity for an existing individual. My approach to existence will not be to ask what each philosopher thinks existence is, but to ask how the existence of individuals comes about. It is on this topic, it seems to me, that the contrasts between Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze become most striking, and threaten to overshadow the similarities. Spinoza will ascribe coming into existence to the activity of finite individuals already in existence; Leibniz will ascribe it to a direct act of creation by God, following the choice of which world to create; and Deleuze will describe a complex process of actualization that creates the features of existing individuals.

The point for me of speaking of essence and existence is not to prejudge the meaning of those concepts, but to provide a framework for comparison. This framework will prove justified to the extent that a worthwhile comparative study is made possible by its use. However, the terminology of essence and existence is closer to Spinoza and Leibniz than to Deleuze. Indeed, it might strike a reader familiar with Deleuze as strange is that I refer to the 'essence' of an individual in Deleuze. (In fact, there are commentators on all three of the philosophers I am considering who think that the philosopher in question has no real use for the notion of essence – it all depends on what one takes 'essence' to mean.) Deleuze does not often use the terminology of essence when speaking in his own voice. One reader of Deleuze, Manuel DeLanda, portrays

Deleuze's philosophy in direct contrast to theories that posit essences: "[I]n some realist approaches the world is thought to be composed of fully formed objects whose identity is guaranteed by their possession of an *essence*, a core set of properties that defines what these objects are. Deleuze is *not* a realist about essences"² However, another commentator on Deleuze, Bruce Baugh, proposes on the contrary "to make sense of the proposition that Deleuze is a realist about essences"³ The issue here is terminological. DeLanda finds it useful to give a narrow definition of 'essence' and to view Deleuze in opposition to that.⁴ Baugh, who is reading Deleuze's texts on Spinoza, where the term 'essence' is used freely and in a way that suggests parallels with Deleuze's other work where this term is not used, finds it useful to see *some kind* of essences playing a role in Deleuze's philosophy. We will see in chapter 4 that Deleuze does acknowledge parallels between his own concepts and traditional discussions of essence and existence.

Chapter outlines

What follows is divided into four chapters. The first deals with Spinoza. Spinoza grounds the reality of the essences of individual finite modes in the attributes of God.

² DeLanda *Intensive Science* 2-3

³ Baugh "Real Essence..." 32

⁴ DeLanda actually seems to refer to more than one notion of essence, but they are all ones that he takes Deleuze to reject. For instance, he writes, "Essences are thought to act as *models*, eternally maintaining their identity, while particular entities are conceived as mere *copies* of these models, resembling them with a higher or lower degree of perfection" (*Intensive Science* 4). He also refers to the notion of essence as a set of 'core properties' on the previous page.

The key text is Spinoza's discussion of individual bodies in the *Ethics*, which reveals a conception of individual essence as a structure or relation of moving parts. Essentially made up of parts, such an individual comes into existence by being composed out of the parts of pre-existing individuals and endures as long as the structure relating the parts can be maintained. For the actual individual, then, the essence determines actions to be taken internally and sometimes externally for the preservation of the essential structure. The activity of the individual appears as a striving to maintain this structure.

The second chapter concerns Leibniz. The essences of Leibnizian individual substances are first of all concepts in God's understanding. These define not only entire individual histories, but an infinity of possible worlds of such histories. God chooses the best of the possible worlds for existence, seeking to maximize metaphysical perfection, harmony, and the happiness and virtue of rational creatures. In the actual individual substance, the essence is the law of the series of its states, which unfolds without opposition or deviation. We will see that there are striking differences between Leibniz and Spinoza with respect to the ontology of individuals. Spinoza presents us with partial, composite, conflictual, perishable individuals, while Leibniz presents closed, simple, harmonious, imperishable ones. Spinoza's primary model seems to be the body, while Leibniz's is the soul.

Having offered some interpretation of the theories of individuals in Spinoza and Leibniz in the first two chapters, I will turn in the third to criticize a few key points from Deleuze's interpretation of these philosophers. I will point to some of the ways in which Deleuze seems to me to import concepts of his own into his interpretation of texts

relevant to the theories I am discussing. I will be far from offering an overall assessment of Deleuze's treatment of Spinoza and Leibniz. My aim will be to show how he assimilates these philosophers to his own position, and to let this stand in contrast with the far less perfect parallels that will emerge from my discussion of all three philosophers.

In the fourth chapter I will discuss the theory of individuals in Deleuze's own philosophy, focusing especially on *Difference and Repetition*, drawing parallels to Spinoza and Leibniz whenever possible. The essences of individuals are not grounded in God as an independent entity, but are considered either as immanent to the domain of actual individuals, or else in relation to a kind of fundamental creative principle that Deleuze calls Life or Process or Event, the activity of pure difference. These essences are not in a one-to-one correspondence with actual individuals, as those of Spinoza and Leibniz are, but are rather considered as starting points for a process of differentiation that culminates in the actual individual. Existence, then, requires a differentiation of the essence, a process that progressively structures the individual as its is actualized. In the actual individual, the essence appears as a potential for transformation, and the activity of the individual sometimes takes the form of a radical sort of learning. The overall picture that emerges from this chapter, it seems to me, is one that puts Deleuze a significant distance away from both Spinoza and Leibniz.

Chapter 1: Spinoza

Spinoza's *Ethics* is about how a human individual (a "wise man," according to 5p42s¹) can achieve blessedness (*beatitudo*) or "the true good."² His ontological reflections are oriented by this project, as the prefatory note to Part 2 of the *Ethics* makes clear. In the service of his ethical task, then, Spinoza comes up with the outline, at least, of an ontology of individual finite modes, individuals not external to the one substance or God that is the basis of Spinoza's ontology. This chapter will give an account of this ontology of individual finite modes, taking note of some of the interpretive difficulties that arise.

There seem to be two main senses of 'individual' in Spinoza. One, which is not the most relevant to my discussion, is used in 2p21s: "we have shown that the idea of the Body and the Body, i.e. (by P13) the Mind and the Body, are one and the same Individual, which is conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension." Spinoza claims that the mind and the body are two ways of conceiving of the same individual, much as God can be grasped both as thinking substance and as extended substance. However, there is no individual apart from the attributes under which it is conceived, so the notion that mind and body are one and the

¹ For abbreviations used in citing texts by Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze, see the list at the end of the main text.

² *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, II/5

same individual does not contribute directly to a theory of individuals. More important will be Spinoza's notion of a 'parallelism' between mind and body, in which each is supposed to enjoy a perfect causal independence from the other.

Much more relevant is a second sense of 'individual,' one which is stated as applying only to bodies, and which appears in a definition after 2p13s:

When a number of bodies, whether of the same or of different size, are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another, or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner, we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body *or* Individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies.

While the former sense of individual referred to the identity of mind and body, this one attempts to define an individual body within extension. It is formulated in such a way as to apply only to bodies, but it might be able to provide a model for understanding what an individual would be in any attribute. One thing we can note right away is that according to this definition, an individual is necessarily composite. This will create a fundamental contrast between the ontologies of Spinoza and Leibniz, since Leibniz's theory of individuals is a theory of simple substances or monads. (It will be interesting to see whether Deleuze falls clearly on one side or the other of this disagreement.) An existing individual mode is composite, but such an individual also corresponds to an eternal essence. Spinoza's individuals are not simply ephemeral compositions. What is the essence of an individual, according to Spinoza? My attempt to address this question constitutes the first section of this chapter. The second section, taking individual essences as given, asks what it is for an individual mode to come into existence. The

composite nature of an individual mode is here at the forefront. I will also consider what is involved in Spinoza's characterization of modal existence in terms of duration. The third section, finally, will consider the essence of the existing mode itself, what Spinoza calls the "actual essence" (3p7). It is here that the pieces of Spinoza's theory of individual finite modes come together.

1. Essence

Do the essences of individuals have any independent reality apart from the existence of the individuals concerned, according to Spinoza? The aims of this section will be to show that they do, to attempt to define the essence of an individual finite mode, and to delimit just what is contained in what could be called the 'realm of essences'. Spinoza's commitment to the reality of essences is, I think, relatively clear, and the ground of their reality will be discussed first. I will then attempt to work out the features of individual essences from Spinoza's discussion of individual bodies. In order to clarify Spinoza's account further, I will consider how Spinoza's realm of essences might relate to a realm of logical possibility such as seems to have been envisaged by Leibniz, arguing that Spinoza has a more limited conception of what counts as an essence. Finally, I will consider how the realm of essences relates to the realm of things that at some time exist: are there essences of things that never exist, according to Spinoza? I will also consider an attempt of Leibniz's to reduce Spinoza's position to absurdity.

It is not obvious, at first glance, what distinction there can be between essence and existence in individual finite modes, within the framework of Spinoza's system. He affirms, after all, that "God's existence and his essence are one and the same" (1p20); and nothing is outside of God (1p15), so one could easily expect that the identity of essence and existence in God is transferred to things in God. On the other hand, in the *Metaphysical Thoughts*, at least, Spinoza seems to think that the distinction of essence and existence in created things is obvious:

Finally, if any Philosopher still doubts whether essence is distinguished from existence in created things, he need not labor greatly over definitions of essence and existence to remove that doubt. For if he will only go to some sculptor or woodcarver, they will show him how they conceive in a certain order a statue not yet existing, and after having made it, they will present the existing statue to him. (I/239)

Despite this appeal to the obviousness of the distinction, from a systematic point of view Spinoza will have to ground it in some manner, given that the distinction is not there at the level of the essence and existence of God.

One possibility Spinoza mentions and rejects in the *Metaphysical Thoughts* is that an essence could be thought to be nothing different from an idea, and to have no being outside the intellect (I/238). He clearly rejects this possibility in the *Short Treatise* as well: "The true essence of an object is something which is really distinct from the Idea of that object" (I/116). Spinoza is thereby committed to a certain ontological reality of essences, and allows two options. The first, that the essence itself really exists, seems to be equivalent to saying that the thing of which it is the essence really exists. For example, God's essence really exists because God exists. The second option is the one that Spinoza will pursue with respect to created things. Their essences are "contained in

another thing which exists really” (I/116). It is clear that according to the *Short Treatise*, an essence is inseparable from some existence. The only question is whether the thing itself of which it is the essence exists, or whether something else may exist in which the essence is contained.

This same alternative is at work in the *Ethics*, as evidenced by 1p8s2. What must exist in conjunction with an essence hinges on the distinction between what is “conceived through itself” and what is “conceived through another” (1a2). Substance, which is conceived through itself, cannot have its essence contained in another. It can only be truly conceived if it itself exists: “Hence, if someone were to say that he had a clear and distinct, i.e., true, idea of a substance, and nevertheless doubted whether such a substance existed, that would indeed be the same as if he were to say that he had a true idea, and nevertheless doubted whether it was false” (1p8s2). However, if something is conceived through another, then it is possible to conceive of it even though it does not exist: “This is how we can have true ideas of modifications which do not exist; for though they do not actually exist outside the intellect, nevertheless their essences are comprehended in another in such a way that they can be conceived through it” (1p8s2). This, then, is the condition for the separation of essence and existence in finite things: the essence must be contained in something else, through which it is conceived, which really exists. Eventually, Spinoza lets us know that he thinks it is the attributes that play this role of ‘container’ for the essences of created things (2p8). The essences of modes of extension will be contained in the attribute of extension, the essences of modes of thought in the attribute of thought, and likewise for whatever other attributes there may be.

It is still not clear how there comes to be a distinction of essence and existence in finite things. We have seen what is, for Spinoza, the condition under which such a separation is possible. But Spinoza says that “God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but of their essence” (1p25). This could be taken to mean that, in causing things to exist, God is also causing their essence to be as it is. This would seem to imply no separation between essence and existence. The import of Spinoza’s claim that God is the efficient cause of the essences of things only becomes clear when he specifies further what the causation of existence consists in:

Every singular thing, *or* any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity. (1p28)³

We will return to this passage later, when we come to a discussion of the cause of existence. The important point for consideration right now is that this proposition does not apply to essences, nor is there any parallel proposition for essences. This infinite causal chain applies only to existence. In effect, Spinoza has distinguished two orders of causation: God is the efficient cause of both essences and existences, but not in the same way. Existing individuals come to be and are destroyed based on the interaction of other existing things. The causation of essences, however, is eternal: “God is the cause, not only of the existence of this or that human Body, but also of its essence (by 1p25), which therefore must be conceived through the very essence of God (by 1a4), by a certain

³ 2p9 makes the same point for ideas in particular.

eternal necessity (by 1p16)” (5p22dem). The essences of created things are independent of the causal order of existences.

The picture Spinoza presents us with, then, is the following. In God, essence and existence are one and the same, and God causes both the essence and the existence of created things. However, there are in fact two separate orders of causation involved here. Through an eternal causation, God causes the essences of individual finite modes to be contained in the attributes. We could say that each attribute, in part, plays the role of a ‘realm of essences’ with respect to the modes of that attribute. The production of essences is entirely independent of the production of existences, which involve an infinite series of finite causes, for which there is no parallel in the realm of essences. But what does it mean for essences to be ‘contained’ in the attributes?

The passage that is most explicit on the subject of the containment of essences in the attributes is 2p8 with its corollary and scholium. The proposition states: “The ideas of singular things, *or* of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended in God’s infinite idea in the same way as the formal essences of the singular things, *or* modes, are contained in God’s attributes.”⁴ The two attributes we know are thought (2p1) and extension (2p2). Proposition 8 of Part 2 indicates that formal essences of modes will be contained in these attributes. But the main point of the proposition is to demonstrate the parallel situation concerning ideas. There follows, first of all, a corollary:

From this it follows that so long as singular things do not exist, except insofar as they are comprehended in God’s attributes, their objective being, *or* ideas, do not exist except insofar as God’s infinite idea exists. And when singular things are

⁴ As far as I know this is the only explicit statement by Spinoza that “the formal essences of the singular things, or modes, are contained in God’s attributes.”

said to exist, not only insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes, but insofar also as they have duration, their ideas also involve the existence through which they are said to have duration.

The corollary, taken with the proposition itself, suggests that for singular things not to exist "except insofar as they are comprehended in God's attributes" is the same as for their formal essences to be contained in God's attributes. For there to be a formal essence is here considered a mode of existence of the thing itself. This is contrasted with the case in which they exist in such a way as to have duration, and again the main point is that there is a parallel situation for ideas. Now the scholium begins, "If anyone wishes me to explain this further by an example..." The example or illustration that Spinoza goes on to give is at once suggestive and difficult to interpret. He himself immediately warns of its inadequacy. It is a geometrical example, from theorem 35, Book III, of Euclid's *Elements*, as Curley notes in his edition of Spinoza's works.⁵ Spinoza writes,

the circle is of such a nature that the rectangles formed from the segments of all the straight lines intersecting in it are equal to one another. So in a circle there are contained infinitely many rectangles that are equal to one another.

Curley adds a helpful clarification of the Euclidean theorem in question: "If AC and FG are any two lines intersecting at point B in a circle, then the rectangle with base AB and height BC is equal in area to that with base BG and height BF."⁶ Spinoza continues,

Nevertheless, none of them [the rectangles] can be said to exist except insofar as the circle exists, nor also can the idea of any of these rectangles be said to exist except insofar as it is comprehended in the idea of the circle. Now of these infinitely many [rectangles] let two only, viz. [those formed from the segments of lines] D and E, exist. Of course, their ideas also exist now, not only insofar as

⁵ Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Vol. I, p. 452, n. 15. See Euclid, *The Thirteen Books of the Elements*, Trans. Sir Thomas L. Heath, New York: Dover, 1956, Vol. II, p. 71.

⁶ Curley, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Vol. I, p. 452, n. 15.

they are only comprehended in the idea of the circle, but also insofar as they involve the existence of those rectangles. By this they are distinguished from the other ideas of the other rectangles.

Given the equivalence of ‘there being an essence contained in x’ with ‘the thing exists only insofar as it is comprehended in x’, Spinoza seems to want to establish the following parallels:

The geometrical illustration

The theory to be illustrated

A circle has a certain nature

An attribute has a certain nature

The essences of infinitely many equal rectangles are contained in the circle

The essences of infinitely many singular things are contained in the attribute

Suppose none of the rectangles can be said to exist except insofar as the circle exists

Suppose none of the singular things can be said to exist except insofar as the attribute exists

Then none of the ideas of the rectangles can be said to exist except insofar as their essences are comprehended in the idea of the circle

Then none of the ideas of the singular things can be said to exist, except insofar as their essences are comprehended in God’s infinite idea

Suppose two of the rectangles exist, not only insofar as the circle exists

Suppose two singular things exist, not only insofar as the attribute exists

Then their ideas also exist, not only insofar as their essences are comprehended in the idea of the circle, but insofar as they involve the existence of the rectangles

Then their ideas also exist, not only insofar as their essences are comprehended in God’s infinite idea, but insofar as they involve the existence of the singular things

My concern is not with the parallel between ideas and the things of which they are the ideas, but with the notion that the essences of things are contained in the attributes. In fact, it is only 2p8 itself that speaks of the formal essences of things. In the corollary, and in the geometrical illustration of the scholium, ‘being comprehended in the attribute’ is presented as a way of existing of the singular thing itself – it is for it to exist only insofar

as something else exists. Still, as I have done in the table above, we can reintroduce the term ‘essence’ into the geometrical illustration, and say that the circle contains the *essences* of infinitely many equal rectangles, rather than saying that it contains the rectangles themselves. Spinoza’s commitment to individual essences, at least, seems quite clear.

That the containment of the essence in an attribute is made equivalent to the thing’s existing insofar as the containing thing exists suggests that the essence’s being caused is equivalent to the very existence of the cause. The circle contains the essences of infinitely many pairs of equal rectangles just by having the nature of a circle. An attribute of God causes the essences of individual modes to be contained in it just by existing as that attribute that it is, with the nature that it has.

Since essences are contained in the attributes, it is not surprising that Spinoza does not offer a general account of the essence of an individual finite mode. Rather, we must turn to a specific attribute, that of extension, and look to his discussion of individual bodies.⁷ In the definition of an individual body, following 2p13s, and in the lemmas that follow it, Spinoza gives some indication of what he thinks constitutes the essence of an individual body. The main idea is that the “ratio of motion and rest” characterizing the

⁷ The degree of priority to be assigned to the attribute of extension is a matter of controversy. Curley sees a systematic priority here and describes Spinoza’s philosophy as ‘materialism’ (*Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 78 and p. 159 n. 44). On the other hand, as Curley points out, Bennett seems to see the priority of extension as reflecting an epistemological rather than an ontological advantage of extension over thought (*A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics* §51.6).

individual body must be preserved for the individual to be preserved.⁸ This ratio or relation of motion and rest depends on how the parts of the individual “communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner” (Definition after 2p13s). The parts themselves are not fixed by the essence, however, but can be replaced (Lemma 4), become greater or less (Lemma 5), and change direction (Lemma 6). As Matheron points out, it is only the *number* and *nature* of the parts that is fixed by the essence of the individual.⁹ The nature of a part is not its own individual essence, but, as Matheron argues, the fact that it accomplishes and communicates some determinate motion that is required by the individual of which it is a part. It may also accomplish other motions which are not directly relevant to its role as a part of this individual. An example might be a human heart as a part of the human body, and an artificial heart capable of replacing it. Both communicate the same motions to the other parts of the body, although the motions they accomplish internally are distinct. The relation of motion and rest, then, is like a structure assigning roles to a certain number of parts. But it is a structure of

⁸ Lemma 5 after 2p13s (“ . . . *motus et quietis rationem* . . . ”). *Ratio* here could be translated as ratio, proportion, or relation. Curley and Parkinson choose ‘ratio,’ Shirley chooses ‘relation.’ Oddly, Curley and Shirley both switch to ‘proportion’ in translating 4p39 (“ . . . *motus et quietis ratio* . . . ”). ‘Proportion’ also appears in Curley’s translation of the *Short Treatise* on the same topic, rendering the Dutch “*proportie van beweginge en stilte*” (*Short Treatise*, I/52). Ratio and proportion seem to imply a strict mathematical interpretation, and this interpretation can be supported by Spinoza’s example in the *Short Treatise* of a proportion: “say of 1 to 3” (I/52). But Alan Gabbey has argued that attempts to give a strict mathematical interpretation of Spinoza’s theory have failed (Gabbey, “Spinoza’s natural science and methodology,” 169). Since I will not be attempting such an interpretation, I will prefer the term ‘relation’ in what follows. It has the additional advantage, in the context of my project here, of conforming with the translation of Deleuze’s ‘*rapport*’ as rendering of Spinoza’s ‘*ratio*’ in his works on Spinoza. See, for example, *Expressionism* 208 (*Spinoza et le problème de l’expression* 190), and *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* 67 (*Spinoza: philosophie pratique* 102).

⁹ Matheron 38

motions, not a static structure. As Hampshire says, “motion must be essential to and inseparable from the nature and constitution of extended things” for Spinoza.¹⁰ What the essence determines, then, is what motions follow from others, how motions are to be communicated among the parts such that the structure itself is preserved.

Hans Jonas, in an article that shows how Spinoza’s theory of individuals can be read as a theory of organisms, provides a nice characterization of individual bodies in Spinoza:

A better analogy [than that of a machine] would be that of a flame. As, in a burning candle, the permanence of the flame is a permanence, not of substance, but of process in which at each moment the “body” with its “structure” of inner and outer layers is reconstituted of materials different from the previous and following ones, so the living organism exists as a constant exchange of its own constituents, and has its permanence and identity only in the continuity of this process, not in any persistence of its material parts. This process indeed *is* its life, and in the last resort organic existence means, not to be a definite body composed of definite parts, but to be such a continuity of process with an identity sustained above and through the flux of components. Definiteness of arrangement (configuration) will then, jointly with continuity of process, provide the principle of identity which “substance” as such no longer provides.¹¹

This analogy and account is helpful, but it is misleading in one respect, as far as the essence of an individual is concerned. Although an individual is very much a process for Spinoza, the “flux of components” is not essential. The parts of the individual *can* be replaced, but they need not be, on Spinoza’s account. Matheron makes this point, which is important for the determination of just what belongs to the essence, rather than the existence, of a Spinozan individual. Matheron writes,

Every physical individual is a system of movements and of rest that, abstracting from perturbations originating externally, functions in a closed cycle: a system,

¹⁰ Hampshire 71

¹¹ Hans Jonas, “Spinoza and the Theory of Organism,” 265

the functioning of which results in the reproduction of this same system. . . . It is certainly true that a finite individual could not *exist* unless the external environment lent itself to this: it is necessary that this environment act on its parts to dispose them to transmit their movements But, from the very fact that [the individual] constitutes a totality closed on itself, its essence does not imply any reference to the environment.¹²

Interaction with the environment, then, is not a positive feature of the essence of an individual body, for Spinoza. An individual can survive the “flux of components,” but it is not essentially through such a flux that it is sustained. Spinoza discusses this in Letter 32, using the blood as his example of an individual. He argues that if a finite body such as the blood could be isolated entirely from any external bodies, it would continue its own characteristic motions.

For if we imagine that there are no causes external to the blood which would communicate new motions to the blood, nor any space external to the blood, nor any other bodies to which the parts of the blood could transfer their motions, it is beyond doubt that the blood would remain indefinitely in its present state and that its particles would undergo no changes other than those which can be conceived as resulting from the existing relation between the motions of the blood and of the lymph, chyle, etc.

These conditions are impossible, but not because of the essence of the individual body, only because of the conditions of its existence as a finite mode of a God who produces an infinity of modes under the same attribute of extension. The essence of a mode defines a

¹² Matheron 43. “*Tout individu physique est un système de mouvements et de repos qui, abstraction faite des perturbations d’origine externe, fonctionne en cycle fermé: un système dont le fonctionnement a pour résultat la reproduction de ce même système. . . . Il est bien vrai qu’un individu fini ne saurait exister sans que le milieu extérieur s’y prête: il faut que ce milieu agisse sur ses parties pour les disposer à se transmettre leurs mouvements Mais, du fait même qu’il constitue une totalité fermée sur soi, son essence, elle, n’implique aucune référence à l’environnement.*”

closed system, even though this system will exist exposed to movements that are not its own.¹³

Contained in the attribute of extension, then, are the essences of finite individual bodies, closed systems of motion and rest that define roles for potentially replaceable moving parts. The example of the circle, considered above, could suggest that this containment is really a matter of logical deduction. The attribute of extension might be thought to constitute a realm of logically possible bodies: there would be an essence of any body that is logically possible, bringing Spinoza into close agreement with Leibniz on this point.¹⁴ There is a passage that seems to support this idea of an agreement between Spinoza and Leibniz, a passage in which Spinoza explains why things are said to be necessary or impossible, and which receives explicit approval from Leibniz in his comments on the *Ethics*:¹⁵

A thing is called necessary either by reason of its essence or by reason of its cause. For a thing's existence follows necessarily either from its essence and definition or from a given efficient cause. And a thing is also called impossible for these same causes—viz. either because its essence, *or* definition, involves a contradiction, or because there is no external cause which has been determined to produce such a thing. (1p33s)

This passage makes it sound as if logical contradiction is the only limit on essence. However, I think that the interpretation of this passage that brings it into line with Leibniz ultimately conflicts with Spinoza's conception of an attribute. The alternative

¹³ A "relation to co-existing things," then, is definitely not "integral to the concept of an individual," as Hans Jonas claims. Cf. Hans Jonas, "Spinoza and the Theory of Organism," 265.

¹⁴ Leibniz: "And so all truths that concern possibles or essences ... rest on the principle of contradiction" (AG 19).

¹⁵ Loemker 204

interpretation can be brought out in the geometrical example considered above by noting that the circle is considered as having a certain *nature*. Although in the case of the circle this might be taken as equivalent to the circle's logical properties, Spinoza's conception of the nature of an attribute seems to involve more than this.

The issue for my purposes is not how an attribute relates to substance or God, which is what the definitions of attribute (1d4) and God (1d6) concern, but how the attribute relates to what is contained in it. On this point I will follow a suggestion made by Edwin Curley concerning the attribute of extension:

So we must think of extension as involving certain laws—to borrow a rare Spinozistic metaphor from the *Treatise on the Intellect* (§101) we must think of the attributes as having laws “inscribed in them, as in their true codes”—and we must think of the infinite modes of extension, and of particular finite bodies, as following from those laws.¹⁶

This view, that extension involves certain laws, can be contrasted with extension “as conceived by Descartes, to wit, an inert mass” (Letter 81). On what Spinoza takes to be the Cartesian view, extension would receive both its laws and its motion from God as from an external source. Spinoza points out that from such a conception of extension it would be “impossible to demonstrate the existence of bodies,” and I think it would also be impossible to understand how, according to Spinoza, essences are contained in the attribute. Spinoza's view seems to be that an attribute must have inherent laws of activity. The ‘first’ thing produced by the attribute of extension is the infinite mode of motion and rest (Letter 64). This, like the attribute itself, must be taken to involve certain laws, in this case presumably the laws of motion and rest partly outlined in Part Two of

¹⁶ Curley *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 38

the *Ethics* between propositions 13 and 14.¹⁷ As Curley writes, “There are laws of motion and rest, principles which apply to all bodies which are in motion or at rest, principles which are deducible from the laws of extension, i.e., from principles which apply to all extended things without qualification.”¹⁸ Since, as Spinoza states: “All bodies are either in motion or at rest” (2p13a1), these laws in fact apply to all bodies.

There can be no essence, therefore, of something that violates the laws of motion and rest. As an example, consider the following passage from the *Short Treatise*:

[W]e find some [Ideas] whose existence is impossible, such as all the monstrous animals one composes of two natures, like a beast that would be both bird and horse, and other things of that kind. It is impossible for them to have a place in Nature, which we find to be differently constituted. (I/17)¹⁹

Why is the existence of these ‘monstrous animals’ impossible? It is not just that there is no external cause determined to produce them. The problem is with their essence. The essence of an individual mode of extension, we have seen, defines a system of roles for moving parts. The problem with the monstrous animals that we compose out of two natures is that in composing them in our imaginations we take no account of the laws of motion and rest. A “beast that would be both bird and horse” can be imagined on an abstract conception of extension, as the geometric form of such a beast, but this is far from grasping the essence of such an animal in Spinoza’s sense, as the structure of motion and rest that would allow it to live. Such an essence, Spinoza suggests, would

¹⁷ Bennett is critical of this idea, because of what he sees as different levels at which ‘motion and rest’ can be discussed. Cf. Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, p. 107.

¹⁸ Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 45.

¹⁹ In its original context, this passage is not presented as an example of how the laws of motion and rest determine essences; rather, it appears in a note to an a posteriori argument for the existence of God.

contradict the laws of motion and rest. In this sense, since the essences of modes of extension depend upon the laws of motion and rest, the essence of such a monster could be said to involve a contradiction.

Does Spinoza suppose the nature of extension, the laws of motion and rest that characterize the extended world, to follow logically from the attribute of extension? Spinoza certainly never provides a deduction. G. H. R. Parkinson, who treats Spinoza's philosophy as a 'logical determinism,' seems to assume that Spinoza did suppose that such a deduction was possible.²⁰ If we assume in this way that the laws of motion are taken by Spinoza to be logically necessary, then the realm of essences conditioned by those laws could be conceived as a realm of logical possibilities. What is important, in any case, is to see that the laws of motion intervene in the notion of essence. For the essence of a mode of extension to avoid logical contradiction, it must conform to a relatively complex notion of extension that involves laws of motion and rest, not just to some minimal criterion of logical consistency.

This way of thinking involves a relatively narrow conception of the realm of essences, compared to that of Leibniz. As we will see, for Leibniz the only limitation on the realm of essences seems to be logical contradiction itself, so that for something to 'involve a contradiction' means that the same predicate is affirmed and denied of it at the same time. Laws of nature, such as the laws of motion, are elements *within* the realm of essences, not conditions for what qualifies as an essence. For Leibniz, if an essence

²⁰ G. H. R. Parkinson, "Editor's Introduction" in Spinoza, *Ethics*, Ed. and Trans. G. H. R. Parkinson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 29. Parkinson also holds that "a logical determinism such as Spinoza's cannot be true" (30).

involves different laws of motion than the actual ones, for example, this might mean that it cannot coexist with the actual world, but it does not follow that there is no such essence. Rather, Leibniz conceives of a realm of essences that includes ‘possible worlds’, entire universes that embody different physical laws.

I think the consideration of how laws are involved in the attributes prevents our attributing a similar position to Spinoza. The essence of something involves a contradiction, for Spinoza, not only when it is contradictory on its own terms,²¹ but also when it contradicts the laws of nature under the attribute through which it is conceived. The inhabitants of any ‘possible world’ of Leibniz’s, which involved different laws of motion, would all involve a contradiction in this sense, although they do not involve any contradiction according to Leibniz.

One could try to extend to the attribute of thought this interpretation, derived from the attribute of extension, of the role of laws of nature in the essences individual finite modes. Parallel with motion and rest in the attribute of extension is ‘absolutely infinite intellect’ in the attribute of thought (Letter 64). Assuming a parallel structure between the attributes, we should expect that there are ‘laws of intellection’ corresponding to the laws of motion and rest. These laws would seem to involve the production of an objective content of ideas, and Spinoza seems to conceive of the individuation of ideas as determined by their objective content; that is, the idea of an individual body would itself be an individual idea. Thus, “the essence of the mind consists (Prop. 13, II) solely in its being the idea of an actually existing body” (Letter 64). Just as there cannot be essences

²¹ As in the example of chimaeras, such as a square circle. Cf. 1/241.

of bodies that do not conform with the laws of motion and rest, there would not be essences of ideas that do not conform with the laws of intellection.

Spinoza does not explicitly offer anything parallel to his account of the structure of a body that would allow us to define the essence of an individual mind. Matheron takes him to be relying on the representative nature of ideas.²² Minds are individuated by what they represent, with representation being, in thought, something like the equivalent of motion and rest in extension.

Setting aside these difficulties, I propose that we understand the realm of essences in Spinoza as the realm of those things that are in conformity with the natural laws of the given attribute, leaving in suspense the question of whether Spinoza considered these laws to be logically necessary. Spinoza seems to think that God produces all the essences that can be understood to conform to the laws of nature in this way. The Spinozan realm of essences is a kind of ‘natural’ realm, a realm of physically viable systems, in contrast with the Leibnizian, which is a ‘logical’ one.

It remains to be considered whether this realm of essences is any wider than the realm of existences itself, that is, whether there are essences of things that do not at any time exist. The passage we have just seen from 1p33s strongly suggests that there are such essences: “a thing is ... called impossible ... either because its essence, *or* definition, involves a contradiction, or because there is no external cause which has been determined to produce such a thing.” If the second kind of impossibility is a genuine occurrence, then there must be cases in which there is indeed an essence of something whose

²² Matheron 34

existence is impossible, because there is no external cause. And this seems to be confirmed by what Spinoza says about contingency:

But a thing is called contingent only because of a defect of our knowledge. For if we do not know that the thing's essence involves a contradiction, or if we do know very well that its essence does not involve a contradiction, and nevertheless can affirm nothing certainly about its existence, because the order of causes is hidden from us, it can never seem to us either necessary or impossible. So we call it contingent or possible. (1p33s)

Here Spinoza recognizes a case in which “we do know very well that [a thing's] essence does not involve a contradiction,” but in which we do not know whether the existence of the thing is necessary or impossible. For Spinoza we can know a thing's essence in this way only if there is such an essence contained in the attribute in question (1p8s2). But if there were essences only of those things that at some time exist, then knowing the thing's essence would be sufficient to know that it must exist. So the realm of essences seems to be wider than that of existences.²³

²³ There is a tendency in English translations of Spinoza that seems to me to misleadingly suggest the opposite, namely, to suggest that there are only essences of those things that at some time exist. In Latin, 1p35 reads: “*Quicquid concipimus in Dei potestate esse, id necessario est.*” Curley translates: “Whatever we conceive to be in God's power, necessarily exists.” Parkinson and Shirley also both use ‘exists’ for ‘*est*’ here. (Wolfgang Bartuschat's German translation, and Bernard Pautrat's French translation, by contrast, do not suggest that existence is what is at stake in this proposition.) Since Spinoza has identified ‘being in God's power’ with ‘following from his essence’, it would follow that everything that follows from God's essence necessarily exists. Spinoza has explicitly stated that both essences and existences follow from God's essence. We would seem to have to conclude either that essences themselves exist, or that there are no essences of things that do not exist, i.e., there is an existence corresponding to every essence. Since, as we have seen, 1p33s implies that there may be essences of things that do not ever exist, the former interpretation would be preferable. (Indeed, 2p8c and 2p8s seem to treat essences as a form of existence of the thing.) The Latin, however, does not seem to force us to make this choice.

Leibniz seems to have interpreted Spinoza as holding that everything that is logically possible at some time exists. He associates this with a view expressed by Descartes, according to which “matter must successively assume all the forms of which it is capable.”²⁴ Thus Leibniz writes,

Spinoza says, in *Ethics* part 1 prop. 16: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways (that is, everything which can fall under infinite intellect).” This view is quite false and makes the same mistake that Descartes insinuated, that matter successively accepts all shapes.²⁵

There is certainly a sense in which it is true, according to Spinoza, to say that matter successively accepts all shapes, since he does not admit that anything is properly called ‘possible.’ Thus there are no other possible shapes of matter than those that it actually accepts, and so these are ‘all’ the shapes there are. But we have seen that in fact there may be essences of modes of extension that never exist. From that point of view, the shapes that matter actually takes are not ‘all’ the shapes for which there are essences.

Leibniz takes ‘all shapes’ in another sense. He writes that the “new Stoics ... believe that all possible things happen one after the other, following all the variations of which matter is capable ... In fact, these are Spinoza’s views.”²⁶ Here it is clear that he takes ‘matter successively accepts all shapes’ to be equivalent to ‘all possible things happen’. ‘Possible’ is obviously not used here in Spinoza’s sense, which refers to a defect in our knowledge. Leibniz seems to be thinking of logical possibility, i.e.,

²⁴ *Principles*, III, 47

²⁵ AG 277. It is probably the reference to “everything which can fall under infinite intellect” that leads Leibniz to his interpretation since, as we will see, Leibniz’s considers God’s understanding as a realm of logical possibility.

²⁶ AG 282

possibility in his own sense of the term. In another passage he gives more indication of what he thinks is implied in this view:

Nor can we really deny that many stories, especially those called novels, are thought to be possible, though they might find no place in this universal series God selected—unless one imagined that in such an expanse of space and time there are certain poetical regions, where you can see King Arthur of Great Britain, Amadis of Gaul, and the illustrious Dietrich von Bern of the German stories, all wandering through the world. This seems not too far from the view of a certain distinguished philosopher of our age, who in a certain place explicitly affirms that matter successively takes on all of the forms of which it is capable (*Principles of Philosophy*, part III, art. 47), something hardly defensible. (AG 94)²⁷

Leibniz tries to associate the view he ascribes to Descartes and Spinoza with the apparently ridiculous consequence that the events of all novels would actually take place somewhere or at some time in the universe. If Leibniz thinks we cannot deny that these stories “are thought to be possible,” he must be taking ‘possible’ in the sense of logical possibility. Thus Leibniz interprets Spinoza as holding that all logically possible things actually exist, or all logically possible events actually occur.

Spinoza, of course, would have no difficulty denying that these stories are possible, since they can only be necessary or impossible. Nor does it follow from 1p16 that they necessarily exist, since Spinoza takes that proposition to apply to both essences and existences (1p25s). The absurd consequences Leibniz would like to draw do not seem to follow.

At the basis of Leibniz’s misinterpretation of Spinoza is a radical difference in perspective between the two philosophers. This will come out more fully when we consider Leibniz’s theory of essences in the next chapter. Briefly put, Leibniz establishes

²⁷ Leibniz repeats the point at AG 100.

an equivalence between logical possibility and essence, and takes the transition from possibility to actuality as a genuine problem demanding explanation. Spinoza does neither. He makes essences follow from God's nature as much as existences, and views possibility as a result of a defect in our knowledge. The so-called transition from possibility to actuality, from this perspective, appears to be a false problem. Leibniz seems to read 1p16 like this: God necessarily creates everything that is logically possible. Spinoza seems to read it like this: all the essences and existences there are are those that follow from God.

Thus it seems that Leibniz reads Spinoza as offering a different explanation of something that Leibniz thinks does need to be explained, namely, which possibles are actual. And he thinks that the answer Spinoza gives is that all possibles are actual. But what Spinoza actually seems to do is refuse the legitimacy of this perspective altogether. There is no answer to the question of which possibles are actual because there are no possibles. If one insists on taking up the perspective of logical possibility, one can certainly say that not all possibles are actual, since not everything that is logically possible agrees with the laws of motion, for example. But there is no *explanation* for this limitation with respect to logical possibility. One can also consider that other laws of motion are logically possible, and these are certainly not actual according to Spinoza. But again there is no attempt on Spinoza's part to explain why there are these laws of

motion and not others, from the point of view of logical possibility. The actual laws of motion simply belong to the nature of God.²⁸

For Leibniz, to say that some finite thing has an essence is to say that the thing is possible. For Spinoza, to say that some finite thing has an essence is to eliminate one of the two grounds of impossibility. Leibniz conceives of essences as including a ‘demand’ for existence. For Spinoza, essences are indifferent to existence. There are two tests of impossible existence: lacking an essence, and lacking an external cause. But there are not two degrees of impossibility. If there is an essence, then there is only one way for the thing to be impossible: by lacking an external cause. And if there is an external cause, then the thing necessarily exists. Whatever passes the first test but fails the second is an essence of something that does not exist. Spinoza does not seem to conceive of this as a limitation, but simply as a positive phenomenon. Essences follow from God as well as existences.

Spinoza does not seem to hold, as Leibniz thinks, that all logically possible individuals exist, nor even that there are essences of all logically possible individuals. Nor does he seem to be committed to the view that every individual of which there is an essence exists. There may be individual essences, contained in the attributes, which are never caused to exist.

I have tried to show that the essences of individual finite modes have a certain degree of reality for Spinoza, independently of the existence of the things of which they

²⁸ As noted above, one could also claim that Spinoza intended to deduce the laws of motion from the nature of God, but never did so.

are the essences, based on their being contained within the attributes of God. And I have argued that the essences thus contained are determined by a theory of attributes as implying natural laws. The individual essences of which Spinoza provides some account are the essences of individual bodies. These, I have claimed, are characterized by a structure of relations between roles to be filled by moving parts, and define a system of movements that would be closed and self-sustaining if taken in isolation. Finally, I have maintained that Spinoza is not committed to the view that all individuals of which there is an essence at some time exist, let alone to the view that all events that are logically possible in Leibniz's sense at some time occur. However, for the essence of an individual to be contained in an attribute of God is not yet for that individual to exist, even though Spinoza does sometimes treat it, as we have seen, as a mode of existence of the individual – 'to exist insofar as something else exists.' The existence proper to finite individuals has distinct requirements, to which we will now turn.

2. Existence

I have already noted that the distinct causal ground of the existence of individual finite modes is explained by Spinoza in proposition 28 of Part 1:

Every singular thing, *or* any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity. (1p28)

Finite things come into existence through the efficient causality of other existing finite things. There can be no first term in this series, since the existence of any finite thing must be explained in the same way. Also, obviously, God or substance cannot belong to this series, since it is a series of finite things. Unlike Leibniz, then, Spinoza does not associate any tendency or urge to exist with the essences of finite things: “so long as we attend to their essence, we shall find that it involves neither existence nor duration” (1p24c).²⁹ Essences have no role to play in the causal explanation of existence. How, then, does the causation that brings about the existence of individual finite modes work? How should we understand 1p28, insofar as it concerns existence? I will first consider the coming into existence of individual bodies, since these are given the clearest treatment by Spinoza in this respect. The situation with respect to minds will prove to be more obscure, based on what seem to be competing dualistic and materialistic accounts. Additionally, I will briefly consider the passing out of existence or destruction of individual finite modes.

Also essential to the account of finite existence in Spinoza is the theme of duration. This is an aspect of Spinoza’s theory that is complicated by seemingly contradictory statements on the topic. Sometimes the existence of individual finite modes seems to be characterized precisely in terms of duration, at other times such a conception seems to be denounced as ‘abstract.’ Later in this section I will attempt to sort out the role of duration in Spinoza’s conception of individual existence.

²⁹ In “On the Ultimate Origination of Things,” Leibniz claims that “essence in and of itself strives for existence” (AG 150).

According to 1p28, then, a body, or a finite mode of extension, should be determined to exist by something else, which is finite and has a determinate existence. And Spinoza makes it clear that only other modes of extension can play the role of cause here: “The modes of each attribute have God for their cause only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute” (2p6). So a body has ‘God considered under the attribute of extension’ for its cause, and more specifically it comes into existence only through the causal efficacy of other bodies.

From the definition of an individual body, we have seen that an individual body is defined by Spinoza as a composite. He provides this definition of a composite body or individual after 2p13s:³⁰

Definition: When a number of bodies, whether of the same or of different size, are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another, or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner, we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose

³⁰ There is a complication here, involving “the simplest bodies, which are distinguished from one another only by motion and rest, speed and slowness” (2p13a2”). The question is whether any singular essence applies to such bodies. Spinoza does imply that such bodies have ‘natures’, since in the discussion that seems to concern them, he writes: “All modes by which a body is affected by another body follow both from the nature of the body affected and at the same time from the nature of the affecting body, so that one and the same body may be moved differently according to differences in the body moving it. And conversely, different bodies may be moved differently by one and the same body” (2p13a1”). Of course, the ‘nature’ of a simple body here could be nothing other than its motion and rest, speed and slowness. The question is: are there essences of such bodies? Are they coming into and out of existence as they change ‘nature’ with every change of speed? Gabbey, in “Spinoza’s natural science and methodology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, notes the problem. Spinoza implies in 2p13a2’, a1” and a2” that the same body can undergo changes in speed and motion without one body ceasing to exist and another being brought into existence. We will consider Deleuze’s solution to this problem, which is important to his account of existence in Spinoza, in Ch. 3.

one body *or* Individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies.

An individual body, according to this definition, is one that unites other bodies in such a way that they “communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner.” It is this communication of motion, or this “ratio of motion and rest” (2p13le5)³¹, that “constitutes the form of the Individual” (2p13le4dem), such that as long as it is preserved, the individual body is preserved. Even more composite individuals can also be formed out of such composite bodies, and indeed Spinoza conceives of the whole of corporeal nature as forming one individual or composite body (2p13le7s).

How does a composite body come into existence? Simply through the causal interaction of less composite bodies, which come to be united in such a way as to communicate their motions to each other. In Letter 32, Spinoza considers blood as an example of a composite body formed from less composite bodies:

For example, when the motions of particles of lymph, chyle, etc., adapt themselves to one another in accordance with the size and shape so as to be fully in agreement with one another and to form all together one single fluid, to that extent only are chyle, lymph, etc., regarded as parts of the blood.³²

Once the blood has come into existence, Spinoza considers its parts to be “controlled by the overall nature of the blood and compelled to mutual adaptation as the overall nature of the blood requires.” This is to say that once the communication of motion characteristic of blood as been put in place, only an external motion can disrupt it. “But since there are many other causes which do in a definite way modify the laws of the

³¹ The doctrine of the ‘ratio of motion and rest’ is also present in the *Short Treatise*. Cf. I/52.

³² Quotations are from Letter 32 unless otherwise noted.

nature of the blood ..., it follows that there occur in the blood other motions and other changes,” including such as can destroy the communication of motion between parts that is characteristic of the blood.

“Now all the bodies in Nature,” Spinoza writes, “can and should be conceived in the same way as we have here conceived the blood.” Although the main topic of this section of Letter 32 is Spinoza’s conception of parts and wholes, basically the same considerations seem to apply to the problem of what it is for a body to come into existence. Coming into existence, that is, seems to be conceived as the formation of a whole out of pre-existing parts. Just as the blood comes into existence when “lymph, chyle, etc., adapt themselves to one another” and “form all together one single fluid,” so with other composite bodies it is the adaptation of the parts to one another that brings the whole into existence.

This, then, seems to be the order of causality referred to in 1p28, as far as bodies are concerned. A composite body, being something finite and having a determinate existence, only comes into existence when less composite bodies enter into a relationship so as to form a whole corresponding to the body in question. They enter into such a relationship, not because of the essence of the whole to be formed, but because of the laws of motion sketched after 2p13.

There seem to be two possible approaches to the coming into existence of individual minds, given this account of the coming into existence of bodies in Spinoza. The first would be to develop a parallel account for the attribute of thought, suggesting that ideas or minds come into existence when less composite ideas or minds enter into a

relationship that forms a composite whole, and do so based on laws contained in the attribute of thought. This idea is supported by 2p15 and Letter 32, and by the general ‘parallelism’ of the attributes in Spinoza’s metaphysics, according to which finite modes are supposed to be caused only by other finite modes of the same attribute.³³ The other option is to suggest that the coming into existence of the mind is to be explained by the coming into existence of the body. This is suggested by what is sometimes called Spinoza’s ‘materialism’, and by some of what he says about the nature of the mind and how to understand it (e.g. 2p13s). I will consider each of these alternatives in turn.

In proposition 15 of Part 2, Spinoza writes:

The idea that constitutes the formal being [*esse*] of the human Mind is not simple, but composed of a great many ideas. Dem.: The idea that constitutes the formal being of the human Mind is the idea of a body (by P13), which (by Post. 1) is composed of a great many highly composite Individuals. But of each Individual composing the body, there is necessarily (by P8C) an idea in God. Therefore (by P7), the idea of the human Body is composed of these many ideas of the parts composing the Body, q.e.d. (2p15)

Here Spinoza deduces the compositeness of the idea forming the human mind from the compositeness of its object. More generally, then, it should follow that every idea of a composite body is itself composite. And since all the bodies whose existence we are considering are indeed composite, all the relevant ideas must also be composite. So if bodies come into existence through ‘composition’, that is, through motions that bring less composite bodies into agreement in such a way as to form a whole, a parallel account seems to be possible with respect to the ideas that form the basis of minds.

³³ Key texts for Spinoza’s parallelism are 2p7 and 2p7s, as well as 3p2.

One difficulty with this proposal is that it is not clear what sort of laws for the interaction of ideas would correspond to the laws of motion for bodies. If bodies communicate their motion to each other, what do ideas communicate to each other so as to form an individual? The simplest solution might be to claim that the ideas interact according to the laws of what they represent, so that representations of bodies that form a whole themselves form a whole on the basis of the wholeness of the object represented. In Letter 32, after generalizing the discussion of blood as a composite body to make it apply to all bodies, Spinoza draws a general parallel for the human mind:

As regards the human mind, I maintain that it, too, is a part of Nature; for I hold that in Nature there also exists an infinite power of thinking which, insofar as it is infinite, contains within itself the whole of Nature ideally, and whose thoughts proceed in the same manner as does Nature, which is in fact the object of its thought.

Further, I maintain that the human mind is that same power of thinking, not insofar as that power is infinite and apprehends the whole of Nature, but insofar as it is finite, apprehending the human body only. The human mind, I maintain, is in this way part of an infinite intellect. (IV/173-74)

Although Spinoza's emphasis here is on the way in which the human mind can be considered a part relative to a greater whole, the parallel with the earlier discussion of bodies can be taken to suggest that it is also a whole relative to parts that compose it. The question of how such wholes are formed is avoided with the assertion that the "thoughts" of the infinite power of thinking "proceed in the same manner as does Nature, which is in fact the object of its thought," where 'Nature' seems to refer to the world of bodies. This perhaps confirms that the thoughts proceed in the same manner as their object, i.e., as what they represent.

Spinoza's account of the composition of individual bodies is only a sketch. The proposal to generalize this account to minds is a sketch of a sketch, but one that seems to be called for, given Spinoza's commitment to keeping causal interaction within a given attribute. Individual finite modes of thought must be caused to exist by other individual finite modes of thought.

Edwin Curley might consider this an overly dualistic approach to the coming into existence of the mind. Concerning dualism and materialism in Spinoza, he writes:

It is true that some of the general propositions that Spinoza enunciates early in Part II have a dualistic ring to them. Spinoza's denial of interaction, his insistence that modes of one attribute must have only other modes of that attribute as their cause, goes way beyond anything Descartes maintained in his separation of the mind from the body. But if we follow out the details of Spinoza's treatment of the mind, as it develops in the course of Part II, I do not see how we can characterize it as anything but a materialistic program. To understand the mind, we must understand the body, without which the mind could not function or even exist.³⁴

To give a materialistic account of the coming into existence of the mind would be to claim that it is explained through the coming into existence of the body. The plausibility of this option, despite Spinoza's 'parallelism', is based on the specific nature of the mind as an idea. In Letter 64, to Schuller, Spinoza writes: "The essence of the mind (by IIP13) consists in this alone, that it is the idea of an actually existing body."³⁵ Thus while the essence of the body seems to be tied to a certain ratio of motion and rest, the essence of the mind seems to consist entirely in that of which it is the idea, its *ideatum*.³⁶ It is

³⁴ Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 78.

³⁵ As quoted by Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 158, n. 39.

³⁶ But this statement, as Gueroult notes, should come with the proviso that it defines the essence of the actually existing mind, not the essence of the mind as contained in the attribute of thought. See Gueroult's appendix on essence in *Spinoza II*.

possible, then, that according to Spinoza the mind is caused to exist by other modes of thought, but that its coming into existence is understood only through the coming into existence of the body. Another way to look at it would be like this: to understand the coming into existence of the body just is also to understand the coming into existence of the mind, because the mind is the idea of the body.

The affections of the mind are ideas of the affections of the body. The idea of the body varies as the body varies. Representations seem to collide as fortuitously as bodies. I have the idea of an empty street, and then I have the idea of man entering the street. The idea of the man comes from outside, just as the impression on the organs of the body comes from outside. On this level, I think Curley is right to read Spinoza as explaining the operations of the mind through the body. There is no independent account of an order of encounters of ideas. Similarly, there seems to be no independent account of the coming into existence of the mind, just an account of how bodies are formed from other bodies. Otherwise, there would have to be some account of how ideas ‘communicate’ with one another in such a way as to form an individual, apart from saying that they represent an object that really exists.

What Spinoza leaves us with, in this respect, are two competing tendencies in his system. In principle, it seems that the coming into existence of the mind should be accounted for only with reference to modes of the attribute of thought. This is what Spinoza’s ‘parallelism’ demands. But in practice, as Curley correctly points out, Spinoza often tends to consider an explanation that accounts for the operation of bodies to have explanatory force with respect to the related operations of the mind.

Individual finite modes, whether extended or thinking, are composite wholes, which come into existence through composition out of less composite wholes. The destruction of a finite mode comes about as a result of the same causal order that brought it into existence in the first place. Just as the essence of the mode has nothing to do with the cause of its coming into existence, so it also has nothing to do with the cause of the mode's destruction: "No thing can be destroyed except through an external cause" (3p4). And for any finite thing, there is an external cause capable of destroying it: "There is no singular thing in nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed" (4a1). So the cause of destruction is always external (it does not belong to the essence of the thing), and there is always such a cause available in nature.

Returning to the example of the blood, from Letter 32, we saw that Spinoza contrasted the communication of motion characteristic of the blood's nature with motions coming from outside:

For if we imagine that there are no causes external to the blood which would communicate new motions to the blood, nor any space external to the blood, nor any other bodies to which the parts of the blood could transfer their motions, it is beyond doubt that the blood would remain indefinitely in its present state and that its particles would undergo no changes other than those which can be conceived as resulting from the existing relation between the motions of the blood and of the lymph, chyle, etc. Thus the blood would always have to be regarded as a whole, not a part.

An individual body, as we have seen, is characterized by the communication of certain motions among its parts. Considered only with respect to those motions that correspond to its nature, the blood is regarded as a whole, and there is nothing that could prevent it

from continuing the motions that are characteristic of it. This is never actually the case, however:

But since there are many other causes which do in a definite way modify the laws of the nature of the blood and are reciprocally modified by the blood, it follows that there occur in the blood other motions and other changes, resulting not solely from the reciprocal relation of its particles but from the relation between the motion of the blood on the one hand and external causes on the other.

What prevents the blood from preserving its characteristic motions indefinitely is its exposure to external causes, motions subject to other natures than that of the blood. The blood can be destroyed because there are bodies and motions outside it that are not subject to the nature of blood, but to other natures. Some of these motions are not powerful enough to destroy the motions of the blood, and so they will modify the motions of the blood while its characteristic ratio of motion and rest is nevertheless preserved. But there will also be things powerful enough to impart a different ratio of motion and rest on the parts of the blood, and so destroy the blood.

And this is the case for every individual body. Spinoza writes, “things which bring it about that the human Body’s parts acquire a different proportion of motion and rest to one another bring it about ... that the human Body takes on another form, i.e. ... that the human Body is destroyed” (4p39dem). Just as bodies have their existence through an external cause, which is itself a body that is finite and has a determinate existence, so they have their destruction through such an external cause as well.

What about the mind? Spinoza writes, “An idea that excludes the existence of our Body cannot be in our Mind, but is contrary to it” (3p10). Does this proposition explain the destruction of the mind in parallel with that of the body by an external cause? We

have seen that the mind is a composite corresponding to the composition of the body (2p15). An idea that excludes the existence of our body would presumably be one that involves some of the component ideas that go to make up the idea of our body, but representing those component bodies under a different relation than that which characterizes our body. This would amount to the decomposition of our mind. Just as our body must maintain a certain proportion of motion and rest, so our mind must have a certain proportion of motion and rest as its object, such that the ideas that correspond to the parts of the body, which are themselves the parts of the mind, together form a whole.³⁷

At this point I would like to address the role of duration in Spinoza's account of the existence of individual finite modes. My main concern will be to reconcile some seemingly contradictory indications. On the one hand, Spinoza seems to characterize the existence of such individuals precisely in terms of duration. This is what distinguishes their sort of existence from the sort of existence proper to God or substance. On the other hand, Spinoza seems to denounce such a conception of existence in terms of duration as 'abstract', and to recommend a different view that would see even the existence of individual finite modes in an 'eternal' perspective. I will try to show how these two dimensions of Spinoza's thought about duration and existence fit together.

³⁷ I will not attempt to deal with the highly controversial issue of interpreting Spinoza's claim that "The human Mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the Body, but something of it remains which is eternal" (5p23). For an extremely critical treatment of this and related issues, as well as references to some more sympathetic treatments, see Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, Ch. 15.

It is difficult to determine just how Spinoza's concept of duration relates to the existence of finite things. Some passages make it seem as though their existence is to be 'explained by' duration (*per durationem explicatur*), in contrast with the eternal existence of God. For example, in his definition of eternity Spinoza writes:

By eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing. Exp.: For such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth, and on that account cannot be explained by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end. (1d8)

The implication seems to be that there is another sort of existence that *can* be explained by duration or time.³⁸ And later in the *Ethics* Spinoza states explicitly that "the actual existence of the Body ... is explained by duration, and can be defined by time" (5p23d).³⁹ One hypothesis about the relation of duration to existence, then, is that duration 'explains' the sort of existence proper to finite modes.

When Spinoza says at one point, "By existence here I do not understand duration..." (2p45s), one is led to conclude that in other places he *does* understand duration by existence, that existence could sometimes *mean* duration. Thus it seems that duration might be a species of existence. But the continuation of this passage complicates matters significantly, as we will see below.

Spinoza's definition of duration neither asserts that duration explains the existence of certain things, nor that it is a species of existence. He writes that "Duration is an indefinite continuation of existing" (2d5). Here it looks rather as though duration is

³⁸ We will see that time is considered less fundamental than duration, so the status of duration is our main concern.

³⁹ In Letter 12 Spinoza writes that "it is only of Modes that we can explain the existence by Duration" (IV/55).

explained through existence. Or, if the existence of finite modes can be explained through duration, this means that their existence can be explained through an indefinite continuation of existing. Perhaps this is still sufficient to distinguish them from eternal things, at least. But it is not clear what the ‘explained through’ is meant to convey.

Sometimes duration and existence seem to be put on an equal footing. In 1p24c, writing about the things produced by God, Spinoza says: “For—whether the things [NS: produced] exist or not—so long as we attend to their essence, we shall find that it involves neither existence nor duration. So their essence can be the cause neither of their existence nor of their duration...” (1p24c). The implication seems to be that duration and existence are two distinct features of the things produced, so that each must be mentioned specifically and ruled out. Apparently, Spinoza is taking ‘existence’ to be associated with ‘beginning to exist’ and ‘duration’ to be associated with ‘continuing to exist’, which are the two things he attributes to God at the beginning of the corollary. This usage seems consistent with his definition.

There seem to be two main senses of ‘duration’, then: it is either a particular sort of existence, the sort that non-eternal, singular things have, or it is the continuation of an existence that has already begun. Perhaps these two senses fit together, if the sort of existence that singular things have is existence that continues from some beginning point.

In any case, Spinoza expresses dissatisfaction with duration as a characterization of the existence of singular things. I return to the passage from 2p45s, of which I quoted the opening above:

By existence here I do not understand duration, i.e., existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly, and as a certain species of quantity. For I am speaking of

the very nature of existence, which is attributed to singular things because infinitely many things follow from the eternal necessity of God's nature in infinitely many modes (see IP16). I am speaking, I say, of the very existence of singular things insofar as they are in God. For even if each one is determined by another singular thing to exist in a certain way, still the force by which each one perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of God's nature. Concerning this, see IP24C. (2p45s)⁴⁰

The gloss on duration here, "existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly, and as a certain species of quantity," doesn't fit well with the hypothesis that duration adequately characterizes the sort of existence proper to finite modes. When Spinoza says that something is conceived 'abstractly', he usually seems to mean that the imagination is somehow involved in its conception, and that this is a way of conceiving something more easily, but deceptively. For instance, in 1p15s he writes on the subject of quantity:

If someone should now ask why we are, by nature, so inclined to divide quantity, I shall answer that we conceive quantity in two ways: abstractly, *or* superficially, as we [NS: commonly] imagine it, or as substance, which is done by the intellect alone [NS: without the help of the imagination]. So if we attend to quantity as it is in the imagination, which we do often and more easily, it will be found to be finite, divisible, and composed of parts; but if we attend to it as it is in the intellect, and conceive it insofar as it is a substance, which happens [NS: seldom and] with great difficulty, then (as we have already sufficiently demonstrated) it will be found to be infinite, unique, and indivisible.

In addition to the association with the imagination, the abstract way of conceiving is often associated with conceiving something as a universal. In 2p49s, Spinoza contrasts the abstract conception of a universal 'affirmation', which would apply to all ideas, with

⁴⁰ *Hic per existentiam non intelligo durationem, hoc est, existentiam, quatenus abstracte concipitur, & tanquam quaedam quantitatis species. Nam loquor de ipsa natura existentiae, quae rebus singularibus tribuitur, propterea quod ex aeterna necessitate Dei naturae infinita infinitis modis sequuntur (vide Prop. 16. p. I.). Loquor, inquam, de ipsa existentia rerum singularium, quatenus in Deo sunt. Nam, etsi unaquaeque ab alia re singulari determinetur ad certo modo existendum, vis tamen, qua unaquaeque in existendo perseverat, ex aeterna necessitate naturae Dei sequitur. Qua de re vide Coroll. Prop. 24. p. I.*

the singular affirmations, which differ as much as the ideas themselves. And in 4p62s, he uses the phrase “abstract, *or* universal,”⁴¹ making the equivalence explicit.

Is duration a universal? Or is it, like quantity, something that can be conceived either abstractly or by the intellect alone? In Letter 12, Spinoza implies that it is of the latter sort:

Next, from the fact that when we conceive Quantity abstracted from Substance, and separate Duration from the way it flows from eternal things, we can determine them as we please, there arise Time and Measure—Time to determine Duration and Measure to determine Quantity in such a way that, so far as possible, we imagine them easily. (IV/56)

Here, in fact, duration and quantity seem to be on the same level – duration being the concept of continuous time,⁴² and quantity that of continuous measure in general. Both can be conceived in a more adequate way (if we do not abstract quantity from substance, and do not separate duration from ‘the way it flows from eternal things’), but both can also be conceived in a less adequate way that allows them to be determined as we please and imagined easily. According to this passage, duration would not seem to be inherently abstract. Just as Spinoza argues against a mistaken conception of quantity in 1p15s, it seems that one could argue against a mistaken conception of duration. Since duration is a species of quantity, it is likely that the same general differences apply: duration ‘as it is in

⁴¹ “*abstracta, sive universalis*”

⁴² Jonathan Bennett argues for the following distinction between Spinoza’s use of ‘duration’ (*duratio*) and his use of ‘time’ (*tempus*): “Spinoza’s basic temporal noun is *duratio*.... He uses *tempus* only under special conditions.... Thus, *tempus* is Spinoza’s word when any of our three concept clusters [the concepts of topological, tensed, or measured time] is at work. And ‘duration’ is his word for time considered as a perfectly uncut, undifferentiated continuum.” See *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, p. 202-203.

the imagination' will be found to be 'finite, divisible, and composed of parts,' while duration 'as it is in the intellect' will be 'infinite, unique, and indivisible.'

In any case, it seems clear that Spinoza's comment in 2p45s, in which duration is made equivalent to "existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly, and as a certain species of quantity," should not be taken to imply that duration is itself inherently abstract.

Is duration nevertheless an abstract way of conceiving of the existence of individual finite modes? Even this does not seem to be the case necessarily, for there is some evidence that God conceives the duration of finite modes, and it is safe to assume that God does not conceive things abstractly. Spinoza writes:

Our body's duration depends neither on its essence (by A1), nor even on God's absolute nature (by IP21). But (by IP28) it is determined to exist and to produce an effect from such [NS: other] causes as are also determined by others to exist and produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner, and these again by others, and so to infinity. Therefore, the duration of our Body depends on the common order of nature and the constitution of things. But adequate knowledge of how things are constituted is in God, insofar as he has the idea of all of them, and not insofar as he has only the idea of the human Body. (2p30d)

It seems, then, that God adequately conceives the duration of our body, insofar as he has the ideas of all things. This implies that duration is not an inherently abstract way of conceiving of the existence of an individual finite mode. Is Spinoza being inconsistent? I think that what Spinoza must mean in 2p45s is only that *we* necessarily conceive the existence of a singular thing abstractly when we conceive it in terms of duration. 2p30 and 2p31 assert, respectively: "We can have only an entirely inadequate knowledge of the duration of our Body," and "We can have only an entirely inadequate knowledge of the duration of the singular things which are outside us." And Spinoza adds later that we

“determine their times of existing only by the imagination” (4p62s). So when *we* determine the existence of any singular thing in terms of duration, we do so abstractly, i.e., the imagination is necessarily involved.

Spinoza’s statement in 2p45s is, I think, misleading in this respect. He makes it sound as though, for him, duration *means* ‘existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly’. But we have seen that in principle there can be adequate cognition of the duration of things, and so duration is not an inherently abstract determination of the existence of things.

I will return below to the consideration of the other perspective on existence that 2p45s serves to introduce. For the moment, I would like to emphasize the irreducible presence of a temporal dimension in Spinoza’s theory of individual finite modes. This dimension is introduced, it seems to me, by a proposition that we have already considered, 1p28. Even though Spinoza avoids explicitly temporal language in 1p28, its relation to duration is made clear in the demonstration of 2p30d, where Spinoza concludes directly from the causal dependence asserted in 1p28 that “the duration of our Body depends on the common order of nature and the constitution of things.” And in fact, I think that temporal concepts were implicitly present in 1p28 all along, by way of the term ‘determinate existence’, which Spinoza uses to characterize the sort of entity to which the proposition applies. It is clear in the demonstration that ‘finite’ is opposed to ‘infinite’ and that ‘having a determinate existence’ is opposed to being ‘eternal.’ What could be opposed to eternal existence besides some sort of temporal existence?

Given that existence ‘explained by duration’ is an irreducible aspect of finite modes, what can we say about the content of this concept? Let’s look again at Spinoza’s definition of duration, this time with the attached explanation:

Duration is an indefinite continuation of existing. Exp.: I say indefinite because it cannot be determined at all through the very nature of the existing thing, nor even by the efficient cause, which necessarily posits the existence of the thing, and does not take it away. (2d5)

Spinoza explains what he is thinking of when he puts ‘indefinite’ in the definition, namely that the duration of an existing thing is not determined by its nature or efficient cause; this seems to be related to the claim of 3p4 that “No thing can be destroyed except through an external cause.” Something that has duration does not thereby have a limited duration. But this still does not give us very much to work with as far as the content of the concept of duration is concerned. The rest of the definition states that duration is a ‘continuation of existing’. To endure is to continue to exist; not to endure is to cease to exist. As we saw that Bennett says, *duratio* seems to be Spinoza’s “basic temporal noun.” ‘Continuation’ seems to carry this same temporal sense. To say that the existence of finite modes can be explained through duration, then, seems to be equivalent to saying that it can be explained as temporal existence. A basic notion of time is presupposed.⁴³

Perhaps all we can say, then, is that what ‘existence explained by duration’ means is the sort of existence that a member of a series of causes such as is presented in 1p28

⁴³ Stuart Hampshire argues that at the “highest grade of knowledge” any temporal determinations will be eliminated. To me it does not seem evident that viewing things “*sub specie aeternitatis*” will involve the elimination of all temporal determinations. It may rather be a matter of a perspective on temporal occurrences that is not itself internal to the temporal flow. See Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978, 174.

can have. Such a being ‘continues to exist’ from a beginning determined by the order of external causes, the “common order of nature and the constitution of things” (2p30d). What it means to say that it ‘exists’ is that it ‘continues’, ‘endures’. The cause of beginning to exist (another finite mode) does not explain the duration of the thing, its continuation in existence. Paradoxically, what explains the enduring of the thing, “the force by which each one perseveres in existing,” must be referred to the “eternal necessity of God’s nature” (2p45s), that is, to a perspective that does not seem to involve duration at all. Duration then seems to be at the intersection of these two aspects of the finite mode: an external cause and an eternal force.

Although temporal existence is irreducible, Spinoza clearly considers it important to emphasize the eternal perspective on the existence of finite modes as well, and to distinguish it from the temporal perspective. A first difficulty is to distinguish this perspective from the eternal subsistence of the essences of finite modes. As we have seen,⁴⁴ in 2p8c Spinoza presents the essences of finite modes as a way of existing of the modes themselves, referring to a situation in which “singular things do not exist, except insofar as they are comprehended in God’s attributes.” This ‘existing only insofar as they are comprehended in God’s attributes’ is the same as there being an essence of something that does not exist. This was contrasted with existing “insofar also as they are said to have duration.” A thing exists as an eternal essence when it cannot be said to have duration. What we have to consider now is the eternal perspective on the existence of those things that *can* be said to have duration.

⁴⁴ In section 1 of this chapter.

We have seen that this eternal perspective reveals that “the force by which each [singular thing] perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of God’s nature.” There is a close relationship between force and essence in Spinoza’s thought, and especially between force and *actual* essence, i.e., the essence of existing things. Thus we could say that while duration concerns the existence of finite modes insofar as their existence depends on being caused by other finite modes (the order of causality of finite existence of 1p28), the eternal perspective concerns the fact that existence is the actualization of an eternal essence. Spinoza also states the two perspectives this way: “We conceive things as actual in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place, or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature” (5p29s).

Wolfgang Bartuschat⁴⁵ seems to me to do a good job of handling the complications of the relation of individual finite modes whose existence involves duration to God as eternal cause. One cannot deduce a finite, temporal individual from the eternal nature of God; one can only understand, based on a *given* individual, that it does indeed ‘follow’ from God, that is, have its force of existing from God. Bartuschat suggests, correctly I think, that the perspective that involves duration is not reducible to the eternal perspective. The existence of finite modes *is* adequately ‘explained by’ duration in one important respect.

⁴⁵ In *Spinozas Theorie des Menschen*

We have seen that Spinoza's 1p28 can be understood to concern, in part, the composition of individual finite bodies out of existing bodies. More generally, the existence of individual finite modes is subject to a causal order that extends beyond the nature of any particular one. The laws of motion are not directed to the production or destruction of particular finite bodies, such as human bodies or blood. "Now since the nature of the universe, unlike the nature of the blood, is not limited, but is absolutely infinite, its parts are compelled to undergo infinite variations" (Letter 32). Individual finite modes exist only as subject to this universe of variations.

How to account for the coming into existence of minds has proven to be less clear. It seems likely that to some extent a parallel account should be given to that of the composition of bodies, but at the same time much of what Spinoza says points in the direction of a materialist interpretation of the sort Curley recommends. In any case, Spinoza's 1p28, insofar as it concerns the existence of individual finite modes, seems to concern the composition of wholes out of parts. It is to the extent that finite existence requires such composition that there is a separate order of causality for existences as opposed to essences. And passing out of existence, in this context, amounts to decomposition.

The dependence of finite individuals on the order of causality expressed in 1p28 makes their existence irreducibly temporal, a matter of duration. But the composition of an individual finite mode is not just a matter of a rearrangement of bodies. If it is the coming into existence of an individual, this is because it is also the actualization of an

essence. We must now consider what Spinoza has to say about individuals insofar as they are actual, bringing together an eternal essence and a temporal existence.

3. Actual Individuals

Given the theory of individual essence outlined above, and the conception of existence as resulting from composition out of parts and involving duration, what are actual individuals like, according to Spinoza? The main text that I will consider in this section is proposition 7 of part 3 of the *Ethics*: “The striving [*conatus*] by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.” It is this notion of actual essence that will have to be elucidated, so that we can see how the individual essence contained in the attribute plays a role in the existing individual.

I will first attempt to clear out of the way what seems to be a frequent misinterpretation of the *Ethics*’ 3p7. Then, I will try to shed some light on this proposition by pointing out the parallel that it establishes between individual finite modes and Spinoza’s God. What is particular to existing finite modes, however, is that they are subject to affections that come from without. This can make it seem as though Spinoza is employing a distinction between essence and accident. Some texts from Spinoza’s correspondence with Blijenbergh suggest that Spinoza did not see it this way, however, and I will argue that Spinoza can legitimately speak of affections or states⁴⁶ of the

⁴⁶ Bennett suggests that the most accurate translation of ‘*affectio*’ would be ‘state’; ‘affection’, he says, “is a tolerable archaism, since ‘affection’ used to mean ‘quality or property or state.’” Cf. *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*, p. 93.

essence rather than accidents. Finally, I will follow Alexandre Matheron's interpretation in explaining how the non-actual essence contained in the attributes can be understood to relate to the actual essence of an existing mode.

I will be considering proposition 7 of part 3 of the *Ethics* for what it can tell us about Spinoza's conception of essence, rather than being directly concerned with his conception of *conatus*, which is what the proposition is actually about. There is a danger, however, of getting carried away with this approach. Some interpreters seem to have been led to take 3p7 for a statement about essence in general (ignoring the qualifier 'actual'), and to reverse the force of the 'nothing but', to arrive at the conclusion that for Spinoza essences of modes as such are nothing but their striving to persevere in their being. Gabriel Albiac, for instance, writes that 3p7

abolishes every possibility of endowing any essence of the modes with the least autonomy or ontological independence (I do not even speak of primacy). Essence is the *conatus*; and the *conatus*, the effort, is nothing but the conflictual relation of beings with one another on this infinite terrain of encounters (i.e., of impacts) that is Nature.⁴⁷

Here Albiac has dropped any reference to *actual* essence and has reversed the proposition to say that the essence is the *conatus*, rather than that the *conatus* is the (actual) essence. He then seems directly to exclude Spinoza's explicit position by insisting that *conatus* is "nothing but the conflictual relation of beings with one another," instead of, as Spinoza thinks, the actual essence of the thing. In any case, we have already seen that the essences of finite modes do have a degree of ontological independence, insofar as they are contained in the attributes of God, independently of the existence of the mode in

⁴⁷ Gabriel Albiac "The Empty Synagogue" in *The New Spinoza* p. 137

question.⁴⁸ As another example of this tendency, Allan Gabbey seems to take a similar approach to 3p7 when he writes that “... the body’s own essence, ... by *Ethics* 3p6-7, is simply the *conatus* or endeavor ‘by which it endeavors to persevere in its own being.’”⁴⁹ Again we have the omission of the qualification ‘actual’, and the reversal that tries to reduce the essence to the *conatus*, rather than following Spinoza in explaining the *conatus* through the actual essence.

Stuart Hampshire also seems to lean in this direction in his account of the essences of finite modes. I will consider the following long passage for the contrast it provides to the interpretation I have been pursuing:

Each particular thing, interacting with other particular things within the common order of Nature, exhibits a characteristic tendency to cohesion and to the preservation of its identity, a ‘striving (*conatus*), so far as it lies in itself to do so, to persist in its own being’ (*Ethics* Pt. III Prop. VI). This striving towards cohesion and the preservation of its own identity constitutes the essence of any particular thing, in the only sense in which particular things, which are not substances, can be said to have essences. Particular things, being dependent modes and not substances, are constantly undergoing changes of state as the effects of causes other than themselves; as they are not self-determining substances, their successive states cannot be deduced from their own essence alone, but must be explained partly by reference to the action upon them of other particular things. Each particular thing possesses a determinate nature of its own only in so far as it is active and not passive in relation to things other than itself, that is, only in so far as its states can be explained otherwise than as the effects of external causes; only so far as a thing is an originating cause – and clearly a dependent mode cannot be entirely an originating cause – can any individuality, any determinate nature of its own, be attributed to it. Its character and individuality depends on its necessarily limited power of self-maintenance; it can be distinguished as a unitary thing with a recognizable constancy of character in so far as, although a system of parts, it succeeds in maintaining its own characteristic coherence and balance of parts.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ See section 1 of this chapter.

⁴⁹ Allan Gabbey, “Spinoza’s natural science and methodology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* p. 166

⁵⁰ Hampshire 76-77

First of all, note in the second sentence that Hampshire seems to take the same position as Albiac and Gabbey, stating that “striving . . . constitutes the essence of any particular thing, in the only sense in which particular things . . . can be said to have essences.” As I have already pointed out, this is not what is asserted by Spinoza. Also, it seems difficult, on this interpretation that reduces essence to striving, to see what it means to say that a mode strives for “the preservation of its own identity.” Does this mean that it strives simply to keep striving? Or that it strives always to remain in the state in which it currently finds itself? Hampshire points out that individual finite modes are “constantly undergoing changes of state,” which “cannot be deduced from their own essence alone,” but involve external causes. If preservation of identity meant remaining in the same state, then *no* change of state could ever be deduced from a mode’s essence. Hampshire then adds what seems to me another reversal of Spinoza’s actual position, stating: “Each particular thing possesses a determinate nature of its own only insofar as it is active and not passive . . .; only so far as a thing is an originating cause . . . can any individuality, any determinate nature of its own, be attributed to it.” Here essence and individuality are explained through activity and causality. Spinoza does the opposite. He writes, “I say that we act . . . when something in us or outside us follows from our nature I say that we are acted on when something happens in us, or something follows from our nature, of which we are only the partial cause” (3d2). Here, according to Spinoza, our activity is clearly to be explained through our nature or essence. We do not attribute a nature on the basis of a thing’s being active or being a cause, but we attribute activity or causality on the basis of what follows from a thing’s nature. Finally, in the last sentence

quoted, Hampshire refers to how a finite individual mode “can be distinguished.” Perhaps this provides a key to the earlier statements as well. If the question is how an individual can be distinguished, empirically, from the individuals that surround it, then certainly it can be distinguished only in so far as it “succeeds in maintaining its own characteristic coherence and balance of parts,” and if we had to proceed empirically then we could only *learn* anything about an individual essence in so far as the individual exhibited that essence through activity. Empirically, we know essences only by their effects. But Hampshire’s earlier statements make it sound as if the very constitution of the essence is based on the individual’s striving, as if its very possession of an essence at all is based on its activity. This is not at all Spinoza’s position. This would be to define essence in terms of characteristics that belong only to existing individuals.

Proposition 7 of Part 3, then, does not state that essence in general is nothing but *conatus*, nor is there any reason to try to make it say that. Such interpretations miss the dimension of Spinoza’s thought about essence outlined in section 1 of this chapter. Spinoza holds that the essences of individuals follow eternally from God and thus that they are not defined only by characteristics of existing individuals. Essence cannot be reduced to actual essence, as far as individual finite modes are concerned, and therefore cannot be defined simply as *conatus*.

The demonstration of 3p7 shows that by ‘actual essence’ Spinoza means the essence of an existing thing. First, Spinoza indicates that ‘actual essence’ is equivalent to ‘given essence.’⁵¹ Then, 1p36 is rephrased in the demonstration in terms of ‘given

⁵¹ “...*datam sive actualem essentiam*.”

essence,' while it had originally been stated in terms of the nature of whatever 'exists.' So 'actual essence' is the same as 'given essence,' which is the same as 'essence of what exists.' Proposition 7 could be rephrased as follows: The *conatus* by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the essence of the existing thing. The features of actual essence will be those that an essence has as long as it is the essence of something that exists.

Spinoza's concept of *conatus* is closely related to his more general concept of power. Thus Curley writes, "I suggest that [Spinoza] thinks of the essence of an individual as a power or force, tending toward self-preservation, a force whose degree can be measured by the extent to which the individual actually does maintain itself."⁵² Adding the qualification that this is how Spinoza thinks of the essence of an *existing* individual, we can get a clearer picture of what Spinoza is getting at if we see that, as far as existing individuals are concerned, there is a definite parallel between the essences of finite things and the essence of God. In 1p34, Spinoza states that God's power is identical with his essence: "God's power is his essence itself." God's own existence (1p11) and all other things (1p16, 1p16c) follow from God's essence. In God, pure power is equivalent to unqualified essence. God's essence is always actual, because God is *causa sui*. God's power is always fully effectual, because there is nothing to oppose it. 3p7, the statement that *conatus* is nothing but the actual essence of the thing, can be understood as the version of 1p34 ("God's power is his essence itself") that is valid for

⁵² Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 112. We will see that Deleuze develops this notion of essence as power further, giving an account of what it might mean to interpret non-actual essences along the same lines.

individual finite modes. The essence must be explicitly qualified as actual, because the essence of an individual finite mode is *not* always actual, it is not the essence of something that always exists. The essences of individual modes that do not exist, which are contained in the attributes, do not involve any striving or *conatus*. They are eternal effects of God. The *actual* essence of an individual finite mode, on the other hand, like the essence of God, is a power that produces effects. But this power takes the form of *conatus*, and does so for two related reasons. One reason is that the existence of an individual finite mode is essentially characterized by duration, and so the individual's effects are spread out in time. The other reason, to be considered here, is that the power of a finite mode, unlike the power of God, is necessarily exposed to opposing forces.

Any finite individual is exposed to forces more powerful than itself, forces capable of destroying it. In 4p3, Spinoza states: "The force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes." Although the proposition is stated in terms of 'a man', the demonstration is based on an axiom that refers to singular things generally. The proposition could therefore be generalized to state that the force by which *any singular thing* perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes. All finite individuals are thus exposed to causes more powerful than themselves.

The power of such an individual, then, is exercised only to the extent that circumstance allows. Its success in 'persevering in existing' is contingent upon favorable encounters with external things. The exercise of its power is a striving, and not a simple production of effects, as is the case with the power of God. The *conatus* of an individual

aims at preserving its own nature. But a finite individual doesn't act except within determinate external conditions. This is the second aspect of 1p28, which we considered earlier insofar as it concerns existence:

Every singular thing, *or* any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence; and again, this cause also can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another, which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so on, to infinity. (1p28)

Just as an individual mode only comes into existence through the interaction of external causes, so is it determined to produce an effect only under the same condition.

Spinoza distinguishes between effects of an individual that can be understood through its nature alone, and those that cannot (3d1, 3d2). It is important to note that this is not a distinction between effects that involve external determinations and those that do not, but rather between those that involve external determinations favorable to the nature of the individual and those that do not. 1p28 applies in all cases; a singular thing can only be determined to produce an effect by another cause that is also finite and has a determinate existence.

Unlike God, then, an individual finite mode is constantly subject to affections from without that come from some finite nature not its own. If an individual cannot act, or produce an effect, without being determined to do so from without, what role can there be for actual essence? It might seem as though the essence will determine only unchanging features of the individual, while its changing features, including its actions, will be determined from without; that is, it might seem as though Spinoza is employing a

distinction between essence and accident. The striving of the individual would have certain essential characteristics, related to the relation of motion and rest that characterizes an individual body, and these would be such as to allow for other accidental determinations, which would depend on the external causes that determine the individual to act in a certain way. However, Spinoza seems to want to refuse this distinction, and prefers to speak of affections or states of the essence itself. The states of the essence, which depend on determinations that come from without, are not less ‘essential’ as a result of this dependence. This is an issue that comes up in Spinoza’s correspondence with Blijenbergh. Affections determined from without belong to the essential activity of a modal essence. There is not an essential activity and an accidental variation distinguishable from it. The only activity is essential – but involves determinations from without.

Spinoza’s correspondence with Willem van Blijenbergh concerns the problem of the reality of evil and its attribution to God.⁵³ There Spinoza argues that it is illegitimate to call a thing evil based on a comparison of it with another thing, since this is to attribute to it an essence that is not its own. Blijenbergh grants this, but adds, “nevertheless I will not be able to grant that, if I am now more imperfect than I was before, and if I have brought this on myself through my own misdeed, I am not to that extent worse” (Letter 20, IV/102). He suggests, in other words, that even if it is a mistake to compare different things, nevertheless one thing can surely be compared with itself at different times. But Spinoza sees the two cases as equivalent:

⁵³ Deleuze discusses this correspondence in Ch. 3 of *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* and Ch. 15 of *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*.

We say, for example, that a blind man is deprived of sight because we easily imagine him as seeing, whether this imagination arises from the fact that we compare him with others who see, or his present state with his past, when he used to see. And when we consider this man in this way, by comparing his nature with that of others or with his own past nature, then we affirm that seeing pertains to his nature, and for that reason we say that he is deprived of it. But when we consider God's decree, and his nature, we can no more affirm of that man than of a Stone, that he is deprived of vision. For at that time vision no more pertains to that man without contradiction than it does to the stone, *since nothing more pertains to that man, and is his, than what the Divine intellect and will attribute to him.* (Letter 21, IV/128, italics in original)

Comparing the past nature of a man with his present nature is here presented by Spinoza as just one way in which we might be led erroneously to attribute something to that man's nature that does not in fact belong to it. We 'easily imagine' the man as seeing, because he used to see. But seeing does not belong to his nature now, and so we are simply mistaken. Our sense that something is lacking is a purely psychological; it does not reflect anything in the actual situation.

Given Spinoza's readiness to allow that seeing might belong to the past nature of a man but not to his present nature, it begins to seem that, according to him, a thing's nature varies from moment to moment. Blijenbergh draws this conclusion:

From these words it seems to me (though I am subject to correction) to follow clearly that on your view nothing else pertains to an essence than what it has at that moment when it is perceived. I.e., if I have an appetite for sensual pleasure, that appetite pertains to my essence at that time, and if I have no appetite for sensual pleasure, then that lack of appetite pertains to my essence at the time when I lack that appetite. (Letter 22, IV/137)

Spinoza does not object to this characterization of his view. He does in fact seem to hold that what pertains to the essence of an individual can vary from moment to moment, and that what pertains to it is whatever is in fact the case. One thing that is clear, at any rate, is that when Spinoza says that something pertains to the essence of an individual, he is

not asserting that it is a necessary property of the individual, such that the individual would not be itself if this property were removed. The individual can survive variations in what pertains to its essence.

But if what pertains to the essence, the affections of the essence, are not necessary properties, are they not then contingent properties, i.e., accidents? Is Spinoza's talk of 'affections of essence' simply misleading?⁵⁴ Richard Mason claims, on the contrary, that "[t]he view of essence in the *Ethics* was far from a conventional one, and did not rely at all on a modal distinction between the necessary and contingent properties of things."⁵⁵ I agree with Mason that it is unhelpful to try to translate Spinoza's theory into the language of necessary and contingent properties. We have seen that what Spinoza proposes as the essence of an individual body is what he calls a 'relation of motion and rest'. I think one motivation for this proposal is that Spinoza fundamentally does not think of individuals in static terms, but rather in terms of activities or processes.⁵⁶ And even the affections, or states, of the essence are not actually static. The examples that Spinoza and Blijenbergh give, namely seeing and having an appetite for sensual pleasure, are themselves more like activities than states. Indeed, Curley has suggested that 3p7 can be read "as a proposal to

⁵⁴ Bennett seems to think so, noting that "It is odd for Spinoza to refer to states of the man's essence rather than of the man, but it comes to the same thing." *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 222.

⁵⁵ Mason, "Spinoza on Modality," 336.

⁵⁶ The focus on activity is also evident in Spinoza's identification of desire with essence in human beings. Spinoza defines desire like this: "Desire is man's very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection of it, to do something" (II/190). He adds that "by an affection of the human essence we understand any constitution of that essence, whether it is innate [NS: or has come from outside], whether it is conceived through the attribute of Thought alone, or through the attribute of Extension alone, or is referred to both at once" (II/190).

count as part of the essence of an individual any activity which can be understood to follow from its striving for self-preservation.”⁵⁷ If the essence of a body is characterized by a certain ratio or relation of motion and rest, then the essence seems to be more like a relation of activities to one another than like a specific activity or group of activities itself. In any case, it seems to be more helpful to think of a Spinozan essence in terms of activities than in terms of necessary properties.

If the essence relates activities to one another, then it needs *relata* – it needs specific activities to be taking place. The affections of essence seem to be such actual states of the essence. They are determined from without, as 1p28 indicates. What needs to be added is that this order of external causality is itself a necessary one, according to Spinoza. “Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced” (1p33). The series of states that actualizes the essence, although it is not determined by the essence itself, is nevertheless the only possible actualization of this essence, and thus is not accidental, except when considered abstractly. In abstraction from the necessary order of causes within which its only possible actualization must occur, the essence just needs some series of states corresponding to the relation of motion and rest that defines it. Only from this perspective, which ignores the conditions of existence, can the series of states belonging to the essence appear accidental.

We have been considering Spinoza’s theory of actual essence. We have seen that insofar as an essence is actual it appears as *conatus*, as striving aimed at self-preservation.

⁵⁷ Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 112.

We have seen that Spinoza treats what might traditionally be considered contingent properties of a thing as affections or states of the essence. This is possible, I claimed, because Spinoza thinks of the essence as a relation of activities rather than as a set of necessary properties. It remains to be asked, now, how this account of actual essence relates to the account of non-actual essences contained in the attributes, outlined in section 1 of this chapter. Hopefully this will also allow me to clarify what is to be understood by an affection of the essence.

How does the non-actual essence, the essence contained in the attribute, relate to the *conatus*, which is “nothing but the actual essence”? How, that is, does the non-actual essence relate to the actual essence? We have seen that the essence of a body is defined by a relation of motion and rest that can be preserved through certain kinds of perturbations. This ‘relation,’ it seems, defines certain ways in which the relata communicate their motions, which result in the maintenance of the relation itself. But we also saw that no specific relata are defined by the essence – what the essence defines are ‘roles’ that can be filled by various individual relata, and can be replaced in the course of the individual’s existence. An essence is *actual* when some existing individuals are indeed filling these roles, that is, when the individual is actually composed of existing parts. In existence, the individual is constantly affected from without. Although, if taken in isolation, it would act simply according to the laws of its own nature, exposed as it is it instead acts frequently in response to variations that do not follow from its own nature and could potentially destroy it. The essence of an individual body determines the actions of which that individual is capable. It determines, that is, relations among parts,

and thus actions that can compensate for variations affecting some part or parts. The more actions of which the body is capable, the more variations it can survive. These are actions aimed at restoring balance. The individual is affected in some part, and motion is communicated to the other parts according to relations defined by the essence of the individual. Using 'I' to stand for the individual, 'A' for its actions, and 'a' for the movements of which these actions are comprised, Matheron writes:

Each of these responses $A_1, A_2, \dots A'_1, A'_2$, *considered in itself*, abstracting from the passive affection that occasions it, can be conceived through the sole nature of I: knowing the essence of I, one can deduce that "if a_2 , then a_3 , then a_4, \dots ", thus that I *is capable* of executing the set of movements A_1 , etc.⁵⁸

In response to an external affection, then, an individual makes a set of movements that can be considered an action, since they follow from the essence of the individual. If some part of the individual is affected in a way that is not in conformity with the individual's essence and the individual can take no such action, then the individual is destroyed. As Matheron states, "The individual, in these conditions, will endure a passive variation only if it is in a position to answer back with a compensating action."⁵⁹

This makes it clear how the *conatus* of the individual, its striving to persevere in its being, is to be understood as the actual essence of the individual. Its actions determined by the essence that compensate for external affections and allow the individual to endure. Without some degree of compensating action, the individual would

⁵⁸ Matheron 45. "Chacune de ces réponses $A_1, A_2, \dots A'_1, A'_2$, *considérée en elle-même*, abstraction faite de l'affection passive qui l'occasionne, se conçoit par la seule nature de I: connaissant l'essence de I, on peut en déduire que « si a_2 , alors a_3 , alors a_4, \dots », donc que I *est capable* d'exécuter l'ensemble de mouvements A_1 , etc."

⁵⁹ Matheron 46. "L'individu, dans ces conditions, ne supportera une variation passive que s'il est à même de lui riposter par une action compensatrice."

be destroyed by the first external affection that disposed one of its parts to move in a way not in conformity with its essence.

It is also relatively clear what is meant by an affection of the essence. If the essence defines actions based on various potential modifications of the parts of the individual, an affection of the essence is any such actual modification for which a resulting action is defined. An affection of the essence is whatever calls forth some essential activity.

These actions, I have said, are a response to an external, passive affection. This is the usual situation, as Spinoza sees it. Generally, an individual is affected in some way from without, acts in response, and is immediately being affected again from without and is again acting in response to this new affection, etc. The essence of the individual allows it to accomplish the actions necessary for moment to moment survival (until an affection too powerful to be compensated is encountered, at least), but nothing more. This is the minimal degree of the actualization of an individual essence, the lowest level of *conatus*. The individual carries out just those internal actions necessary to prevent its own destruction. However, we can also define, as Matheron says, a kind of optimal level of actualization, in which the individual would do nothing but act on the basis of states generated by its own activity.⁶⁰ This is based on viewing the essence as a set of hypothetical actions: given state x, action A will be generated, leading to state y; given state y, action B will be generated, leading to state z; etc. In practice there is no finite individual that generates its series of states in this way, straightforwardly following the

⁶⁰ Cf. Matheron 48. This idea is quite close to the actual situation of a Leibnizian monad.

laws of its own individual essence. But this, in any case, is the maximal degree of the actualization of an essence or the highest level of *conatus*: activity based on states generated by the individual's own activity.

Individuals of a certain complexity, such as human beings, are potentially capable of approaching this ideal, according to Spinoza. How is this possible? First, we should recall that an individual taken in isolation would not be in stasis, but would continually act, carrying out the motions determined by its own essence.⁶¹ Similarly, if an individual could ever avoid being affected from without, it would act on the basis of the state that resulted from its last action. Neither perfect isolation nor the avoidance of external affection is possible; what is possible, however, as Matheron argues, is that a sufficiently complex individual simultaneously receive multiple affections that neutralize one another.⁶² Matheron's idea is that if the individual *would* perform action A, assuming it were following the laws of its own nature and were not affected from without, then even if it is simultaneously imposed upon by various external affections, it is possible that these affections will cancel each other out and the individual *will* still perform action A. In this case, the individual is following the laws of its own essence, in spite of being exposed to the external world. The potential for activity of this kind is enhanced to the extent that human beings can modify the external world in such a way as to make it more conducive to action in accordance with their essence.⁶³

⁶¹ This point is made by Spinoza in Letter 32, using the example of the blood, and was mentioned in section 1 of this chapter.

⁶² Cf. Matheron 50

⁶³ This is an important motivation for the ethical and political considerations in Spinoza's works.

Individuals have an eternal essence, but this is not defined by a set of necessary properties that would be instantiated as long as the individual exists. Rather, the essence seems to be a relation of activities, which can be produced within an attribute in accordance with the laws of nature under that attribute. And since the essence is of an individual finite mode, something that exists as a part of nature and not as an isolated whole in its own right, this activity takes the form of a striving for self-preservation. The essence, far from itself determining the series of states of the individual, relates together activities determined from without, in such a way as to maintain a certain relation of activity that characterizes the individual. What the actual essence of the individual does is determine compensating movements in the other parts of an individual when one part is affected in some way, such that the relation of motion and rest characterizing the individual can be preserved. Thus while the non-actual essence defines a set of relations of motions, the actual essence determines movements to be taken based on given actual movements.

A Spinozan individual is an essentially closed system of activity that exists only in a condition of exposure to external forces. The essence as principle of activity governs its attempts to approximate in existence what would be a perfectly self-sustaining activity if it could be taken in isolation.

Chapter 2: Leibniz

Leibniz's ontology of individual substance, unlike Spinoza's account of individual finite modes, does not stand clearly in the service of a single philosophical goal, such as Spinoza's goal of securing the path to human happiness or 'blessedness'; it is meant, like almost every aspect of Leibniz's system, to serve many ends at once. Prominent among these are securing the metaphysical foundations of Christianity against the modern materialists, reconciling ancient and modern discoveries in metaphysics, and accounting for the relationship between metaphysics and physics. Here, in any case, this ontology will be presented in outline, for the purposes of a comparison with Spinoza and to orient an interpretation of Deleuze.

The most immediate contrast with Spinoza, of course, is that Leibniz's finite individuals are substances, while Spinoza's are not. It is not obvious, however, just how significant this difference is. Could not Spinoza's finite individual modes just as well be called substances? Modes and monads are both finite individuals that depend on God for their essence and existence, but the similarities pretty much end there. Where the primary example of a Spinozan mode was the body, Leibnizian substances are immaterial and those that are not minds are still better compared to minds than to bodies. While a Spinozan individual is necessarily composite, a Leibnizian individual is simple and indivisible. Leibniz's idea of substance, in other words, is a notion that conflicts almost

point by point with Spinoza's conception of an individual mode – except for the key point that each is defined by an essence that appears as a principle of activity in the actual individual.

This chapter, like the previous one, is divided into three sections. The first concerns Leibniz's conception of the essence of an individual substance. The second deals with the existence of substances, and especially God's choice of which substances to create. The third section discusses the activity of an existing substance, as determined by its essence.

1. Essence

In this section I will consider Leibniz's conception of the essence of a finite individual substance. I will show how, in contrast with Spinoza, essences in Leibniz are understood in part as concepts in God's understanding, such that the essences of individual substances are closely related to what Leibniz calls complete concepts. In some texts Leibniz tries to account for complete concepts in terms of the logical manipulation of concepts in general, but we will see that this approach fails to capture much of what Leibniz understands by a complete concept. More promising, therefore, will be an approach that looks to the features of Leibnizian substances, or complete beings, in working out what is to be understood by a complete concept.

Leibniz's theory of complete beings or individual substances is far more complex and multi-faceted than I can do justice to here, but for the purposes of this study I will highlight two aspects of complete beings: first, that they internalize the spatial dimension

of the phenomenal world through their perceptions, and second, that they internalize its temporal dimension through the law of their activity. The essence of a substance will first of all appear in the guise of this law of activity. The best way to understand a complete concept, then, will be as God's grasp of the law of activity that essentially characterizes such a complete being or individual substance. I turn first of all, however, to the question of how Leibniz grounds the reality of essences in the first place.

We saw at the beginning of chapter 1 that Spinoza thinks of essences as somehow contained in God's attributes, and thus as depending for their reality on the existence of God. For Leibniz, the relationship between God and the essences of finite things is different; it is God's understanding, not his attributes, that serves as the ground for the reality of essences, independently of any existence besides God's own. In the context of a discussion of which essences get selected for existence, after comparing this selection to a mechanical process of 'heavy bodies striving,' Leibniz defends the reality of essences against an imagined objection:

But, you will say . . . this comparison . . . is faulty in this respect – heavy bodies which act against each other truly exist, whereas possibilities or essences, whether prior to or abstracted from existence, are imaginary or fictitious, and therefore we cannot look for a reason for existence in them. I answer that neither these essences nor the so-called eternal truths about them are fictitious but exist in a certain region of ideas, if I may so call it, namely, in God himself, who is the source of all essence and of the existence of the rest.¹

Leibniz is insistent, then, that essences have a certain existence of their own in God. His view of the realm of essences stands in the tradition of theological Platonism that posits a

¹ "On the Radical Origination of Things" (1697); G VII 304-5; L 488. For abbreviations used in citing texts by Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze, see the list at the end of the main text.

realm of Ideas in God's mind. As Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne write, quoting another text from Leibniz,

In a letter to Hansch of July 1707 praising a certain "*enthusiasmo Platonico*," Leibniz says that "many of the Platonic doctrines are most beautiful – [...] that there is an intelligible world in the divine mind, which I usually call the region of ideas . . ." ²

So there are ideas in the divine understanding that are, in relation to us, a kind of intelligible world.

In order better to grasp what Leibniz understands by the reality of essences, however, we should note the equivalence, in the first quotation, of "essence" and "possibility." Elsewhere Leibniz writes, "In order to call something possible, it is enough for me that one can form a concept of it even though it should only exist in the divine understanding, which is, so to speak, the domain of possible realities." ³ From these texts there emerges immediately the close association for Leibniz between concept, possibility, and essence. The region of ideas, the realm of essences, simply consists of the concepts understood by God, which can be thought of as possibilities insofar as God is capable of actualizing them, of creating the corresponding objects. As Benson Mates says,

Leibniz was a nominalist, denying the reality of all abstract entities. Nothing that is not an individual substance really exists; meaningful statements that appear to be about concepts and other abstract entities must be *compendia loquendi* for statements about one or more actual individuals. ⁴

² J. A. Cover and John O'Leary Hawthorne, *Substance and Individuation in Leibniz*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 152; the Leibniz quotation is from L 592.

³ G II 55; Mason 62

⁴ Benson Mates, *The Philosophy of Leibniz: Metaphysics and Language*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 73. There is a significant exception to this, however, insofar as Leibniz takes the ontological argument for the existence of God to involve a real transition from possibility to actuality.

The fact that one of Leibniz's individuals is God makes it possible for Leibniz to attribute a reality to the contents of God's understanding that he would not attribute to the contents of the understanding of some contingent being. Di Bella points out that God was a particularly useful individual in a nominalistic metaphysics: "The reference to God's mind . . . is a move that – while not being available to Hobbes – was open to theistic nominalists. Thus, Leibniz shifts onto divine ideas the epistemological burden which realists attributed to universals within things."⁵ So, as Mates claims, statements about possibles are really statements about an individual substance, namely God, but God is an individual whose ideas can play the role of essences quite effectively. Essences, for Leibniz, are first of all concepts in God's understanding.

Our interest is in the essences of finite individuals. But God's understanding is much more than just a region of the essences, concepts, or possibilities of individuals; it also contains all the incomplete or universal notions as well. In fact, according to Leibniz, the only limit to what is contained in the divine understanding is contradiction itself, so that God's understanding appears as a kind of realm of logical possibility. He writes, "all truths that concern possibles or essence . . . rest on the principle of contradiction."⁶ Often, in fact, Leibniz uses the language of essence to refer, not to the essences of individuals per se, but to necessary connections among concepts, what could be called 'species essences' or 'mathematical essences.' Di Bella writes, "From a terminological point of view [Leibniz] will usually reserve the venerable lexicon of

⁵ Stefano Di Bella, *The Science of the Individual: Leibniz's Ontology of Individual Substance*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2005, p. 38.

⁶ A 6.4.1445; AG 19

“essence, essential” to this type of conceptual containment, which is bound to incomplete concepts.”⁷ However, Leibniz also sometimes uses the term ‘essence’ in the sense that is relevant to my discussion, that is, to refer to an individual essence, as when he refers to the “essence or individual concept” of a substance.⁸ Possible individuals are grasped in what Leibniz calls ‘complete concepts.’ He writes that “it is the nature of an individual substance or complete being to have a concept so complete that it is sufficient to make us understand and deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which the concept is attributed.”⁹ Such complete concepts are generally contrasted with concepts of accidents¹⁰ or of species. Leibniz writes, “the concept of a species contains only eternal or necessary truths, whereas the concept of an individual contains, regarded as possible [*sub ratione possibilitatis*], what in fact exists or what is related to the existence of things and to time”¹¹ It is these complete concepts that are equivalent to the essences of individuals.

Apparently, to understand the essence of an individual for Leibniz, we must understand what a complete concept is. But there seem to be, in Leibniz, two largely independent ways of approaching complete concepts. One way, which I will call the logical approach, is to start from the study of concepts and propositions in general, that is, from formal logic, and to work towards individual concepts from there. This is the approach that Bertrand Russell emphasizes in *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, although he

⁷ Di Bella 215-16

⁸ “Discourse on Metaphysics” (henceforth DM) §16; A 6.4.1554-55; G IV 441; L 313

⁹ DM §8, A 6.4.1540, G IV 433, L 307

¹⁰ For instance, in the sentence following that just quoted from the “Discourse on Metaphysics.”

¹¹ G II 39; Mason 41

does so largely to demonstrate its failure. It is the approach that Leibniz takes when he would like to convince Arnauld that his theory of complete concepts follows from the nature of a true proposition. Leibniz writes, “[I]n every true affirmative proposition . . . the concept of the predicate is in a sense included in that of the subject; the predicate is present in the subject [*praedicatum inest subjecto*]; or else I do not know what truth is.”¹² Thus everything that can truly be predicated of an individual will be included in the concept of that individual. This approach can make it seem as though individual concepts fit nicely into a general logical theory of concepts, propositions and truth. What complicates everything, and ultimately undermines the purely logical approach to the essence of an individual in Leibniz, as far as I can tell, is the necessity of making reference to time. Leibniz sometimes tries to present this as unproblematic. Thus, for instance, he claims that “*The complete or perfect concept of an individual substance involves all its predicates, past, present, and future,*”¹³ and this is made to follow simply from the fact that the concept must include all of the individual’s predicates. The reference to past, present, and future predicates, however, creates problems for understanding the sort of concept that is involved, which no longer seems like a simple expansion of a general concept. The following long quote from Benson Mates makes the situation clear:

Leibniz says, it will be remembered, that the concept (or property) King is included in the complete individual concept of Alexander the Great. But this inclusion relation cannot be exactly the same as that which holds between Animal and Man or between Plane Curve and Circle. For Man and Circle are complex concepts that contain . . . simpler ones like Animal and Plane Curve, while the

¹² G II 56; Mason 63

¹³ “First Truths” (*Principia logico-metaphysica* [1689?]); A 6.4.1646; L 268

complete individual concept of Alexander cannot contain King in that same way. It is not absolutely impossible for something to be Alexander without being a king; indeed, before 336 B.C. such was actually the case. The concept of Alexander seems to be a temporally ordered series of states, each of which is itself a “complete” property or concept – complete in the sense that it contains, for every property P , either P or the complement of P and not both. Thus, the property King is not, strictly speaking, contained in the concept of Alexander, but rather it is contained in some elements of the series of states that constitute that concept.

There is no evidence that Leibniz ever explicitly considered this asymmetry between individual and general concepts. Usually he seems to regard the complete concept of an individual simply as a complex property of the same type as any other complex property, with components that are less specific concepts and are ultimately analyzable into simples.¹⁴

As Mates implies, there is one approach to conceptual containment that accounts for the inclusion of simpler concepts in more complex ones, such that it is absolutely impossible for the thing defined by the more complex concept to be what it is without also being defined by the concept that is contained in it; e.g. it is absolutely impossible for something to be a man without also being an animal. When Leibniz takes the logical approach to complete concepts, treating them in the same way as incomplete concepts such as man and animal, he does not seem to indicate that any change in the notion of containment is needed. Yet, as Mates also insists, the sort of containment that applies to complete concepts of individuals cannot in fact be the same as that which applies to incomplete or species concepts. The solution Mates proposes is to consider the complete concept as a “temporally ordered series of states,” where each state could be taken as a concept in the traditional sense. This account of complete individual concepts is not reached by any expansion of the logical characteristics of general concepts, but by taking

¹⁴ Mates 87

account of the temporal aspect of the entities that the complete concept is supposed to capture.

Although Mates is right that Leibniz said little about the asymmetry between species concepts and concepts of individuals, Leibniz did indicate his awareness of a need to “philosophize one way about the concept of an individual substance and another way about the specific concept of the sphere,” recognizing, as already quoted, that “the concept of an individual contains, regarded as possible, what in fact exists or what is related to the existence of things and to time.”¹⁵ What Mates offers, with his account of the complete concept as a temporally ordered series of states, seems to be an examples of what James Manns calls the ‘mirror image’ theory of individual natures in Leibniz.¹⁶

Manns writes,

On this account, a nature can be seen as nothing other than the idea (housed in the mind of God) of that succession of states or properties attributable to any individual substance. These states, as such, are to be viewed as a realization of their ideal counterpart.¹⁷

Instead of a conjunction of logical predicates, the complete concept would now appear as a ‘script’ or ‘life-plan,’ a list of the individual’s states in the order in which they occur. Manns argues, however, that this is still an insufficient account of complete concepts (although it does better than the purely logical approach, since it at least gives us a temporal series).

¹⁵ G II 39; Mason 41

¹⁶ He attributes versions of this view to Nicholas Rescher, Wilfrid Sellars and R. S. Woolhouse. See James Manns, “The Nature of a Nature in Leibniz” in *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Critical Assessments*, Vol. II, Ed. R. S. Woolhouse, London, Routledge, 1994, pp. 164-75. (Source: *Studia Leibnitiana*, Vol. 19, no. 2 [1987], pp. 173-81.) p. 165.

¹⁷ Manns 164

The alternative to the logical approach, which, as we have seen, tries to view complete concepts as reached by an expansion of the properties of general concepts, could be called the ontological approach. The ontological approach to a complete concept first of all takes it as a perfect grasp (God's grasp) of an individual. Whatever individuals are like, presumably God grasps this perfectly. Leibniz's account of what individuals are like is not derived from his logical reflections on complete concepts. Di Bella tries to show how, within Leibniz's work, "the ontological idea of a complete being has its own relatively autonomous history, which has to be presupposed by the 'logical' theory of complete concept."¹⁸ Leibniz works out that individual substances must be complete beings, and the complete concept is supposed to be God's grasp of such a being. From this point of view, one can look at the ontology of individuals in Leibniz to try to work out what ought to be captured by the complete concept. When we give a temporal dimension to the complete concept, we are already doing this to some extent. But to grasp complete concepts, and thus the essences of individual substances more adequately, we must look at Leibniz's ontology of substance, his theory of complete beings, in a bit more detail.

In the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, as we have seen, Leibniz states that "it is the nature of an individual substance or complete being to have a concept so complete that it is sufficient to make us understand and deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which the concept is attributed."¹⁹ What is a complete being? Here I will focus on two important elements of this notion and show how Leibniz incorporates them into his

¹⁸ Di Bella 381

¹⁹ DM §8; A 6.4.1540; G IV 433; L 307

theory of individual substance. The key to the notion of a complete being seems to be the idea that a complete being, a true individual substance, must internalize everything that makes it the individual that it is. We can see Leibniz as starting from some ideas about what makes for an individual in the spatio-temporal phenomenal world, and constructing a metaphysical theory that allows for the internalization of the essential factors of individuality. One dimension of this, the spatial dimension, seems to be derived from physical considerations, and suggests that the identity of an individual depends on how it is interconnected with all other things. We will see that it is the notion of perception that allows Leibniz to internalize these interconnections. A second, temporal dimension is the idea that an individual's entire history is relevant to its being the individual that it is. Leibniz's notion of substantial activity works to internalize this aspect of individuality and complete the notion of a complete being. Instead of being dependent on what is distinct from it in space and time, a complete being internalizes both of these orders of relations and is dependent on nothing but God. Or, more precisely, a complete being turns out to provide the foundation for what appears phenomenally as the orders of space and time. I will first consider the spatial or physical dimension.

Stefano Di Bella suggests, correctly, I think, that one line of thought at work in Leibniz is the idea that "individuals are conceivable, hence individual concepts possible, only by assuming their being inserted in an infinitely complex network of other interconnected individuals."²⁰ This view of individuality seems to derive from a line of

²⁰ Di Bella 344

thought that concerns the *physical* interconnection of things, the notion that everything is affected by everything else in a physical continuum. Leibniz writes,

The universe being in a way fluid, all of one piece, and like a limitless ocean, all motions are conserved and propagated to infinity, although insensibly, just as the circles which a thrown stone generates in water are propagated visibly for some distance; and although they finally become invisible, their impression does not fail to continue and to extend to infinity . . . This communication of motions means that each thing acts on and is affected by every other thing . . . Thus our organs, being affected by neighboring bodies, and these by others near to them, we are affected mediately by all other bodies, and our soul also, since it represents bodies according to its sense organs.²¹

In this passage, Leibniz is discussing the interaction of bodies in the material world, which for him is not the level of true individuality. What I am claiming, however, is that Leibniz incorporates ideas derived from the situation of a body into his theory of individual substance. An individual substance, although it is not affected from without at all, has states of an infinite complexity, complex enough, that is, to represent all of the infinity of affections to which a body would be subject in the physical continuum. Thus it is as if a Leibnizian substance internalizes all the affections that a body would receive from without. A body, in fact, in Leibniz's view, would depend for its individuality on all of the bodies that affect it and make it have precisely those characteristics that it has. It would not have sufficient independence to be considered a substance. In Leibniz's view, a finite substance should depend for its existence on nothing besides God. If individuality depends on an infinitely complex set of determinations, then these must be internal to an individual substance.

²¹ To the Electress Sophia, 9 February 1706; G VII 567; quoted in Robert McRae, *Leibniz: Perception, Apperception, & Thought*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976, p. 29 n. 8.

It is the ontological notion of perception that allows Leibniz to conceive of the internalization of all the external circumstances that could go into making up the identity of an individual on a realistic view of the material world. Robert McRae highlights the fundamental status of perception in Leibniz and warns against possible misunderstandings:

When at the beginning of the *Principles of Nature and Grace* Leibniz introduces his notion of substance as a monad and asserts that it cannot at any given moment be distinguished from another ‘except by its internal qualities and action, which can be nothing else that its *perceptions* ...’, the reference to perceptions has no epistemological significance whatever. Perception is a key notion in Leibniz’s metaphysics because he was an immaterialist who believed that substance and the states of substance must be conceived by analogy with the mind and its perceptions. In using the analogy, he was not asserting that all substances are minds, nor that they are aware of their surroundings nor that they see and feel objects.²²

Perception has first of all a purely ontological sense for Leibniz. It is a name for the modifications of a simple substance, which are complex even though they are states of what is simple. For perception to occur is for “phenomena that are divisible or made up of many entities” to be “expressed or represented in a single indivisible entity”;²³ “perception is *the expression of a multitude in a unity*.”²⁴ Just as we human beings can have perceptions of multiple objects without this posing a threat to our unity as individuals or making us into something divisible, simple substances in general can represent the multiple while maintaining their simplicity. It is largely the notion of perception, then, that makes true substantial individuality intelligible.

²² McRae 19

²³ G II 121; Mason 155

²⁴ To Bayle, G III 69; WF 256

Although Leibniz generally discusses perception as perception *of* something, as the expression of what is multiple in what is simple, it is perceptions themselves, as the states of substances, that are ontologically basic, and what they ‘express’ in fact depends on them for its reality. The material world is derivative of substances with their perceptions. On the fundamental level, there are only simple substances with their perceptual states.

What I have said so far about complete beings is in fact true of any one of their states taken on its own. Each state of a Leibnizian substance involves sufficient complexity to express the entire physical universe. The second important idea about individuality that enters into Leibniz’s notion of a complete being, constituting its temporal dimension, is the idea that an individual substance’s entire history is relevant to its identity.²⁵ As with the circumstances of the physical world, however, if this is to be a factor in a theory of individual *substance* for Leibniz, then the circumstances of the individual history must be internalized. What accomplishes the internalization of individual history is the notion of substantial activity, and especially the notion of an internal law of such activity. Leibniz writes,

If . . . the law set up by God does in fact leave some vestige of him expressed in things, if things have been so formed by the command that they are made capable of fulfilling the will of him who commanded them, then it must be granted that

²⁵ In fact, Leibniz makes this point even with respect to extended things, although the explanation, it seems, must ultimately be sought in his theory of substance: “It seems clear to us that this square of marble from Genoa would have been exactly the same even if it had been left there, because our senses permit us to make only superficial judgements, but fundamentally, because of the connexions between things the whole universe with all its parts would be quite different and would have been another universe from the beginning if the least thing were to happen other than it does” (G II 42; Mason 46).

there is a certain efficacy residing in things, a form or force such as we usually designate by the name of nature, from which the series of phenomena follows according to the prescription of the first command.²⁶

Law, form, force, nature and essence are all used synonymously by Leibniz with reference to individual substances;²⁷ they all refer to the principle governing a substance's activity, the immanent rule according to which it produces its states. The notion of laws internal to an individual substance also comes up in the following passage, in which Leibniz asserts that future predicates must be understood as laws contained in the subject:

And seeing that since the beginning of my existence it could truly be said of me that this or that would happen to me, one must admit that these predicates were laws contained in the subject or in the complete concept of me which makes what is called myself, which is the basis of the connexion between all my different states and of which God had perfect knowledge from all eternity.²⁸

The implication here is that an individual substance's future states are contained in it in virtue of these laws. The activity of an individual substance consists in the production of the series of its perceptual states, and the essence of the individual substance is nothing other than the law or laws of its activity.

An individual substance or complete being, then, is ultimately characterized by a law for the production of a series of infinitely complex perceptual states, and there is a sense of 'essence' that refers to this law or principle of activity in the individual itself.

²⁶ "On Nature Itself" (1698), par. 6; G IV 507; L 501

²⁷ The different terms come to the fore in different contexts. 'Law' seems to be preferred in contexts where the focus is on causality or on analogies with mathematical functions; 'form' is preferred when Leibniz is explaining what was worth saving in the Scholastics; 'force' is used mainly when Leibniz is relating his metaphysics to his physics; 'nature' is frequent when he is combating occasionalism or Spinozism; 'essence' appears in contexts where discussions of creation and existence are near at hand.

²⁸ G II 43; Mason 47

This would be the metaphysical essence, the nature or form of an individual. Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne offer the following evidence for Leibniz’s assertion of such a metaphysical essence:

Recall . . . that in *Discourse* §13, to the objection “But someone might insist that [Caesar’s] nature or form corresponds to this notion, and since God has imposed this personality on him, it is henceforth necessary for him to satisfy it,” Leibniz replies not by denying that the nature of a substance corresponds to the complete notion, but by denying that this (with premises) entails the absence of freedom.”²⁹

And as Leibniz also states, “God has always endowed things themselves with something from which all of their predicates are to be explained.” This “something” is “an active and, so to speak, vital principle.”³⁰ This principle of activity with which things themselves are endowed is the essence of a substance.³¹

If we return now, with this outline sketch of Leibniz’s ontology of complete beings or individual substances in hand, to the question of how to understand what Leibniz means by a complete concept, what is clear, at least, is that if a complete concept is to provide God’s perfect grasp of such an individual substance, then it must include some grasp of the law of the series that Leibniz identifies as the essence of a substance. “[N]o enduring thing can be produced,” Leibniz writes, “if no force that long endures can be impressed upon it by the divine power.” God produces a world of enduring things, not

²⁹ Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne 218 n. 7

³⁰ *A Specimen of Dynamics* (1695); AG 125; See GM VI 234-54 for the Latin text.

³¹ In another relevant statement, made while commenting on a piece of writing by Foucher, Leibniz writes: “The author is right in saying that thought is not the essence of the soul, for a thought is an act, and since one thought succeeds another, that which remains during this change must necessarily rather be the essence of the soul, since it remains always the same. The essence of substances consists in the primitive force of action, or in the law of the sequence of changes” (“Notes on the Reply of Foucher to the Criticism of his Criticism of the ‘Recherche de la Vérité’” [1676]; A.6.3.326; G I 374; L 155)

a world where “everything would reduce to certain evanescent and flowing modifications or phantasms, so to speak, of the one permanent divine substance.”³² Similarly, no complete concept could successfully grasp a Leibnizian individual, an enduring thing, if it did not include a grasp of this enduring force, rather than simply including the predicates corresponding to the series of the individual’s states. It seems, then, that we must take complete concepts to have a structure similar to the ontological structure of individual substances themselves. There must be a sort of core concept corresponding to the law of the series of the individual, and the predicates contained in the concept must follow from this core, just as the states of the individual follow from its essence.

Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne, in giving an account of complete concepts, put the emphasis on certain texts of Leibniz’s in which he presents the relationship between the complete concept and the predicates of the individual as one of explanation. They write, “Leibniz understands individual concepts as standing in an explanatory relation to the predicates of an individual, as presumably no list or conjunction stands to its members.”³³ Just as the essence of an individual allows it to produce the whole series of its perceptual states, so the complete concept would not so much directly contain all of the predicates of the individual as allow for their explanation. However, Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne suspect that “an individual concept is not related to the predicates contained in it in any straightforwardly formal or deductive way.”³⁴ Unsurprisingly, when we follow the ontological approach and work out the features of complete concepts

³² “On Nature Itself” (1698), par. 8; G IV 508; L 502

³³ Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne 172-73

³⁴ Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne 173

on the basis of the theory of substance, the ambiguities of the latter are carried over into the theory of concepts. The relation between the concept and the predicates it ‘contains’ is only as clear as the relation between the essence of an individual substance and the states it ‘produces.’ Complete concepts, understood in this way as God’s perfect grasp of Leibnizian individual substances, do not appear to be good candidates for insertion into a general system for the logical manipulation of concepts.

Earlier I contrasted the ontological approach to complete concepts, in which the concept is modelled on the metaphysical structure of the individual, with the logical approach, in which individual concepts are derived as variations on general concepts. Di Bella notes that the two approaches lead to two different ways of understanding complete concepts, and that both of these are present in Leibniz’s texts. Corresponding to the ontological approach is a view of the complete concept as one from which the properties of an individual can be deduced, while the logical approach views the complete concept itself as a set or conjunction of predicates. Di Bella does not think that Leibniz ever really chooses between these two interpretations. He writes,

The two ways of construing the complete concept – as an identifying property, from which the others can be deduced, or as a set of predicates simply built up by the logical operation of conjunction – remain as two possibilities, both documented in Leibniz’s text. The first surfaces when Leibniz makes the notion adhere to the inner metaphysical structure of the individual, but it is never explicitly and fully spelt out. The second is put forward when he deals with individual concepts, in logical contexts, as a limiting case in the general manipulation of concepts, availing himself of the standard resources of their combinatorial treatment.³⁵

³⁵ Di Bella 202

Following the ontological approach, we will not view complete concepts simply as sets of predicates. But it is important to realize that many of Leibniz's texts do seem to treat complete concepts as if they could be built up in just this way. On the other hand, as Di Bella says, the alternative view of complete concepts is not really spelled out by Leibniz, and it does not seem likely that it can be given the sort of formal treatment that Leibniz applied to concepts when he is considering issues in logic.

Also important to note is the fact that the logical approach to complete concepts in Leibniz can lead, in turn, to an interpretation of his ontology of individual substance that differs significantly from the one presented here. Thus there is a kind of 'logical approach' to the theory of substance as well. On this kind of interpretation, what is emphasized is that a complete concept contains *all* of the predicates of a substance, including relational predicates,³⁶ and thus it seems to include information about everything else that exists along with that substance. That is, since the complete concept of an individual is said to contain all of the individual's predicates, and relational predicates are included, if the nature of an individual is read off from the complete concept, then the individual seems to be interconnected with all of the individuals in its world, i.e., it seems to follow that it can exist only if all the other individuals that compose its world exist. But if one starts from Leibniz's theory of substance, as I have done, one finds that the accidents of substances are perceptual states that are produced by each substance autonomously, and that Leibniz envisions scenarios in which the same

³⁶ The sort of interpretation I am pursuing involves denying that relations to other substances are included as such in the complete concept of an individual substance. For a discussion of this issue, see Cover and O'Leary-Hawthorne, *Substance and Individuation in Leibniz*, 58-86.

perceptual series of an existing substance would occur, despite no other substances being in existence.³⁷ From this perspective, it seems clear that the complete concept of an individual *cannot* refer directly to the existence of any other individual. I will have more to say about the separability of substances in the next section. For now, the point is that the logical approach to complete concepts and the theory of substance leads to conclusions about the nature of individual substance that are inconsistent with Leibniz's own explicitly drawn conclusions.

Besides avoiding these interpretive difficulties, the approach that starts from the ontology of substance also has the advantage of clarifying the relationship between two Leibnizian 'definitions' of substance: substance as what falls under a complete concept, and substance as what has within it an active force. Benson Mates presents this relationship as a mystery: "[W]e are left to wonder," he writes, "what reason [Leibniz] could possibly have had for holding that those and only those entities that "have within them active force" also have "concepts that contain every attribute of whatever falls under them.""³⁸ This link becomes more intelligible, it seems to me, if we note that the activity of a Leibnizian substance consists in its producing all of its own states based on its own internal principle. To adequately grasp such an entity means grasping this principle of activity and the states of the individual that follow from it. On the ontological approach to substance in Leibniz, a grasp of this is what is meant by a complete concept, and thus it is clear why only those entities that produce all of their own states in this way should have a complete concept. On the other hand, if we start from

³⁷ For texts see section 2, below.

³⁸ Mates 194

complete concepts, taken simply as complete descriptions or complete sets of predicates, there does seem to be no reason why what falls under such a concept should also involve a principle of activity.

Whereas the essences of individuals in Spinoza depend directly on God's attributes for their reality, those in Leibniz depend on their being known by God, or being objects of his understanding. Unlike the 'realm of essences' contained in Spinoza's God, Leibniz's is a realm of logical possibility. However, these logical possibilities of individuals are not reached by simple combination of predicates, but depend on a structured view of what an individual substance must be like. The central feature of this view is that the individual is characterized by a principle of activity through which it produces all of its states. If God understands something to be an individual substance, it is because he sees the principle of activity that characterizes it.

Although I have argued here that the logical manipulation of concepts is not sufficient to generate the notion of a complete concept as Leibniz actually uses it, the limit on what essences there actually are, given the ontology of individual substance and the corresponding theory of complete concepts, is purely logical. That is, for Leibniz, God's understanding includes the concept, the essence, of any logically possible individual substance. There are essences of infinitely many individuals that never exist. Unlike Spinoza, Leibniz considers these individuals *possible*. They could have existed instead of the individuals that actually exist. The main thing that Leibniz's account of the existence of finite individuals, to which we turn in the next section, will have to do is to explain why some possible individuals exist rather than others.

2. Existence

We saw that for Spinoza the problem of the coming into existence of finite things is answered by a causal account of how an individual may be composed out of pre-existing parts.³⁹ For Spinoza, individuals are formed and destroyed in the course of the normal operations of the natural world. The cause of finite existence is in other finite things and comes only ‘mediately’ from God. As far as Leibniz’s individual substances are concerned, this is not the case at all. Being simple, they are subject neither to composition nor to decomposition. It is not by the operation of natural forces that they come into existence, and, unlike God, they do not have a reason for their existence in themselves either: “For a sufficient reason for existence cannot be found merely in any one individual thing or even in the whole aggregate and series of things”⁴⁰ Leibniz’s individual substances come into existence through direct creation by God. Monads, he says, “cannot begin except by creation or end except by annihilation.”⁴¹ An account of how individuals come into existence, in Leibniz, thus turns into an account of which individuals God determines to create, and this will be the topic of this section. An important role will be played in this account by Leibniz’s notion of world, and much of

³⁹ See chapter 1, section 2.

⁴⁰ “On the Radical Origination of Things” (1697); G VII 302; L 486

⁴¹ “The Monadology” (1714) §6; G VI 607; L 643

my time will be spent clarifying this notion.⁴² Finally, I will briefly consider the main criteria by which, according to Leibniz, God chooses the best possible world.

Even though, as mentioned, the essences of finite individuals do not have the reason for their existence in themselves, Leibniz thinks that they must not be indifferent to existence either. Rather, essences or possibles ‘strive’ for existence in their own right.

Leibniz writes,

[W]e should . . . acknowledge that from the very fact that something exists rather than nothing, there is a certain urgency [*exigentia*] toward existence in possible things or in possibility or essence itself – a pre-tension to exist, so to speak – and in a word, that essence in itself tends to exist. From this it follows further that all possible things, or things expressing an essence or possible reality, tend toward existence with equal right in proportion to the quantity of essence or reality, or to the degree of perfection which they involve; for perfection is nothing but quantity of essence.⁴³

This talk of striving essences or possibles has led some commentators to conclude that there is really no role for God to play in Leibniz’s account of the coming into existence of finite individuals.⁴⁴ The idea would be that the essences all strive for existence, and some group prevails, by virtue of being the group with the greatest total perfection. The whole thing would occur very much like a mechanical process. But even though Leibniz himself draws the analogy to a mechanical process, the account that renders reference to God superfluous is far from his view of the matter. Another passage that describes the

⁴² This will also be relevant to my discussion of Deleuze’s interpretation of Leibniz in the next chapter, since Deleuze makes much of the fact that Leibniz’s God chooses a world rather than choosing certain individuals, but gives this a meaning very much his own.

⁴³ “On the Radical Origination of Things” (1697); G VII 303; L 487

⁴⁴ Arthur Lovejoy interprets Leibniz in this way in *The Great Chain of Being*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960 (First published Harvard University Press, 1936); see p. 177.

situation of the striving essences, including both the mechanical analogy and explicit reference to God's role, is the following:

[T]he principle of existence is the essence of things. Certainly: Every essence or reality demands (*exigit*) existence, just as every *conatus* demands movement, or an effect, that is to say, unless something hinders it. And every possible involves not only possibility, but also a *conatus* for actually existing, not as if things which are not could have *conatus*, but because the ideas of essences actually existing in God stake a claim in this way; then God freely decrees to choose what is most perfect. Hence just as on a balance each weight strives (*conatur*) and pushes on its scale according to the measure of its heaviness, and demands (*exigit*) descent, unless it is impeded, but what is heaviest prevails; so each thing aspires to existence according to the measure of its perfection, but that one obtains it which is more perfect. Accordingly every possible exists, unless it is impeded by the existence of what is more perfect. From these things it is obvious that the essences of things depend on the divine nature, existences on the divine will; for not by their own power can they obtain existence, but by the decree of God.⁴⁵

In this passage Leibniz makes it clear that the reality of these striving essences of individuals is the reality they have as ideas in God's understanding,⁴⁶ and that they do not obtain existence "by their own power." In fact, not only the analogy with a mechanical process, but also the talk of striving, should probably be taken metaphorically. It can be translated into Leibniz's vocabulary for describing two aspects or moments of God's will.

⁴⁵ A 6.4.557. [P]rincipium Existentiae est Essentia rerum. Nimirum: Omnis essentia seu realitas exigit existentiam quemadmodum omnis conatus exigit motum, vel effectum, scilicet, nisi quid obstet. Et omne possibile non tantum involvit Possibilitatem, sed et conatum actu existendi, non quasi ea quae non sunt conatum habeant, sed quia ita postulant ideae essentiarum in Deo actu existentes; postquam Deus libere decrevit eligere quod est perfectissimum. Hinc quemadmodum in libra unumquodque pondus conatur et pertendit in sua lance pro modulo suae gravitatis, et descensum exigit, nisi impediatur, vincit autem quod est gravius; ita unaquaeque res ad existentiam aspirat pro modulo suae perfectionis, obtinet autem quae perfectior est. Proinde omne possibile existit, nisi impediat existentiam perfectioris. Ex his patet Essentias rerum pendere a natura divina, existentias a voluntate divina; neque enim propria vi sed decreto Dei existentiam obtinere possunt.

⁴⁶ Leibniz makes the same point in a passage later in "On the Radical Origination of Things," quoted in section 1, above.

The first aspect, God's antecedent will, "tends toward actualizing all good and repelling all evil,"⁴⁷ and since it is better for something to exist rather than nothing, the 'striving' or 'claim' of all essences for existence can be understood as God's antecedent will that all should exist. Of the second aspect, God's consequent will, Leibniz writes:

The *consequent will* arises from the concurrence of all antecedent acts of will. When the effects of all antecedent acts of will cannot be carried out together, the maximum effect which can be obtained by wisdom and power will be obtained. This will is also commonly called *decree*.⁴⁸

Just as the striving essences are said to compete with one another such that the result of maximum perfection comes into existence, so God's antecedent acts of will are said to conflict and to be combined to maximum effect in his consequent will or decree. These, I would argue, are two ways of describing the same situation. The language of striving essences captures well the objectivity of the conflict, as Leibniz sees it, which involves a genuine comparison of the degrees of perfection inherent in the things themselves, and is not just a matter of God's preference; the language of God's will, however, better reflects the ontological status of the essences involved. They are ideas in God's understanding, not existing individuals in their own right.

Now if all essences of individuals strive for existence, or have a claim on existence as ideas in God's understanding, why do they not all come into existence? What is the conflict between them? Leibniz seems to take it as evident that not all possible individuals exist, as is clear from his attempt to reduce Spinoza's position to

⁴⁷ *Causa Dei* §25; G VI 442; Schrecker 119

⁴⁸ *Causa Dei* §26; G VI 442-43; Schrecker 119

absurdity by suggesting that it implies that all fictional characters will exist in reality.⁴⁹ But even though it is clear that Leibniz holds that not all possible individuals exist, it is very difficult to see, given his ontology of substance, how he can consistently maintain this. The answer is supposed to be found in the notion of ‘impossibility.’⁵⁰ While each individual substance is possible, taken in itself, and strives for existence on this basis, not all substances can coexist, not all individuals are compossible. Given the nature of Leibnizian substances, however, as independent producers of internal perceptual states, each according to its own law, it is very difficult to see how any one individual could be incompatible with another.

Commentators who follow the logical approach to Leibniz’s theory of substance, deriving the nature of substance from the features of concepts, emphasize those texts in which Leibniz seems to take impossibility to be explained by logical contradiction between concepts. Leibniz states that “[t]he compossible is that which, with another, does not imply a contradiction,”⁵¹ such that the impossible must be that which, with another, does imply a contradiction. The idea is that, since these concepts are supposed to include everything that can truly be predicated of the individual, and since the individual is supposed to ‘mirror’ the whole world, the individual concept will in fact include everything that can truly be predicated of *every* individual in its world, and a

⁴⁹ See above, Ch. 1, section 1.

⁵⁰ There is a famous passage in which Leibniz states that the source of impossibility is unknown. He writes, “But it is as yet unknown to men, whence arises the impossibility of diverse things, or how it can happen that diverse essences are opposed to each other, seeing that all purely positive terms seem to be compatible *inter se*” (G VII 195; Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, London: Routledge, 1992 (First edition, 1900; Second edition, 1937), pp. 296-97).

⁵¹ Grua 325; Mates 75 n. 36

contradiction would arise between it and any concept of any individual not belonging to its world, and thus not reflected in its concept. Benson Mates interprets Leibniz in this way, referring to “the Leibnizian doctrine that in the actual world and in every other possible world, each concept “mirrors” or “expresses” all the other individual concepts in that world.”⁵² No individual substance would be compossible with a substance that mirrors a different set of substances. In fact, from this doctrine of mirroring, it is also supposed to follow that no individual substance could exist apart from any other substance that belongs to its world. Mates thinks that Leibniz “held that any two monads in the actual world – for example, Adam and Eve – are such that neither could have existed without the other,”⁵³ and that this is true of any substances in any possible world.

This concept-based interpretation fits very poorly with Leibniz’s ontology of substance as it is stated elsewhere, however, and it conflicts with some of his explicit statements about the possible coexistence of substances. If we take the last consequence mentioned, that an individual substance could not possibly have existed without all the individuals that belong to its world, Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne provide an example of Leibniz explicitly rejecting this interpretation as expressed by his correspondent Des Bosses.⁵⁴ Des Bosses suggests to Leibniz that it follows from his views that “God could not create any one of these monads which thus exist without constructing all of the others

⁵² Mates 76

⁵³ Mates 192

⁵⁴ See Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne 100.

which equally exist now”⁵⁵ Leibniz responds with a distinction between what God can do ‘absolutely’ and what he can do ‘hypothetically’:

My reply is easy and has already been given. He can do it absolutely; he cannot do it hypothetically, because he has decreed that all things should function most wisely and harmoniously. There would be no deception of rational creatures, however, even if everything outside of them did not correspond exactly to their experiences, or indeed if nothing did, just as if there were only one mind⁵⁶

What is absolutely or metaphysically possible for God is whatever is in God’s power, whatever does not involve a contradiction. What is hypothetically impossible is so on the basis of some assumption; in this case, the assumption is that God “has decreed that all things should function most wisely and harmoniously.”⁵⁷ If mirroring were included in the very concept of an individual substance, it would be contradictory, and thus absolutely impossible, for God to create one of the monads that actually exist without creating the others that belong to the actual world. So in this passage, at least, Leibniz does not seem to hold that mirroring is included in the very concept of an individual substance.

⁵⁵ G II 493; L 610; Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne 100

⁵⁶ G II 496; L 611; Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne 100. One reason for Leibniz’s claim that there would be no deception of rational creatures in such a case may be that he thinks we can discover the nature of perception as internally and spontaneously produced, and thus discover that it does not necessarily imply the existence of its object.

⁵⁷ Mates argues that the notion of hypothetical necessity or impossibility is based on “the confusion of ‘Necessarily, if *P* then *Q*’ with ‘If *P* then necessarily *Q*’” (Mates 117). That is, Leibniz seems to hold that necessarily, if God has decreed that all things should function most wisely and harmoniously, then God does not create only one substance. Leibniz seems to conclude that it is impossible ‘in a way,’ i.e. ‘hypothetically,’ for God to create only one substance. This seems to amount to the rather empty claim that, given that God does what he does, he does not do otherwise. In effect, Mates notes, “the hypothetically necessary propositions coincide with the contingently true propositions” (Mates 119).

The ontological approach, relying on texts such as the one just quoted, would see mirroring first of all as a relation among individual substances, and only derivatively as a relation among the concepts of those substances. Mirroring, then, is not so much a matter of predicates as of perception. Because perceptual states are produced internally by each individual substance, they do not inherently involve actual relations to other substances.⁵⁸ One individual might perceive Arnauld as married and another might perceive Arnauld as unmarried, but this seems to be no reason why both individuals cannot exist together. Leibniz asserts as much when he writes that “God could give to each substance its own phenomena independent of those of others”⁵⁹ If each substance can have its own phenomena independent of those of others, how could a contradiction possibly arise from the coexistence of any two or more such substances?

Let us take the term ‘world’ to refer to any set of substances that God could create together. Leibniz’s statements about the coexistence of substances lead me to conclude that *any* set of individual substances constitutes a world in this sense, including the set of all individual substances. In other words, it seems to follow from Leibniz’s account of the nature of substance that all possibles are compossible. Since Leibniz’s clearly stated view is that “all possibles are *not* compossible,”⁶⁰ however, we must look for an account of impossibility at some level other than that of the basic theory of substance. Cover

⁵⁸ Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne argue that Leibniz intended a reduction of relations to the intrinsic perceptual states of monads. They write: “a relational accident can and should be regarded as identical with an intrinsic accident insofar as certain facts of expression hold of it” (86).

⁵⁹ “Clarification of the Difficulties which Mr. Bayle has found in the New System of the Union of Soul and Body” (1698), G IV 519; L 493

⁶⁰ G III 573; L 662 (my emphasis)

and O’Leary-Hawthorne, drawing on work by Bertrand Russell and Margaret Wilson, make the proposal that “impossibility claims are only ever true in relation to a certain set of presumed particular lawful decrees.”⁶¹ What this means is that some individual substances can be said to be impossible with others only on the assumption that God has already decided to institute some specific laws of harmony. Instead of considering the essences of individual substances simply as a set of individuals, God considers them collectively in relation to such laws. It is only on the hypothesis of these laws of harmony, whatever they may be, that impossibility arises, and it is only insofar as God is committed to instituting such laws that he is forced to choose a limited set of substances rather than being free to create them all. Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne argue that this account provides “the only sensible notion of impossibility available to Leibniz given his considered metaphysic and, moreover, one that he nowhere clearly rejects.”⁶²

If the term ‘world’ means “a creation scenario for God,”⁶³ then any set of individual substances constitutes a world. There is another sense of ‘world’ in Leibniz, however, which we should consider now. It shows up, for instance, in the passage partially quoted above, when Leibniz says that “God could give to each substance its own phenomena independent of those of others, but in this way he would have made as many *worlds without connection*, so to speak, as there are substances,”⁶⁴ and also in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, where he writes, “these phenomena maintain a certain order

⁶¹ Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne 137

⁶² Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne 138

⁶³ Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne 140

⁶⁴ “Clarification of the Difficulties . . .” G IV 519; L 493 (my emphasis)

in conformity with our nature or, so to speak, in conformity with *the world which is in us*”⁶⁵ The sense of ‘world’ in these passages, both carefully marked by “so to speak” (“*pour ainsi dire*”) to show that they present an unusual use of ‘world,’ is that of a phenomenal world contained *in* an individual substance. The world in this sense is constituted within the perceptions that a substance produces on its own, through its own spontaneous activity.

Given the two senses of ‘world,’ Leibniz seems to allow for the metaphysical possibility of a world, in the sense of a creation scenario or set of individual substances, that would consist of multiple disconnected worlds, in the sense of the ordered phenomenal contents of the individuals in question.⁶⁶ But although such a world or creation scenario is metaphysically possible, Leibniz does not really take it seriously as an option for God when he is discussing God’s choice of a world to create. The term ‘world,’ in fact, seems to acquire a third sense, referring neither to any metaphysically possible creation scenario, nor to the private phenomenal world of an individual substance, but rather to the *shared* phenomenal world that is constituted among a group of substances, the private phenomena of which correspond with one another. Donald Rutherford emphasizes this sense of world, as shared spatio-temporal world, which

⁶⁵ DM §14; A 6.4 1550; G IV 439; AG 47 (my emphasis). Also, in the “New System,” the soul is said to receive its perceptions “as in a world apart” (L 457).

⁶⁶ In the *Theodicy*, Leibniz does assert that “all things are *connected* in each one of the possible worlds” (Part 1, §9; Huggard 128), but this passage is one in which Leibniz is far from giving a strict exposition of his metaphysical views. He mentions a universe ‘filling’ all times and places, which contradicts his usual approach to space and time, and he explains the connection of things through the propagation of movement, that is, at a level that is supposed to be derivative of the metaphysics of substances, not constitutive for it.

appears in the *Theodicy*, and he even attempts to base the notion of compossibility on it, suggesting that “[a] group of substances is compossible only if such substances can be conceived as coexisting within the same world, which is to say, only if they agree in their respective expressions of the universe.”⁶⁷ Perhaps it is in fact the case that Leibniz thinks that any group of compossible substances will constitute a shared spatio-temporal world. Still, Rutherford himself acknowledges that there are creation scenarios available to God that would not be ‘worlds’ in the sense he is emphasizing. His account of compossibility can perhaps be read as a more limited version of that offered by Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne, according to which only those laws of harmony are sufficient to secure compossibility that ensure the constitution of a shared spatio-temporal world.

We saw above how ‘mirroring’ plays a role in the logical account of impossibility, where mirroring was presented as a relation among concepts. It seems to me that Leibniz’s doctrine of mirroring is more accurately portrayed in terms of a relation among the perceptions of substances. It seems that one way of linking the account of compossibility in Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne, in terms of laws of harmony, with the account given by Rutherford, in terms of a shared world, is to suggest that individual substances inhabit a shared world if and only if mirroring holds, taking mirroring to be an example of a ‘law of harmony’ of the sort to which Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne refer. Such a connection between mirroring and the shared spatio-temporal world seems to fit well with Leibniz’s view of the physical continuum, in which

⁶⁷ Donald Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 187

everything is affected by everything else.⁶⁸ The only worlds that Leibniz seems to take seriously as candidates for creation are mirroring worlds from which a shared spatio-temporal phenomenal world is constituted.

To summarize, I have distinguished three senses of ‘world’ at work in Leibniz. There is ‘world’ as creation scenario, a set of substances that God could create together; there is ‘world’ as what is contained in any substance, the content of its perceptions, its private phenomena; and there is the ‘world’ that emerges from the coordination of these two, when the set of substances is such that their private phenomena agree with one another in such a way that they can be considered to constitute a shared phenomenal world rather than a multiplicity of private ones. This third sense of world, as public phenomenal world, then lends itself to a reversal of perspective that leads to one more development of the notion of world in Leibniz.

The metaphysical possibility of non-mirroring worlds is not a consequence of Leibniz’s theory of individual substance that he wants to advertise. Instead, he is concerned to emphasize that, given mirroring, which he assumes to hold in the actual world, the fact that each substance is in some sense “a world apart” does not threaten the unity of the world as a whole. And in fact, as long as we limit ourselves to mirroring worlds, a reversal of perspective is possible, according to which, instead of considering the world to be composed of individual substances, we consider each substance to be nothing but a point of view on the world. The world becomes the shared ‘object’ of perception, and ‘perception’ shifts from its purely ontological sense, referring to the

⁶⁸ Cf. the text quoted in section 1 above (To the Electress Sophia, 9 February 1706; G VII 567; quoted in McRae 29 n. 8).

states of a simple substance, to a more natural, realistic sense in which what is perceived is what is really there, even if it is perceived rather ‘confusedly.’ Far from being “worlds apart,” individual substances now appear to share one and the same world, and even to share it in all its infinite detail.

The reversal of perspective is also carried out with respect to the essences of individual substances themselves, the ‘laws of the series’ that characterize them. Leibniz writes,

In fact when we say that each monad, soul, or mind has received a specific law, we must add that this is only a variation of the general law which orders the universe; it is like the way in which the same town appears different from the different points of view from which it is seen.⁶⁹

The reversal is striking here, to the point that Leibniz can seem to be abandoning his metaphysics of individual substance in favour of a kind of ontological holism in which the universe itself is what God effectively creates, and individuals are simple variations on that. But this impression is dispelled, I think, as long as we remind ourselves of the metaphysical possibility of non-mirroring worlds. Individual substances produce their perceptual states entirely on the basis of their own internal law or essence. Nothing is changed in these perceptual states by the existence of other monads. Mirroring amounts to a correspondence between series of perceptual states, each of which would unfold in the same way, whether or not the corresponding series were there. With this in mind, we can see that it would be much more accurate for Leibniz to say that the “general law which orders the universe” is nothing but the harmonious activity of the individual laws

⁶⁹ “Leibniz’s Comments on Note L to Bayle’s *Dictionary* Article ‘Rorarius’ (1705?)” G IV 553-54; WF 239

of the mirroring set of individuals selected by God. The nature of substance is not affected by mirroring. This is why, in explaining the nature of substance, Leibniz always feels the need to bring up these scenarios that he doesn't think should be taken too seriously, especially the scenario of just one substance alone in existence with God.

The reversal of perspective that sees the world as prior to the individuals that compose it, and the law of the universe as prior to the laws that define individual substances, is presented as close to the God's eye view of possible worlds at creation. God chooses a world, Leibniz says, not this or that individual:

[I]n order to proceed with accuracy, one must say that it is not so much because God decided to create this Adam that He decided everything else; but that the decisions which He takes regarding both Adam and other particular things are a consequence of the decision He takes regarding the whole universe⁷⁰

God has the whole universe in view, not from an ontological perspective (the universe is not an ontological whole) but from a teleological one; that is, God's aim in creating is not just the perfection of some one individual, but that of the entire universe. Leibniz is discussing Adam because Adam is supposed to be the *first* human individual, and he wants to head off the possible confusion that would see God choosing Adam first, and letting everything else that is connected with Adam follow as a result. Leibniz is here rejecting the idea that any individual is given priority of consideration by God. This does not mean, of course, that the universe or world is ontologically more basic than the individuals that compose it.

The account of compossibility in terms of laws of harmony, and the limited sense of 'world' that is developed by focussing only on mirroring worlds, makes God's role

⁷⁰ GP II 41; Mason 44

much more significant and complicated than it appears in those passages where Leibniz describes the striving essences of individual substances. In those passages, it seems as if all the substances ‘compete’ for existence on an individual basis, and the largest compatible set, or the most perfect compatible set, prevails. Now it seems as if the competition is really between worlds, not individuals, and that God has already ruled out anything but mirroring worlds. In the *Monadology*, in fact, Leibniz speaks of “each possible [world] having a right to claim existence in the measure of the perfection it enfold.”⁷¹ We must now consider what makes a world more perfect, according to Leibniz.

Donald Rutherford, in *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature*,⁷² identifies three main goals of Leibniz’s God that motivate the choice of the best possible world. These are: the maximization of metaphysical perfection; the maximization of harmony; and the maximization of the happiness and virtue of intelligent creatures. Rutherford argues convincingly that these aims are not ultimately conflictual in Leibniz’s view, so that the resulting world is not a compromise, but actually represents the highest possible degree of each of these desirable features. I think Rutherford’s analysis of this point is undermined to a certain extent, however, by the fact that he does not provide a convincing account of impossibility as metaphysically necessary. If impossibility is not metaphysically necessary, as we have seen, the creation of all substances remains a metaphysically possible creation scenario. To the extent that God rules out this

⁷¹ Mon. §54; L 648

⁷² Rutherford’s excellent account will be the main guide for my brief discussion of God’s choice of the best possible world.

possibility in favour of a world governed by some kind of laws of harmony, then, the maximization of harmony comes into conflict with the maximization of metaphysical perfection. Still, once we take the starting point as allowing mirroring worlds only, Rutherford's argument seems compelling.

Rutherford argues that the metaphysical perfection of a world can be understood on the basis of the primary perfections that Leibniz ascribes to God, and the parallel Leibniz draws between God and individual substances or monads. God's primary perfections are power, knowledge and will. In the *Monadology*, Leibniz writes:

There is in God the *power* which is the source of everything, there is also the *knowledge* which contains the variety of the ideas, and finally, there is the *will* which makes changes or products in accordance with the principle of the best. This corresponds to what is in created monads the subject or basis, the perceptive faculty, and the appetitive faculty. But in God these attributes are absolutely infinite or perfect, and in created monads . . . they are nothing but imitations in the degree to which the monad has perfection.⁷³

The same perfections that, in their unlimited degree, make up the essence of God, are present in limited degrees in creatures, and account for the perfection of those creatures. The more perfect a creature is in each of these respects, that is, the less limited a monad is in power, perception and appetite, the more it contributes to the metaphysical perfection of the world to which it belongs.

Alexander Wiehart-Howaldt suggests that the creation of a world of monads, as opposed to a world of some other ontological structure, is itself a result of considerations

⁷³ Mon. §48; L 647

of perfection rather than a matter of metaphysical necessity.⁷⁴ This does not seem to me to be Leibniz's position. It seems to me rather that the theory of individual substance is intended by Leibniz to be metaphysically necessary, and I think the parallel between God's perfections and the limited perfections of monads reinforces this interpretation. Leibniz sometimes describes God's act of creation as 'emanation,' and it makes sense that what God emanates are necessarily his own perfections, i.e., that he creates substances structured by the same basic perfections that characterize him. This seems to be how Leibniz thinks of monads, as the passage just quoted shows, and I do not know of any passages where Leibniz presents God as deliberating about the ontological structure of the world in making his choice of the best possible world.

The two aspects of the maximization of metaphysical perfection, then, seem to be to make as many monads as possible and to make especially those monads with the highest degree of the basic perfections of power, perception and appetite. The most obvious solution to this problem, and one that I have already argued seems to me to be metaphysically possible on Leibniz's principles, is the creation of all possible individuals. Leibniz avoids this result, it seems to me, only by making the demand for harmony as fundamental a requirement for the perfection of a world as metaphysical perfection.

The maximization of harmony seems to be seen by Leibniz as a combination of as much variety as possible with as much order as possible. Order seems to be conceived as the following of universal laws. Variety is ultimately variety of different individual

⁷⁴ See Alexander Wiehart-Howaldt, *Essenz, Perfektion, Existenz: Zur Rationalität und dem systematischen Ort der Leibnizschen Theologia Naturalis*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996 (*Studia Leibnitiana* Sonderheft 25), p. 162.

substances of different degrees of perception. I have already claimed that it is considerations of harmony that lead Leibniz to introduce a restricted sense of ‘world’ as mirroring world, and this establishes the basic universal law that all individual substances must mirror or express one another. Among mirroring worlds, other universal laws distinguish degrees of harmony.

God will produce, according to our discussion so far, the most metaphysically perfect and harmonious of the mirroring worlds. But a third consideration, as mentioned, is the happiness and virtue of intelligent creatures. Rutherford points out the potential conflict between the sort of perfection we have been considering and this new dimension:

This conception of the universe as “made for” intelligent creatures appears to stand in an uneasy tension with what we have so far identified as the primary end of creation: the maximization of metaphysical goodness or perfection. To the extent that Leibniz champions the latter as the fundamental value realized in creation, he seems to reserve no special place in the world for rational creatures; conversely, to the extent that he represents the perfection of the rest of the universe merely as a means to the greater happiness of minds, he appears to reject the maximization of metaphysical goodness as the primary end of creation.⁷⁵

Rutherford argues, however, that this tension is resolved for Leibniz. It is the nature of intelligent creatures that the exercise of their faculties is dependent upon the metaphysical perfection of the world they inhabit. With respect to happiness, Rutherford concludes that “the maximization of perfection and harmony is a necessary and sufficient condition for the maximization of happiness.” It is a necessary condition because “only in a world in which there exists as much perfection and harmony as possible can rational minds attain their greatest possible happiness – a happiness that is derived from their perception

⁷⁵ Rutherford 46

of these qualities.”⁷⁶ It is also a sufficient condition, because the individuals suited to enjoy happiness on the basis of these qualities are precisely the most metaphysically perfect individuals. An increase in metaphysical perfection thus involves an increase in both the subjects and in the object of happiness. A maximum of happiness comes along with the maximum of metaphysical perfection and harmony.

What about virtue? Leibniz establishes the consistency of the maximization of virtue with that of perfection, harmony and happiness by equating the life of virtue with the life of happiness. If happiness for intelligent creatures is derived from the perception of perfection and harmony, virtue involves both the active perception of such qualities and brings about their increase in the community of intelligent creatures. The ‘perception’ involved in happiness is not a matter of pure contemplation. Leibniz says, “[E]very enlightened person must judge that the true means of guaranteeing forever his own individual happiness is to seek his satisfaction in occupations which tend toward the general good.”⁷⁷ The maximization of virtue, happiness, harmony and perfection go hand in hand, for Leibniz, once we see the connections between perfection/harmony and happiness, and between happiness and virtue.

This, then, in very broad outlines, is Leibniz’s account of God’s choice of the best possible world, and thus of which individuals exist. God chooses from among the mirroring worlds the one that maximizes metaphysical perfection, harmony, and the happiness and virtue of rational creatures. This set of individuals exists, and can only

⁷⁶ Rutherford 53

⁷⁷ Quoted Rutherford 61; Klopp X 10; Riley, *Political Writings* 105

cease to exist through annihilation by God: “they last as long as the universe.”⁷⁸ It remains to be considered in the next section how the essential activity of such an existing individual should actually be understood.

3. Actual Individuals

The best possible world, a certain set of individual substances that mirror one another and together constitute a phenomenal material world in space and time, has been created by God. The essence of each individual substance is its own ‘law of the series’ or principle of activity. In what does the activity of an actual individual consist? In an attempt to clarify this, I will first of all follow the comparison that Leibniz sometimes makes between the activity of substances and the activity of bodies. Some aspects of what Leibniz understands by the activity of individual substances become clearer in this comparison, in which Leibniz draws on accepted examples of activity in the material world and tries to determine the extent to which substantial activity can be considered analogous. Next, I will approach substantial activity from the perspective of Leibniz’s psychology, which allows for a more literal grasp of what Leibniz thinks the activity of a substance is like, since Leibnizian substances are more like minds than like bodies. Some of Leibniz’s thoughts on the psychology of volition, in particular, will serve as a way of access to this topic. Finally, this section will conclude with a brief comparison between the activity of a Leibnizian individual substance and that of a Spinozan individual mode.

⁷⁸ “The Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason” (1714) §2; AG 207

Approaching the activity of individual substances by analogy with physical processes, Leibniz tries to emphasize the naturalness of the activity he ascribes to individual substances, an activity that consists in unfolding a series of perceptual states. He writes that “the present state of each substance is a natural result of its preceding state, but there is only one infinite intelligence which, because it envelops the universe, can see this result in souls as well as in each portion of matter.”⁷⁹ In physics, on the other hand, our finite intelligence is sometimes enough to see that one state of a body in motion is the natural result of the preceding state. What Leibniz seems to mean by a natural result is one that occurs spontaneously in accordance with a law. Di Bella has pointed out a text by Leibniz on the sense in which movements of bodies should be considered spontaneous – namely, insofar as no external obstacle interferes with the body’s following some particular law of motion. Leibniz writes,

This action will be most spontaneous, whose pattern [*species*] will not be changed, but only its grade [quantity]: e.g., if we imagine that a body falls towards the center of the earth always on a straight path, though it is slowed down by the resistance of the medium. The situation closest to spontaneity is when the body does stop for some time because of an obstacle; then, once the obstacle is taken away, it goes on falling along its path. In this case, in fact, one will be able to go back by inference to the earlier state, without assuming any additional datum; only one will be wrong about the time employed, because the period at rest will depend on the external obstacle. But if meanwhile the body has been thrown up by some external agent, in this case we are not able to go back by our inference, if we are not acquainted with the interfering action. In this also, however, we will have different grades of facility, e.g. if the external mover pushes the body along the selfsame path it was following before, so that the path never changes.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ “Clarification of the Difficulties which Mr. Bayle has found in the New System of the Union of Soul and Body” (1698) G IV 521; L 495

⁸⁰ “*De Affectibus*” A VI.4 1428-29; Di Bella 114. See also NE 211: “[A] body can be said to ‘act’ when there is spontaneity in its change, and to ‘undergo passively’ when it is pushed or blocked by another body.”

Here Leibniz identifies spontaneity with law-following, and identifies situations as ‘close to spontaneous’ depending on how far they stray from the spontaneous case through the intervention of external factors. If the activity of an individual substance can be called ‘spontaneous,’ it is in this same sense of following a law without encountering any external obstacles – with the difference that it is absolutely impossible for an individual substance to encounter any obstacle to its activity except from God. And, of course, the law that it follows is not a general law of nature, such as the laws that govern the motions of bodies, but the individual law of the series of states of that substance. In addition to regarding the activity of a substance as spontaneous, Leibniz also thinks that it can be called ‘uniform’: “If to act uniformly is to follow perpetually the same law of order or of succession, as in a certain scale or series of numbers, I agree that in this sense every simple being and even every composite being acts uniformly.”⁸¹ The activity of substance should be understood, according to Leibniz, as spontaneous and uniform.

In a reply to comments made by Bayle in his *Dictionary*,⁸² Leibniz pursues an analogy proposed by Bayle between an individual substance and a material atom. Leibniz writes,

The state of the soul, like that of the atom, is a state of change, a tendency. The atom tends to change its place, the soul to change its thoughts; each changes by itself in the simplest and most uniform way which its state permits.⁸³

⁸¹ “Clarification of the Difficulties . . .” G IV 522; L 495

⁸² Cf. “Note L to Bayle’s *Dictionary* Article ‘Rorarius’ (1702)” WF 227.

⁸³ “Reply to the Thoughts on the System of Preestablished Harmony Contained in the Second Edition of Mr. Bayle’s Critical Dictionary, Article Rorarius” (1702) G IV 562; L 579

Here we have a more concrete parallel between a material process and substantial activity. The changes that substances bring about in themselves are the “simplest and most uniform” ones. On the other hand, it is difficult not to be struck by the difference between the physical example – an atom that keeps moving in a straight line if no external force acts on it – and the extremely complex series of perceptions that we ourselves experience, and that are supposed to be a part of the ‘uniform activity’ that Leibniz is talking about. Thus Leibniz continues,

Then how does it come, I will be asked, that there is such simplicity in the change of the atom, and such variety in the changes of the soul? It is because the atom (as it is assumed to be, although there is no such thing in nature), though it has parts, has nothing which causes some variety in its tendency, because we assume that its parts do not change their relations. The soul, on the other hand, though entirely indivisible, involves a composite tendency, that is to say, a multitude of present thoughts, each of which tends to a particular change⁸⁴

There is a limit, then, to the analogy between an ‘atom of substance’ and a material atom, and the key difference is that a state of an individual substance “involves a composite tendency,” while the state of a material atom is hypothesized to involve a simple tendency, one that remains unchanged unless affected from without. Although Leibniz frequently emphasizes the ‘simplicity’ of substances, in the sense that substances, on his account, are not divisible into parts, this simplicity does not extend to the activity or tendency of a substance. If we contrast Leibniz with Spinoza, then, the contrast is not just between simple and composite individuals. A Spinozan individual is composed out of parts and involves a composite tendency based on the varying affections of its parts; a Leibnizian individual is not composed out of parts, but nevertheless involves a composite

⁸⁴ “Reply to the Thoughts . . .” G IV 562; L 579

tendency. It is the concept of perception, as we have already seen,⁸⁵ that makes this multiplicity-in-unity possible for Leibniz.

The analogy between the activity of an individual substance and that of a material atom breaks down because the material atom has only a simple tendency, while an individual substance has a composite tendency. In view of this difference, Leibniz proposes a new analogy: “[E]ach thing or part of the universe must point to all the rest, in such a way that the soul, as concerns the variety of its modifications, must be compared, not with a material atom, but with the universe which it represents according to its point of view”⁸⁶ Instead of being compared with a material atom, the individual substance must be compared with the entire material universe. A state of the universe, like the state of a soul or substance, and like the state of an atom, must be understood as a tendency, but in this case it is very much a composite tendency. A state of the material universe can be understood as a field of forces. Leibniz writes, “[T]here is nothing real in motion itself except that momentaneous state which must consist of a force striving towards change. Whatever there is in corporeal nature besides the object of geometry, or extension, must be reduced to this force.”⁸⁷ The tendency of the material universe at a given moment is composed of all the forces corresponding to the motions of all the bodies that make up that universe. The tendency of an individual substance, Leibniz has claimed, can be compared with this, except for the important difference, of course, that

⁸⁵ In section 1 of this chapter.

⁸⁶ “Reply to the Thoughts . . .” G IV 562; L 579

⁸⁷ “Specimen Dynamicum” (1695) GM VI 235; L 436

the elements that ‘compose’ the tendency of a substance cannot be assigned to separable parts.

In his original comparison of a substance or soul with an atom, Leibniz noted that “each changes by itself in the simplest and most uniform way which its state permits.” but while this simplicity and uniformity is evident in the atom, it seems to have been lost in the switch to a comparison with the entire material universe. A material atom would continue its motion in a straight line if nothing affected it. What law can correspond to the complex changes of the universe as a whole? It seems to be a fundamental assumption of Leibniz’s that there is such a law. In a related vein, he writes that if someone

puts down a number of points on paper entirely at random . . . I maintain that it is possible to find a geometric line whose law is constant and uniform and follows a certain rule which will pass through all these points and in the same order in which they were drawn. . . . But when the rule . . . is very complex, the line which conforms to it passes for irregular.⁸⁸

The line that “passes for irregular” can be considered analogous to the series of our perceptions, which also pass for irregular. Leibniz is confident that there is nevertheless a complex rule that, if known, would reveal the seemingly irregular series to be regular after all. But how complex can the “constant and uniform” law be? Leibniz gives some simple mathematical examples, the function of a parabolic curve and of the quadratrix,⁸⁹ but neither of these could be imagined to pass for irregular. If the complexity of the law of the series increases with the complexity of the series itself, there seems to be a danger of ending up in a situation where the law of the series is not significantly simpler than the

⁸⁸ DM §6; A 6.4 1537-38; G IV 431; L 306

⁸⁹ “Clarification of the Difficulties . . .” G IV 522; L 495-96

series itself. Di Bella considers this problem both with respect to worlds (which are supposed to be ordered by laws) and with respect to the individual's series of perceptual states. As he puts it,

If every series can be conceived of as lawlike, then lawlikeness turns out to be, perhaps, too weak a criterion for selecting ordered worlds from chaotic aggregates. As a matter of fact, the DM 6 thesis has strained the concept of a worldwide law to an extreme point. Moreover, also as regards a single individual series, the transcendence of the law over and above the sequence of states seems to become very tenuous. And this could trivialize the intuition concerning the close link of a series with it defining law.⁹⁰

If the theory of the law of the series is to have any significance, it seems that emphasis must be put on the 'constant and uniform' nature of the law. Indeed, this seems to be an important factor in Leibniz's willingness to consider the law of the series as equivalent to the essence of a substance, since it is "that which remains" during changes.⁹¹ If the law itself equals the series in complexity, it is hard to say what could be said to remain the same – it would be like saying that the series as a whole is what remains the same as the monad passes through the states of the series. The law of the series would just be the series itself.

The analogy between the activity of an individual substance and the activity of a body in a physical process obviously does not serve to resolve all of the obscurity of how the activity of a Leibnizian substance is to be understood, especially since this analogy culminates in a comparison with the entire physical universe understood as a single, lawful process, a process which does not necessarily seem any easier to grasp than the

⁹⁰ Di Bella 331

⁹¹ "Notes on the Reply of Foucher to the Criticism of his Criticism of the 'Recherche de la Vérité'" (1676), L 155

substantial activity it is meant to clarify. In any case, perhaps it is in psychological terms, rather than by way of a physical analogy, that the activity of an individual substance can be grasped most directly. The activity of Leibnizian substances is more akin to the activity of thought than to the movements of bodies. In fact, human thought is an actual instance of substantial activity in Leibniz's sense. It will be helpful, therefore, to look to some of Leibniz's comments on the activity of thinking for clarification of his notion of substantial activity, and a good starting point is his discussion of the psychology of volition in the *New Essays on Human Understanding*. This provides at least a partial insight into that subgroup of substances to which we belong, the group called spirits or rational souls.

One of the main topics of chapter XXI of book 2 of the *New Essays* is how we rational souls can act in a way that leads to happiness. The happiness of created beings consists in "continual and uninterrupted progress towards greater goods."⁹² Leibniz's assumption is that the virtuous life is the happy life, and that acting virtuously frequently requires setting aside immediate pleasure in favour of future benefits. Achieving this predominance of the future over the present is the key psychological problem in virtuous action, and Leibniz is happy to see evidence that it is not at all impossible to achieve in the fact that there are non-virtuous ways of life in which this predominance is also achieved: he points to the ambitious person and the miser as two types who live for the future and disdain present pleasures.⁹³ However, the problem is to determine how such a future good can actually play a role in the present in determining us to action, and how it

⁹² NE 189

⁹³ Cf. NE 204-05

can prevail over the tendency to seek immediate pleasure. It is a matter, essentially, of the traditional “struggle between flesh and spirit.” Leibniz writes,

Cicero somewhere makes the good remark that if our eyes could see the beauty of virtue we would love it ardently. Since neither that nor anything like it is the case, it is not surprising that, in the struggle between flesh and spirit, spirit so often loses, because it fails to make good use of its advantages. This struggle is nothing but the conflict between different endeavours – those that come from confused thoughts and those that come from distinct ones. Confused thoughts often make themselves vividly sensed, whereas distinct ones are usually only potentially vivid: they could be actually so, if we would only apply ourselves to getting through to the senses of the words or symbols; but since we do not do that, through lack of care or lack of time, what we oppose lively sentiments with are bare words or at best images which are too faint.⁹⁴

In the traditional manner, then, Leibniz considers the attempt to live virtuously as an effort on the part of the spirit to overcome the inclinations of the flesh. But more accurately, for him it is a struggle between different thoughts, different tendencies in the mind, rather than between mind and body. In the quote just given, Remnant and Bennett translate ‘*clair*,’ normally rendered as ‘clear,’ with ‘vivid’; the choice seems to be appropriate in this case, because what is at stake in the term is the ‘force’ of each thought, the strength of the endeavour associated with it. The implication of the passage certainly seems to be that the more vivid the thought, the stronger the associated endeavour. Standing in for the traditional role of the flesh, then, we have confused thoughts, and in the traditional role of the spirit we have distinct thoughts. If the ‘flesh’ tends to overcome the ‘spirit,’ it is because confused thoughts tend to be vivid, while a special effort is needed to give distinct thoughts the vividness or strength required to overcome the endeavour associated with the confused thoughts.

⁹⁴ NE 186-87

Since our eyes cannot see the beauty of virtue, there is no direct link between the degree of goodness or perfection associated with an action, and the strength of the endeavour to pursue that action. Leibniz argues, essentially, that if we are to act virtuously, we must strengthen the endeavours associated with our distinct ideas about virtuous action so that they are in a position to prevail in the conflict of endeavours. He uses the metaphor of a battle to make his point:

Since the final result is determined by how things weigh against one another, I should think that it could happen that the most pressing disquiet did not prevail; for even if it prevailed over each of the contrary endeavours taken singly, it may be outweighed by all of them taken together. . . . The mind should make provision for this from a distance, for once battle has been engaged there is no time left to make use of . . . artifices: everything which then impinges on us weighs in the balance and contributes something to determining a *resultant direction*, almost as in mechanics; so that without some prompt diversion we will be unable to stop it.⁹⁵

The notion of making provision “from a distance” is interesting here. Once the battle among different endeavours is engaged, it is only the ‘vividness,’ only the relative strength of each that will matter, not their actual desirability in terms of the overall goal of achieving happiness. But is there really a time ‘before the battle’ when preparations can be made? In a way, there is not; there is no state in which appetite and activity are suspended. However, I think Leibniz’s battle metaphor is meant to apply to occasions when our resolve to act virtuously is tested by particularly strong opposing tendencies. There is a battle all the time, in the sense that there is at every moment a conflict of tendencies in us and some prevailing outcome; but some of the time the balance is very close, so that any one of two or more outcomes might easily be made to prevail by some

⁹⁵ NE 193

small additional factor. Leibniz describes this situation in response to Locke's claim that "a man is at liberty to lift up his hand to his head, or let it rest quiet: he is perfectly indifferent in either" ⁹⁶ He writes,

Strictly speaking, one is never indifferent with regard to two alternatives, of whatever kind, for instance whether to turn right or left For we do one or the other without thinking about it, which is a sign that a confluence of internal dispositions and external impressions – all of them insensible – settles us on the alternative which we adopt. Its predominance is very slight, however, and we are bound to seem indifferent about the matter, since the slightest sensible consideration which arises for us can easily determine us to go one way rather than the other ⁹⁷

At each moment, then, there is a 'battle' of endeavours in us, even if these are all insensible and we are unaware of having faced an alternative. But in these circumstances, any sensible consideration, any factor of which we become aware, will be able to tip the balance. The true battle, however, occurs when there are multiple sensible considerations in play: one or more conscious desires, and possibly a rational ideal of what the best course of action would be. If we are to follow this rationally prescribed course of action, then the idea of this action must have an associated endeavour that is strong enough to overcome all of the opposition. This can be the case, Leibniz thinks, if there is a vivid image associated with the idea, or if a strong resolution or habit of acting in that way has been established. Leibniz writes,

[W]hen the future affects someone, it does so either through his image of it or else through his having made a policy and practice of being guided by the mere name or some other arbitrary symbol of the future without any image or natural sign of it. The latter case depends on the fact that one cannot go against a policy one has

⁹⁶ NE 197

⁹⁷ NE 197

firmly adopted – still less against one’s established practice – without a certain disquiet and sometimes a certain feeling of distress.⁹⁸

Both of these conditions depend on what has occurred in the past. Rational, virtuous action, then, is subject to the general conditions governing the relative strength of endeavours, and prevails only on the basis of the vividness of the associated idea or the strength of an ingrained habit.

What can these reflections on the psychology of volition tell us about the activity of Leibnizian substances in general? Not all substances are rational souls, of course, and the goal of happiness and virtuous action, which guides the theory of volition, is only available to rational souls. Leibniz usually distinguishes three ‘grades’ of substance: bare monads, souls, and spirits or rational souls.⁹⁹ Still, rational souls *are* supposed to be individual substances in Leibniz’s sense, so the account of voluntary action is first of all a literal account of at least part of the activity of one subgroup of substances. Rational souls act, at least in part, by desiring, planning, deciding, etc. We are aware of these activities in ourselves, and they are instances of the general activity of substance that Leibniz is proposing as metaphysically basic.

Leibniz takes the voluntary acts of substances to be among the least controversial elements of his theory of the activity of a substance:

[E]veryone who recognizes immaterial and indivisible substances also attributes to them a multitude of simultaneous perceptions and a spontaneity in their reasoning and their voluntary acts. Thus I am only extending this spontaneity to confused and involuntary thoughts too¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ NE 204

⁹⁹ See Mon. §19 and §29.

¹⁰⁰ “Reply to the thoughts . . .” G IV 564; L 580-81; Leibniz also notes that “[e]ven Father Malebranche agrees that the soul has internal voluntary actions” (L 580).

The activity we recognize in ourselves, we associate with our reasoning and our voluntary acts. We do not associate it with our perceptions of external objects or feelings of pain, for example. But, for Leibniz, the latter are not instances of passivity, but belong as much to our spontaneous activity as the former. This actually leads to some confusion in Leibniz's account of volition, in that he makes use of two senses of 'volition,' one that fits better with everyday usage, reserving the term for thoughts of which we are aware, and one which better captures the complete action of a substance in his sense, but stretches the usual meaning of the term. In one passage, therefore, he contrasts the term 'volition' with a psychological sense of his term 'appetition':

I shall say that volition is the effort or endeavour (*conatus*) to move towards what one finds good and away from what one finds bad, the endeavour arising immediately out of one's awareness of those things. This definition has as a corollary the famous axiom that from will and power together, action follows; since any endeavour results in action unless it is prevented. . . . There are other efforts, arising from insensible perceptions, which we are not aware of; I prefer to call these 'appetitions' rather than volitions, for one describes as 'voluntary' only actions one can be aware of and can reflect upon when they arise from some consideration of good and bad; though there are also appetitions of which one can be aware.¹⁰¹

In another passage, however, he describes a 'complete volition' as something that would include the appetitions that he had previously contrasted with volitions, referring only at the end of the quote to his earlier definition of volition:

Various perceptions and inclinations combine to produce a complete volition: it is the result of the conflict amongst them. There are some, imperceptible in themselves, which add up to a disquiet which impels us without our seeing why. There are some which join forces to carry us towards or away from some object, in which case there is desire or fear, also accompanied by a disquiet but not always one amounting to pleasure or displeasure. Finally, there are some

¹⁰¹ NE 172-73

impulses which are accompanied by actual pleasure or suffering. . . . The eventual result of all these impulses is the prevailing effort, which makes a full volition. However, desires and endeavours of which we are aware are often called ‘volitions’ too, though less complete ones, whether or not they prevail and take effect.¹⁰²

What Leibniz here calls a complete volition seems to be the complete action of a substance, its transition from one state to the next. Such a transition does not appear ever to be wholly voluntary, in the sense of volition that implies awareness. The states of a Leibnizian substance, after all, are perceptual states representing the entire universe. Most of what we perceive is contained in what Leibniz calls *petites perceptions*, minute perceptions of which we are unaware. Leibniz writes,

[T]here are hundreds of indications leading us to conclude that at every moment there is in us an infinity of perceptions, unaccompanied by awareness [*apperception*] or reflection; that is, of alterations in the soul itself, of which we are unaware because these impressions are either too minute or too numerous, or else too unvarying, so that they are not sufficiently distinctive on their own. But when they are combined with others they do nevertheless have their effect and make themselves felt, at least confusedly, within the whole.¹⁰³

Corresponding to these minute perceptions are impulses of which we are not aware either:

These impulses are like so many little springs trying to unwind and so driving our machine along. And I have already remarked that that is why we are never indifferent, even when we appear to be most so, as for instance over whether to turn right or left at the end of a lane. For the choice that we make arises from these invisible stimuli, which, mingled with the actions of objects and of our bodily interiors, make us find one direction of movement more comfortable than another.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² NE 192

¹⁰³ NE 53

¹⁰⁴ NE 166

In a way, the involuntary part of our action seems to be infinitely larger than the voluntary part, with respect to what is represented in each. But perhaps the endeavour associated with the involuntary part can be insignificant compared to the endeavours associated with the elements that enter into our voluntary actions, so that the actions of substance can nevertheless sometimes reasonably be qualified as voluntary.

What about the activity of those substances that are not rational souls? Leibniz's idea, apparently, is that we can conceive of them by subtracting from our notion of ourselves those elements that they lack. Leibniz lays out three levels of 'inclination' that seem to correspond to the three levels of substance:

I believe that fundamentally pleasure is a sense of perfection, and pain a sense of imperfection, each being notable enough for one to become aware of it. For the minute insensible perceptions of some perfection or imperfection, which I have spoken of several times and which are as it were components of pleasure and pain, constitute inclinations and propensities but not outright passions. So there are insensible inclinations of which we are not aware. There are sensible ones: we are acquainted with their existence and their objects, but have no sense of how they are constituted; these are confused inclinations which we attribute to our bodies although there is always something corresponding to them in the mind. Finally there are distinct inclinations which reason gives us: we have a sense both of their strength and of their constitution.¹⁰⁵

Non-rational souls, then, cannot be guided by distinct inclinations, and do not have the goal of happiness. They do have sensible inclinations, however, and thus pursue pleasure and avoid pain. We ourselves act more or less in this way as long as no rational inclinations are at work in us. Bare monads, it seems, would not have any sensible inclinations at all, and no actual pleasure and pain, but would act entirely on the basis of the "minute insensible perceptions of some perfection or imperfection" that are the

¹⁰⁵ NE 194

additional component in the activity of rational and non-rational souls as well. In general, then, all substances incline towards perfection and away from imperfection, with the types of inclination appropriate to the grade of the substance in question.

To complete this psychological account of the activity of substance, what is needed is some indication of how the ‘law of the series,’ which Leibniz identifies with the essence of an individual substance, fits in. This law appears, in psychological terms, as a kind of ‘memory,’ which all substances have, and which Leibniz contrasts with the ‘stupidity’ of an atom:

[A]n atom can only learn to go in a simple straight line: it is so stupid and imperfect. It is completely different with a soul or a mind. Because this is a true substance, or a complete being, and the source of its own actions, it, so to speak, remembers (confusedly, of course) all its preceding states, and is affected by them. It retains not only its direction, as does the atom, but also the law of changes of direction, or the law of curvature, which the atom cannot do.¹⁰⁶

The psychological account of the activity of substance is teleologically oriented – it is presented in terms of the pursuit of happiness, pleasure, or perfection, rather than in terms of the simple lawful consequence of the present state from the previous one. The substance’s ‘memory,’ however, acts as a kind of constraint. Current inclinations arise on the basis of past ones and are developments of the same “law of changes” that the substance has followed in the past.

It will be helpful, finally, to contrast Leibniz’s account of the activity of an individual substance with Spinoza’s account of the activity of an individual mode of extension. In both cases it is the essence of the individual that provides the principle of

¹⁰⁶ “Leibniz’s Comments on Note L to Bayle’s *Dictionary* Article ‘Rorarius’ (1705?)” G IV 543-44; WF 235

activity. In Leibniz's case, however, the principle of activity or law of the series of a simple substance is perfectly sufficient to produce all of the states of the substance on its own. Even though what a monad perceives is the entire world of monads, that world does not have to be there for this series of perceptual states to play out. This is the point Leibniz wants to make when he brings up the possibility that God could create just one substance, or a set of disparate substances. Perceptual states are perfectly internal features of the individual substance. A substance taken on its own, then, doesn't so much 'perceive' a world as dream or hallucinate it.¹⁰⁷ In mirroring worlds, this dreaming is a perceiving, because there is a correspondence between the perceptual series of any given monad and those of all the others. Nothing at all hinders the activity of an individual substance: "each simple substance acts without constraint, since it is entirely the principle of its actions."¹⁰⁸

The *conatus* of an individual mode, on Spinoza's account, is nothing but the actual essence of the mode; but the individual itself is subject to the constraints that come with being a part of nature, exposed to individuals more powerful than itself. Most dramatically, the Spinozan individual is subject to death imposed from without by forces that overpower it, while the Leibnizian individual does not die: "death can only be a sleep, and not a lasting one at that . . ."¹⁰⁹ It is clear why a Spinozan individual is subject to pain and destruction, given its exposure to other individuals that are

¹⁰⁷ Leibniz writes that "our internal sensations . . . are really appearances or like well-ordered dreams . . ." ("New System" §14; L 457). Also, Deleuze will refer to the basic perceptions of monads as "hallucinatory microperceptions" (*The Fold* 86).

¹⁰⁸ "Letter to Samuel Masson, on Body" (1716) AG 228; cf. also L 517: substance runs through its series of changes "unhindered."

¹⁰⁹ NE 55

incompatible with it. Pierre Bayle wondered, however, why a Leibnizian individual should ever suffer pain or even displeasure, given its complete spontaneity and isolation from any individual besides God. Bayle writes, “I find . . . that the spontaneity of this soul is most incompatible with the feelings of pain and in general, with all perceptions which are displeasing to it.”¹¹⁰ Leibniz responds in the following way:

This incompatibility would certainly exist if spontaneous and voluntary meant the same thing. Everything voluntary is spontaneous, but there are spontaneous actions which are not chosen and therefore are not voluntary. It does not rest with the soul always to give itself feelings which please it, since the feelings which it will have are dependent upon those which it has had.¹¹¹

The problem is not immediately solved with the distinction of the spontaneous and the voluntary, however. We can see this by turning to Spinoza’s notion of an individual essence. Spinoza does not hold that all of an individual’s actions are voluntary, and yet he thinks that nothing that follows from an individual’s essence can be harmful to that individual. “No thing can be destroyed except through an external cause” (3p4). In the previous chapter, we considered Spinoza’s statements about what would happen to an individual if it could be isolated from all outside affections.¹¹² Spinoza thinks that it would continue its activity undisturbed, immune to harm and destruction. Leibniz’s individual substances seem to enjoy precisely this sort of isolation, so why do they suffer pain and something resembling death, even if it is really only a ‘sleep’?

The answer is to be found not so much in the distinction between the spontaneous and the voluntary itself, as in the incredible scope that Leibniz gives to the spontaneous

¹¹⁰ “Clarification of the Difficulties . . .” G IV 519; L 494

¹¹¹ “Clarification of the Difficulties . . .” G IV 519; L 494

¹¹² See Ch. 1 section 1, above, and Spinoza’s Letter 32.

but involuntary actions of an individual substance. The involuntary actions of a Spinozan individual mode of extension would consist, for example, in those bodily functions that we perform without awareness, such as the circulation of the blood. For Leibniz, the involuntary actions of a substance will include a representation of the circulation of the blood, but also a representation of the entire universe, the production of all the impressions that seem to come from without. The individual includes all of this in its activity. If sometimes the playing out of all these strands of activity produces a feeling of pain in the individual, this is at least no more surprising than that the individual should include a representation of the entire universe in itself in the first place.

In a way, the situation of the Leibnizian individual appears to be radically different from the Spinozan. Because everything is internal to the individual, there is no exposure to any more powerful natural creature. Leibniz writes: “Substance acts insofar as it can, unless it is impeded; moreover, every simple substance is impeded, but it is not impeded naturally except from within itself.”¹¹³ The activity of a Leibnizian substance is determined by its essence, or law of the series, in a way that is more perfect and complete than the way the activity of a Spinozan mode is determined by its essence. Nothing intervenes in the activity of a Leibnizian substance at all. The activity of a Spinozan mode, on the other hand, is determined by the essence in conjunction with its affections. However, the contrast with Spinoza is tempered to some extent by the fact that the whole universe is taken to be internal to the Leibnizian individual, so that the ‘impeding’ of an individual can also be understood as its ‘adjustment,’ its ‘pre-established harmony,’ with

¹¹³ To Des Bosses (1716) G II 516; AG 202

other finite individuals. In this way, Leibniz leaves room for a perspective more like Spinoza's, and closer to common sense, in which many kinds of harm, at least, are thought to come from without.

In this section, then, I have tried to show that Leibniz attributes to his immaterial substances a kind of natural, spontaneous, lawful activity that is analogous to the activity he attributes to material processes in physics-related contexts. The 'law' that is at work, however, is not a general law of nature such as would govern the movements of bodies, but the individual law of the series that is equivalent to the substance's essence. In its complexity, this law invites comparison with a law that would govern the movements of the entire physical universe, rather than with the law governing the movements of a single body relative to others. What this law governs, furthermore, is an activity more analogous with thought than with movement, and so I have suggested that it is through Leibniz's extension of his psychological ideas to substances in general that the activity of monads is most literally grasped. What is striking in contrast with Spinoza is the unvarying precision with which a Leibnizian individual enacts its essence in its existence, with no room left for anything that would come from the outside.

Leibniz's ontology of substance, as we have seen in this chapter, is built around a notion of individual essence as a principle of activity that lets the individual produce in itself the whole series of its infinitely complex perceptual states. This essence is first of all a concept in God's understanding, God's grasp of the possibility of such an individual. God chooses to create a lawfully ordered set of such individuals, a set of individuals that

mirror one another, and, in particular, that set that maximizes metaphysical perfection, harmony, and the happiness and virtue of rational souls. In existence, each individual actively produces in itself, as a perfectly closed system, the series of perceptual states defined by its essence, a series which amounts to a varying representation of the entire universe.

Chapter 3: Deleuze on Spinoza and Leibniz

It would be a lengthy and complicated undertaking to account for Deleuze's interpretations of Spinoza and Leibniz as such. At a general level, it can be noted that these interpretations tend to involve a sort of systematic reconstruction that is not too tightly tied to the texts under discussion. Each is guided by an overarching theme, the theme of 'expression' in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*,¹ the theme of 'folds' in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Often, systematic use is made of elements that are not obviously intended for the role that Deleuze assigns to them, such as the use of the types of infinity in the interpretation of Spinoza,² or the use of the theory of the 'vinculum' in the interpretation of Leibniz.³ At the same time, these interpretations always seem to be undertaken in such close connection with Deleuze's own philosophical

¹ The French title is *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*. The two main references for this chapter are: Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, Trans. Martin Joughin, New York: Zone Books, 1992 (*Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1968); and Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Trans. Tom Conley, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993 (*Le Pli: Leibniz et le baroque*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1988). References will be to the English translations of Deleuze's works, with page numbers of the French editions following in parentheses.

² See *Expressionism* 192 (174). Spinoza introduces the types of infinity in Letter 12 without any indication of what they correspond to in his system.

³ See *The Fold* 110 (148). Leibniz's theory of the *vinculum substantiale* is often seen as a concession to a specific correspondent (Des Bosses) rather than as a genuine addition to Leibniz's theory of substance. (See pp. 7-8 of Jolley's Introduction in *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*.) Deleuze makes use of the theory as if it is a standard element in Leibniz's views on body and matter.

interests that it is sometimes difficult to discern whether Deleuze is attributing a position to Spinoza or Leibniz, or simply asserting it himself, or both. And he does not hesitate to draw on concepts from other philosophers important to him, especially Bergson and Nietzsche, in order to explicate Spinoza or Leibniz. A full discussion of Deleuze's interpretations of these two philosophers would have to make an attempt at sorting out all of these strands.⁴

My aim in this chapter is much more limited. I would like to highlight and criticize a few points in Deleuze's interpretations that conflict with the interpretations I have offered above, and that can serve to link the discussion of Spinoza and Leibniz to the discussion of Deleuze's theory of individuals. My criticism of Deleuze on these points will be relatively narrow, limited mainly to an examination of the immediate textual basis for the specific claims involved. Given the sort of overarching, systematic interpretations that Deleuze proposes, however, part of the justification for his particular interpretive points may come from the way these points fit into this larger scheme. This context will not be visible here, so some of Deleuze's claims may seem to have less grounding than they actually do, and I cannot attempt to do full justice to them.

Still, I think these few points should at least serve to make clear the difference between comparing Deleuze with Spinoza or Leibniz, and comparing Deleuze with

⁴ Deleuze describes his work on the history of philosophy in the "Letter to a Harsh Critic" in *Negotiations, 1972-1990*. He maintains that in his studies of philosophers "the author had to actually say all that I had him saying," while at the same time his interpretations are characterized by "shifting, slipping, dislocations and hidden emissions." "Letter to a Harsh Critic," *Negotiations, 1972-1990*. Trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, 6. ("Lettre à un critique sévère," *Pourparlers*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990, 15)

‘Deleuze’s Spinoza’ or ‘Deleuze’s Leibniz.’ Most of the secondary literature that I have seen on Deleuze that discusses Spinoza or Leibniz seems to take his interpretations of the latter at face value. My goal in chapter 4 will be to examine the connections of Deleuze with Spinoza and Leibniz as best I can understand them, without regard for how Deleuze understands them. The critical points made here should highlight some relevant points on which Deleuze’s interpretations should probably not be taken on faith.

This chapter should also serve a transitional role. Deleuze’s interpretations tend to incorporate concepts that are not explicitly found in the philosophers under discussion, concepts that are important in his own original philosophical work. So this chapter is also a partial transition to Deleuze’s conceptual world. It will prepare the ground for the final chapter dedicated to Deleuze’s theory of the virtual and actual aspects of individuals.

1. Deleuze on Spinoza

Deleuze’s main work on Spinoza is *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, presented as his secondary thesis for the *doctorat d’Etat* in 1968 (*Difference and Repetition* was his primary thesis) and it is from this book that most of the discussion in this section will be drawn. My focus is narrow compared to Deleuze’s work, which is an interpretation of Spinoza’s system as a whole, articulated around the concept of expression. It is mainly chapters 12 to 14, Deleuze’s discussion of the essence, existence and activity of finite modes, that will concern me here.

Although *Expressionism* is presented more as a work in the history of philosophy than perhaps any other of Deleuze's books on philosophers, perhaps because of its role as a secondary thesis, his interpretation of Spinoza on the subject of individual finite modes is marked by the introduction of concepts that are at most marginally present in Spinoza's own texts. The two key concepts that I will consider are those of intensity, for the interpretation of essence in Spinoza, and extensive parts, for the interpretation of existence. Deleuze introduces the notion of intensity into his discussion of modal essences in Spinoza in an attempt to account for the 'intrinsic distinction' of the essences, contained in the attributes, of non-existing modes. This leads him to an account of modal essences as parts or degrees of God's power: a mode's essence "is itself part of God's power, is an intensive part, or a degree of that power."⁵ This way of understanding the essences of non-existent modes helps to link the theory of modal essences in general with Spinoza's view that the *conatus* of an existing mode is nothing but its actual essence. Deleuze also considers the modal essence to be expressed in a 'characteristic relation,' and this is an important additional element of Deleuze's interpretation of modal essences. To account for the existence of finite modes, Deleuze introduces a general theory of 'extensive parts' in every attribute. We will see that this aspect of Deleuze's interpretation is based on a generalization from what Spinoza calls "the simplest bodies"⁶ in the physics section of the *Ethics*. The extensive parts in a given attribute provide a kind of 'matter' for the modes of that attribute.

⁵ *Expressionism* 199 (181-82)

⁶ *Ethics* a2" after 2p13s. For abbreviations used in citing texts by Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze, see the list at the end of the main text.

i. Intensive Essence

Deleuze's discussion of the essences of finite modes in Spinoza takes off from the question of how these essences are distinct from one another in the attribute that contains them. He asks, "How are the essences of modes distinct, if they are inseparable from one another?"⁷ The essences of modes are inseparable because God causes them all to be contained in the attribute according to a "principle of production which comprehends all."⁸ They do not have separable causes, so they are themselves inseparable. How then are they to be distinguished? But first we should ask, are they to be distinguished at all? For, as Deleuze notes, there are texts of Spinoza's, especially in the *Short Treatise*, that seem to deny any distinction of essences apart from the existence of the corresponding modes.⁹ On the other hand, Spinoza seems to presume that essences are individual, and thus presumably distinct from one another, for example in proposition 57 of part 3, where he states that "Each affect of each individual differs from the affect of another as much as the essence of the one from the essence of the other." Given that Spinoza seems to assume distinct individual essences, Deleuze will attempt to explain away his apparent denial of such distinction and to provide an account of what sort of distinction is involved.

⁷ *Expressionism* 194 (177)

⁸ *Expressionism* 194 (177)

⁹ *Expressionism* 195 (177-78). Cf. *Short Treatise* II.xx (I/97/12) and Appendix II.11 (I/119).

Deleuze is undertaking to fill in an area of Spinoza's system that is not worked out by Spinoza himself. Recognizing this, he writes, "One may be permitted to think that, while he does not explicitly develop such a theory, Spinoza is looking toward the idea of a distinction or singularity belonging to modal essences as such."¹⁰ The theory that Deleuze discerns in Spinoza between the lines involves a concept that Spinoza does not specifically invoke, that of intensity or intensive quantity. In a comment to the English translator of *Expressionism*, Deleuze discusses his introduction of this concept into his interpretation of Spinoza:

It is quite true that one doesn't, strictly speaking, find *intensity* in Spinoza. But *potentia* and *vis* cannot be understood in terms of extension. And *potentia*, being essentially variable, showing increase and diminution, having degrees in relation to finite modes, is an intensity. If Spinoza doesn't use this word, current up to the time of Descartes, I imagine this is because he doesn't want to *appear* to be returning to a PreCartesian physics. Leibniz is less concerned by such worries. And does one not find in Spinoza the expression '*pars potentiae divinae*'?¹¹

While Spinoza does not appear to use the exact expression Deleuze mentions, he does use the equivalent '*pars potentiae Dei*,' for instance in 4p4d. In Deleuze's view, then, the concept of intensity is at work in Spinoza, even if it is not explicitly mentioned. Deleuze's approach will therefore be to interpret the essences of individual finite modes as 'intensive parts.' Later we will see that his account of existence in Spinoza will turn on the complementary notion of 'extensive parts.' He lays out the opposition of these two kinds of modal parts in the following passage:

But it appears from the *Ethics* that the word "part" must be understood in two ways. Sometimes it is a question of parts of a power, that is, of intrinsic or intensive parts, true degrees, degrees of power or intensity. Modal essences are

¹⁰ *Expressionism* 197 (180)

¹¹ *Expressionism* 417-418, in the translator's footnote a to chapter 12.

thus defined as degrees of power (Spinoza here joins a long Scholastic tradition, according to which *modus intrinsecus* = *gradus* = *intensio*). But it is also, at times, a question of extrinsic or extensive parts, external to one another, and acting on one another from outside.¹²

Deleuze takes the two kinds of part, intensive and extensive, to correspond to two ways in which something can be distinguished, what he calls ‘intrinsic distinction’ and ‘extrinsic distinction.’ He develops the opposition of these two kinds of distinction with the help of an example taken from Duns Scotus, the example of a white wall:

As long as the wall is white, no shape is distinguished from or in it. That is: in such a state the quality is not affected by anything extrinsically distinct from it. But there remains the question of knowing whether there is another type of modal distinction, presenting an intrinsic principle of individuation. . . . Let us return to Scotus: whiteness, he says, has various intensities; these are not added to whiteness as one thing to another thing, like a shape added to the wall on which it is drawn; its degrees of intensity are intrinsic determinations, intrinsic modes, of a whiteness that remains univocally the same under whichever modality it is considered.¹³

An extrinsic distinction, it seems, would require adding something to the white wall, for instance, drawing a shape on it. An intrinsic distinction requires no such addition. The intensities of whiteness are distinct without any addition from outside.

It is with this opposition in hand, then, between the intrinsic distinction of intensities and the extrinsic distinction that involves something that comes from outside, that Deleuze approaches Spinoza’s statements about the distinction of modal essences within the attribute. Spinoza, as mentioned above, seems mainly to *deny* that there is any distinction of modal essences, as long as the corresponding mode does not exist. In the *Short Treatise*, he invokes the example of the white wall to argue that just as nothing can

¹² *Expressionism* 191 (173)

¹³ *Expressionism* 196 (179)

be distinguished in a white wall, essences cannot be distinguished as long as the modes do not have existence as well.¹⁴ Deleuze wants to apply his distinction between the two ways of being distinguished to claim that in such passages Spinoza is denying only the *extrinsic* distinction of essences. Deleuze writes,

“Being distinct from” is bluntly opposed in all this to “being contained in.” As contained only in their attribute, modal essences are not distinct from it. *Distinction, then, is taken in the sense of extrinsic distinction.*¹⁵

While Spinoza might seem to be denying any distinction of the essences of modes apart from their existence, he should be taken to deny only extrinsic distinction. Deleuze’s argument, then, is this: Spinoza needs a distinction of modal essences; Spinoza seems to deny any distinction of modal essences; but those denials can be taken to apply only to extrinsic distinction; therefore, we should take modal essences to be intrinsically distinct, as intensities or degrees of a quality, since this option is open to us and allows us to provide Spinoza with the distinction that he needs. This solution depends, of course, on the extent to which the attributes, of which the essences of modes are supposed to be the intensities, are like qualities. Deleuze claims that attributes are identical to qualities: “One finds in Spinoza,” he writes, “the classic identification of attribute and quality.”¹⁶ Just as Scotus found a form of distinction in whiteness that is not extrinsic, Deleuze thinks that this

seems also to be the case for Spinoza: modal essences are intrinsic modes or intensive quantities. An attribute remains as a quality univocally what it is, containing all the degrees that affect it without modifying its formal reason.

¹⁴ *Short Treatise* Part II, ch. XX, note c. (p. 136 in Curley’s edition)

¹⁵ *Expressionism* 195 (178)

¹⁶ *Expressionism* 191 (173)

Modal essences are thus distinguished from their attribute as intensities of its quality, and from one another as different degrees of intensity.¹⁷

Thus, according to Deleuze, attributes are like qualities and modal essences are like degrees of those qualities. However, the parallel that Deleuze wants to draw between attributes and qualities is not as straightforward as these statements make it appear. If it were, one might expect Deleuze to go on to talk about modal essences as ‘degrees of extension’ or ‘degrees of thought,’ as one would talk about degrees of whiteness, given the supposed identification of attribute and quality. But on Deleuze’s own interpretation, attributes are not so much like qualities such as whiteness, but rather are considered as qualitative forms for the expression of God’s power.¹⁸ Deleuze will thus speak of modal essences as degrees of *power* rather than as degrees of the attribute understood as a quality. The essence of a mode of extension is a degree of God’s power expressed in extension, the essence of a mode of thought is a degree of God’s power expressed in thought.

One strength of Deleuze’s account, I think, is the way it links the notion of the essences of modes contained in the attribute, the essences of non-existent modes, with the account of actual essence that appears in part as power in the form of *conatus*. With reference to actual essence, Curley, for instance, writes: “I suggest that [Spinoza] thinks of the essence of an individual as a power or force, tending towards self-preservation . . .

¹⁷ *Expressionism* 196-97 (179-80)

¹⁸ Deleuze calls the attributes “dynamic and active forms” (*Expressionism* 45 [36]) and says that God’s “power of existing” is expressed in “an infinity of formally distinct attributes” (*Expressionism* 118 [104])

.”¹⁹ On the other hand, when Curley considers the essence of an individual apart from this notion of actual essence, he looks for a definition that would specify its necessary properties.²⁰ Deleuze finds a way of thinking of non-actual essence as power or force as well, as a degree of God’s power considered under the attribute in question. Of the essences contained in the attributes, he writes, “This is the sense in which an attribute contains, that is, complicates, the essences of all its modes; it contains them as the infinite series of degrees corresponding to its intensive quantity.”²¹

Despite the appeal of this approach, however, I think that it is difficult to maintain as an interpretation of Spinoza. Let me contrast Deleuze’s interpretation on these points with the account I tried to give above. There, I suggested that the ‘containment’ of essences in the attribute had to do with the nature of the attribute in question, for instance with the laws of motion and rest in the attribute of extension. What is strange about Deleuze’s account is that there seems to be no role for the specific nature of the containing attribute. What makes a degree of power in the attribute of extension a degree of power in the attribute of *extension*? The account I tried to give set out from the definition of an individual mode of extension after 2p13s, as involving a ratio or relation of motion and rest that characterizes the individual. Defining the essence of an individual mode in this way puts it in a clear relationship with the containing attribute, since an individual essence in the attribute of extension is defined in terms of motion and rest, which are determinations of extension for Spinoza. Nor does it seem too difficult to offer

¹⁹ Curley *Behind the Geometrical Method* 112

²⁰ Curley *Behind the Geometrical Method* 111-12

²¹ *Expressionism* 197 (180)

at least the sketch of an answer to the problem that Deleuze uses to motivate his introduction of intensive quantity into Spinoza's theory of essences, namely the problem of how essences are distinguished. If, as I have suggested, essences of individual modes of extension are complex relations that define motions of parts relative to the motions of other parts, these essences will be distinguished, presumably, by just these characteristics – that is, by precisely what roles they assign for moving parts, and by precisely what motions they prescribe for other parts relative to those. I would also suggest that the example of the white wall, on which Deleuze places so much emphasis (he brings it up again in the seminar of March 10, 1981), does not make a very good analogy with a Spinozan attribute. Differing degrees of intensity may be the only distinctions to be found on an otherwise unmarked white wall, but Spinoza's attributes have all the internal complexity of the laws of nature included in them.

In order to make more intelligible the relationship between Deleuze's account of the essences of individual finite modes in Spinoza and the account I have offered, I would like to consider the role that Deleuze himself assigns to the relation of motion and rest, which I have identified with the essence of the individual mode. In some ways the account I have given of Spinoza is very close to that given by Deleuze. He does assign a prominent place to the relation of motion and rest. This is best seen in a seminar on Spinoza from March 10, 1981. There, Deleuze presents his account of individual modes in Spinoza starting from the condition of their existence, their extensive parts, which I will be considering in the next section. He asserts that every individual has an infinity of extensive parts. Then he asks: "what allows us to distinguish one infinite set from

another?”²² and answers: “Spinoza’s response seems to be: an infinite set of infinitely small parts belongs to me, and not to someone else, insofar as this infinite set puts into effect [*effectue*] a certain relation.” And a bit further on Deleuze states: “Under what relation of the infinitely small can they belong to a finite individuality? . . . Spinoza’s answer, if I stick to the letter of Spinoza, is: under a certain relation of motion and rest.” Here, then, we have Deleuze asserting that what distinguishes existing individuals, at least, is their relation of motion and rest, which I have claimed is equivalent to their essence. But Deleuze thinks something more is needed: “But this relation which characterizes me, and which determines that the parts which put into effect the relation belong to me . . . is this the last word on the individual? Obviously not, it is necessary to give an account of it in its turn.” Deleuze adds: “Here Spinoza says this very firmly: the relations of movement and rest serve only to express a singular essence.” Unfortunately, Deleuze does not tell us where he sees Spinoza saying this “very firmly”; and I cannot find anywhere that Spinoza even implies this. Deleuze goes on to ask: “what is it, this singular essence?” and he answers with his account of the white wall example, and the conclusion that Spinozan essences are intensities.

It should be clear now that the notion of a relation of motion and rest has a very important place in Deleuze’s account of finite modes, but it is kept strangely separate from both essence and existence. Deleuze insists on maintaining a certain separation between the characteristic relation and the essence of the individual mode. Thus he writes, “A modal essence expresses itself eternally in a relation, but we should not

²² Transcripts and translations of Deleuze’s seminars are available online at www.webdeleuze.com. I have used the English translation by Simon Duffy.

confuse the essence and the relation in which it expresses itself.”²³ One motivation for Deleuze’s account of the relationship between essence and relation in individual finite modes seems to be the desire to establish a parallel with his account of God’s essence, which, according to Deleuze, is *expressed* in God’s attributes, but is not to be identified with those attributes. Deleuze writes: “Substance expresses itself, attributes are expressions, and essence is expressed.”²⁴ Similarly, then, the essence of an individual finite mode is *expressed* in its characteristic relation, but is not to be identified with that relation, as we have seen. But the goal of establishing such a parallel does not seem to be sufficient justification for the interpretation Deleuze proposes, given the difficulty of finding it in Spinoza’s text.²⁵

Ultimately, I think Deleuze gives the notion of intensity more prominence than it deserves in an account of the essences of individual finite modes in Spinoza. His justification of it on the grounds that it makes intelligible the distinction of the essences

²³ *Expressionism* 209 (191)

²⁴ *Expressionism* 27 (21)

²⁵ One way of giving Deleuze’s interpretation more plausibility might be to consider it alongside the “mode-identity” interpretation proposed by Bennett in *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics*. Bennett is concerned to account for Spinoza’s claim that “the Mind and the Body are one and the same thing, which is conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension. The result is that the order, or connection, of things is one, whether nature is conceived under this attribute or that...” (3p2s). He suggests that there are “trans-attribute differentiae,” modal determinations of substance that do not fall under any attribute, but which cannot be grasped intellectually except as expressed in an attribute (Bennett 145). Deleuze’s notion of degrees of power might be a way of thinking about the sort of distinction appropriate to such differentiae. Deleuze himself, however, gives no indication that he has the problem of individual identity across the attributes in mind when he proposes that the essences of modes be understood as degrees of power, and in fact he works against this interpretation with his insistence on the parallel between attribute and quality, which clearly implies that the essences of modes are to be taken as degrees of the attribute, and not as degrees of power independent of the attributes.

contained in the attributes is unconvincing, because the distinction it provides remains disconnected from the attributes and seems to distinguish only degrees of power, without regard for the attribute under which the essences fall. Once we take the attributes into account, it seems that the essences within an attribute must be distinguished according to the features of that attribute. The essences of individual bodies, I argued in chapter 1 above, are structures that relate parts together and determine how motions are to be communicated between them. If we ask how essences are to be distinguished, it seems to me that they must be distinguished according to the features of such structures, and not just according to their degree of power. The notion of intensity does play a prominent ontological role in Deleuze's own theory of individuals, however, as we will see in chapter 4. The role that Deleuze assigns to it in his interpretation of Spinoza seems to me to be a reflection of the role he gives it in his own philosophy, rather than a particularly helpful interpretation of Spinoza's texts.

ii. Extensive Existence

Deleuze's analysis of the existence of individual finite modes in Spinoza is complementary to his interpretation of essence. Whereas the key concept there was intensity or intensive parts, the key to his interpretation of existence is extensity or extensive parts. His basic claim is that "*to exist is to actually possess a very great number [plurimae] of parts*". These component parts are external to the mode's essence,

and external to one another: they are extensive parts.”²⁶ I will return to the issue of what it is for a mode to possess extensive parts. The first thing to consider is where this theme of extensive parts comes from in Spinoza, since ‘extensive parts,’ like ‘intensity,’ is not a Spinozan term. Deleuze seems to derive the notion from Spinoza’s discussion of what he calls “the simplest bodies.”²⁷ The first part of the discussion of the physics of bodies, after the scholium of proposition 13 of part 2, concerns the simplest bodies, although Spinoza really only indicates this when he makes the transition to talking about composite bodies or individuals, saying: “This will be sufficient concerning the simplest bodies, which are distinguished from one another only by motion and rest, speed and slowness. Now let us move up to composite bodies.”²⁸ These simplest bodies pose interpretive difficulties, which were noted by Albert Rivaud in “*La physique de Spinoza*,” and which Deleuze tries to deal with in the course of adapting this doctrine for his interpretation of the existence of individual finite modes.

The first problem is with what legitimacy Spinoza can speak of simplest bodies at all, given his other positions. The simplest bodies, after all, are not atoms. In 1p15s, in Letter 6, and in *Descartes’ Principles*, Spinoza denies that there is a vacuum, which would have to be posited on an atomic theory, and in *Descartes’ Principles* atoms are explicitly denied.²⁹ Given this denial of atoms, Rivaud states the problem that is posed by the theory of the simplest bodies as follows:

²⁶ *Expressionism* 201 (183)

²⁷ Axiom 2O after 2p13s

²⁸ Axiom 2O after 2p13s

²⁹ I/190. Cf. also I/188 and Letter 6 at IV/32. At IV/29 Spinoza states that “it is by reasoning and calculation that we divide bodies to infinity”

How can one speak, in an extended space whose actual division is infinite, of completely simple bodies? Such bodies can be real only relative to our perception. For the intellect, there is just extension divided to infinity, and of which the smallest fragments still contain an infinite number of parts.³⁰

It seems, then, that Spinoza's simplest bodies cannot be strictly simple, but must only be relatively simple. But Deleuze denies that talk of simplest bodies is inconsistent with the notion of an actually infinite division of matter. According to him, "there is no contradiction between the idea of absolutely simple ultimate parts and the principle of infinite division, as long as this division is *actually infinite*."³¹ The idea is that in this case the absolutely simple ultimate parts are actually infinitely small. He writes, "The ultimate extensive parts are in fact the actual infinitely small parts of an infinity that is itself actual."³² This may be the best one can do with Spinoza's combined assertions on these points, but it seems like one could think that the actually infinite division of bodies just means that the idea of an infinitely small body is incoherent. If 'simple' means indivisible, and if a body is extended by definition and any extension is divisible, then it seems that there can essentially be no simple body. Perhaps Deleuze would deny that the simplest bodies are extended. In fact, not much is at stake for Deleuze in the simplicity of the simplest bodies. He is content to see them as corresponding to an actually infinite division because he is also content to consider them as always present only in infinite groups. It is always an infinity of the simplest bodies that makes up a composite body.

³⁰ Albert Rivaud, "La Physique de Spinoza," *Chronicon Spinozanum*, 4: 24-57, 1924-6, 32; the first two sentences are in Deleuze's note 11 (*Expressionism* 381 [187]), the third sentence is my translation.

³¹ *Expressionism* 205 (187)

³² *Expressionism* 205 (187)

It is the second interpretive difficulty concerning the simplest bodies that is more decisive for Deleuze's account of existence in Spinoza. This problem concerns the essence or nature of a simple body. Spinoza makes explicit reference to the nature of such a body at A1" after 2p13s. But in what can the nature or essence of such bodies consist? As Alan Gabbey says, "motion, rest, speed, and slowness are their sole distinguishing characteristics."³³ But these are the very characteristics that are constantly changing as bodies interact. Rivaud draws what seems to be a problematic conclusion: "A particular body, or a simple body at least, has then no eternal essence. Its reality seems to be subsumed into that of the infinite system of causes."³⁴ And Rivaud adds later, "What has no essence at all cannot exist, and every essence is, by definition, immutable."³⁵ Deleuze's approach is to accept this conclusion, despite Spinoza's reference to the nature of a simple body. He writes, "[Spinoza] does, it is true, speak of the "nature" of bodies, on the level of simple bodies, but this "nature" refers only to such a body's previous state."³⁶ The simplest bodies have no essence, and as Rivaud had inferred, they cannot properly be said to have existence either. In fact, Deleuze also stops referring to them as 'bodies'; they are 'parts,' not bodies in their own right. As Deleuze says, "Strictly speaking, simple parts have neither an essence nor an existence of their own."³⁷

³³ Gabbey "Spinoza's natural science and methodology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, 166

³⁴ Quoted by Deleuze, *Expressionism* 206 (188); Rivaud 32

³⁵ Quoted by Deleuze, *Expressionism* 206 (189); Rivaud 34

³⁶ Note 12, *Expressionism* 381 (188). On this view, however, it does not seem clear how a subsequent state could be identified as belonging to the same simple body.

³⁷ *Expressionism* 207 (189)

In effect, then, Deleuze has given the simplest bodies a distinct ontological status. They are not themselves individual modes, but constitute a kind of matter that allows individual modes to exist. He makes this explicit in the lecture of March 10, 1981, stating:

The simple bodies have only strictly extrinsic relations, relations of exteriority with each other. They form a species of matter, using Spinoza's terminology: a modal matter, a modal matter of pure exteriority, which is to say: they react on one another, they have no interiority, they have only external relations with one another.³⁸

When Deleuze here states that he is "using Spinoza's terminology," perhaps he is referring to 1p15s, which is one of the few places in the *Ethics* where Spinoza uses the term 'matter.' But there is nothing there, or anywhere else, as far as I can see, to support Deleuze's identification of the simplest bodies with a kind of general matter. In 1p15s, Spinoza himself seems to identify matter, understood through the intellect, with corporeal substance, not with the simplest bodies.

There is one more important step in Deleuze's creative reinterpretation of Spinoza's simplest bodies. So far, he has claimed that they should be understood as infinite groupings of parts with no essence or existence of their own. He refers to them as 'extensive parts.' But he does not mean by this that such parts are to be found only in the attribute of extension, despite the derivation of this theory from the notion of simplest bodies. On the contrary, he writes:

It should not be thought that Extensivity belongs only to Extension: the modes of Extension are defined essentially by degrees of power, and an attribute such as

³⁸ Seminar of March 10, 1981, available on-line at www.webdeleuze.com.

Thought itself has extensive modal parts, ideas that correspond to the simplest bodies.³⁹

Deleuze's claim, then, is that there are 'extensive parts' in every attribute. There is some justification for the claim that there are such 'extensive parts' in the attribute of thought, insofar as Spinoza seems to think that the idea of a mode of extension must have parts corresponding to the parts of the mode of which it is the idea (2p15), but there is no explicit support for such an idea in Spinoza. We are very far, in any case, from the simplest bodies with which Deleuze began. What he has now is a distinct ontological element present in every attribute, extensive parts that have no essence or existence of their own but that are supposed to help account for the existence of individual finite modes.

In my discussion of the existence of individual finite modes, I left unresolved the question of whether the existence of modes of thought must be understood in terms of the attribute of thought alone (a parallelist interpretation), or whether it is rather to be understood through the existence of the body (a materialist interpretation). Deleuze's interpretation offers the former sort of solution. A mode of thought exists by subsuming extensive parts in the attribute of thought, just as a mode of extension exists by subsuming extensive parts in the attribute of extension. This theory is really an extrapolation from Spinoza's statements about modes of extension, and from the general principles of 'parallelism' of the attributes.

How do 'extensive parts' account for existence? As we saw, Deleuze writes that "*to exist is to actually possess a very great number [plurimae] of parts.* These

³⁹ *Expressionism* 191-92 (174)

component parts are external to the mode's essence, and external to one another: they are extensive parts."⁴⁰ This 'very great number' turns out to be an infinity, based on the infinite division of bodies that we have already discussed: "Extensive parts come in greater or lesser infinities, but always come in an infinity."⁴¹ To 'possess' an infinity of parts is for those parts to take on the characteristic relation that corresponds to the essence of the mode. The extensive parts seem to function, on Deleuze's interpretation, as a kind of 'matter' for the 'form' provided by the characteristic relation. Deleuze writes:

Spinoza's theory of existence involves, then, three components: *a singular essence*, which is a degree of power or intensity; *a particular existence*, always composed of an infinity of extensive parts; and *an individual form* that is the characteristic or expressive relation which corresponds eternally to the mode's essence, but through which also an infinity of parts are temporarily related to that essence.⁴²

To exist is to have a matter, extensive parts, corresponding to the form, the characteristic relation, and a mode ceases to exist when its matter takes on some other form.

I do not understand the need to find an abstract theory of matter in Spinoza. Deleuze acknowledges in the seminar of March 10, 1981 that to speak of the infinite groupings of simplest bodies that he describes is to speak of an abstraction. He states, "the infinite sets of very simple bodies don't exist independently of the differential relations which they put into effect. Therefore it is by abstraction that I began by speaking of them." Does Spinoza need this theory of abstract matter? Deleuze does not explicitly say why he attributes it to Spinoza, despite the obvious exegetical effort

⁴⁰ *Expressionism* 201 (183)

⁴¹ *Expressionism* 207 (189)

⁴² *Expressionism* 209 (191)

required to extract this theory from Spinoza's scant statements about the simplest bodies. Since Deleuze uses it in accounting for the existence of individual finite modes, perhaps the implication is that without this theory, Spinoza could not account for the existence of these modes. But Spinoza seems to consider it sufficient to point out that individual modes come into existence through the activity of other modes. He posits, in effect, an infinite causal chain of finite modes.⁴³ The 'matter' for new individuals is always provided by individuals that already exist. To exist is to have a cause; it is for the causal interactions of existing modes to bring about the configuration of parts that corresponds to the structure defined by the mode's essence. This account seems to me to be sufficient for Spinoza's purposes, and no further theory of matter seems to be necessary.

There is little to suggest that Spinoza's theory of the simplest bodies was meant to play the role that Deleuze assigns to it in accounting for existence in Spinoza. In my discussion of how individual modes come into existence, I simply spoke as though there are always existing individuals from which, or from the parts of which, new individuals are formed. Deleuze's interpretation adds something like a fundamental matter for this whole sphere of existence. To me, it does not seem to add much to our understanding of Spinoza. On the other hand, it does provide a parallel with Deleuze, since the appearance of the extensive, as opposed to the intensive, as we shall see in chapter 4, is an important part of his account of the actualisation of the virtual. So it appears to me that the emphasis Deleuze puts on extensive parts, much like the role he assigns to intensity, does more to echo the structure of his own ontology than to clarify Spinoza.

⁴³ See *Ethics* 1p28.

Deleuze introduces the notions of intensity and extensity into his interpretation of the essence and existence of finite modes in Spinoza, I have argued, with relatively little textual basis. Nor do these concepts seem to provide much help in interpreting Spinoza, at least in the immediate context in which they are introduced. On the other hand, we will see in chapter 4 that intensity and extensity are prominent in Deleuze's account of the relation between the virtual and the actual in his own ontology. As I noted above, one goal of this chapter is to illustrate the difference between comparing Deleuze with Spinoza and Leibniz, and comparing Deleuze with Spinoza-as-presented-by-Deleuze or Leibniz-as-presented-by-Deleuze. Taking Deleuze's interpretation of Spinoza at face value would give the appearance of a much stronger parallel between Deleuze and Spinoza than seems to me actually to exist.

2. Deleuze on Leibniz

Deleuze's reading of Leibniz plays a role in *Difference and Repetition* and in *The Logic of Sense*, and it is most fully developed in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. It is always elaborated with a view to Deleuze's own concerns, however. As Deleuze says, Spinoza is the philosopher on whom he did the most work "according to the norms of the history of philosophy."⁴⁴ His use of Leibniz is thus perhaps a bit freer, but in any case he

⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, Revised edition. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, 15 (*Dialogues*, Paris: Flammarion, 1996, 22)

remains true to his usual approach of trying to make even what may seem like ‘monstrous’ interpretations follow from things the philosopher actually said.⁴⁵ Like the section on Spinoza, this section will discuss points where Deleuze’s interpretation of Leibniz differs from the interpretation given above, differences that point in the direction of Deleuze’s own theory of individuals articulated around the distinction of virtual and actual.⁴⁶

There is one point on which Deleuze is in direct disagreement with Leibniz, and this is on the use of the notion of possibility. We have seen that Leibniz equates essences with possibilities understood by God. Actual individuals are prefigured as possible individuals prior to creation. Deleuze adopts a critique of the notion of possibility from Bergson, and this critique informs his reading of Leibniz. The first thing we have to consider, then, is how Deleuze deals with the rather fundamental notion of possibility in Leibniz.

Secondly, Deleuze has an interpretation of the link between individual and world in Leibniz that differs significantly from the interpretation given above. While I have mainly considered worlds to be composed of individuals, Deleuze thinks there is an important sense in which the world is prior to the individual. We will see that a lot turns on the sense of ‘world’ that one ascribes to Leibniz.

⁴⁵ See “Letter to a Harsh Critic” in *Negotiations, 1972-1990*.

⁴⁶ It should be noted that the extremely important conceptual pair virtual-actual is badly obscured in the English translation of *The Fold*. One instance is in the table of contents itself, where we have “Virtual-present” as a translation of “*virtuel-actuel*”; ‘*actuellement*’ is variously translated as ‘currently,’ ‘presently’ and ‘authentically’ in contexts where it is clearly being opposed to ‘virtually,’ and should thus be rendered ‘actually.’ See pp. vi, 22, 23, 26, 50, 51 and 52 for instances of these problems.

i. The Critique of Possibility

When we turn, in the next chapter, to a consideration of Deleuze's philosophy, focused on *Difference and Repetition*, what will play the role of essence will be what he calls "virtual Ideas," or "the virtual," or simply "Ideas."⁴⁷ In *Difference and Repetition*, the virtual is introduced in opposition to the possible. And given the importance of the notion of possibility in connection with the Leibnizian conception of essence, we must consider here Deleuze's critique of possibility as it relates to his reading of Leibniz.

Deleuze lays out the contrast between the virtual and the possible in the following passage:

The only danger in all this is that the virtual could be confused with the possible. The possible is opposed to the real; the process undergone by the possible is therefore a 'realisation'. By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is that of actualisation. It would be wrong to see only a verbal dispute here: it is a question of existence itself. Every time we pose the question in terms of possible and real, we are forced to conceive of existence as a brute eruption, a pure act or leap which always occurs behind our backs and is subject to a law of all or nothing. What difference can there be between the existent and the non-existent if the non-existent is already possible, already included in the concept and having all the characteristics that the concept confers upon it as a possibility? . . . [T]o the extent that the possible is open to 'realisation', it is understood as an image of the real, while the real is supposed to resemble the possible. That is why it is difficult to understand what existence adds to the concept when all it does is double like with like. Such is the defect of the possible: a defect which serves to condemn it as

⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, Trans. Paul Patton, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994 (*Différence et répétition*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968); henceforth DR; 284 (364), 208 (269), 168 (218). I retain Deleuze's capitalisation of 'Idea.' The notion of the virtual also plays a role in Deleuze's interpretation of 'world' in Leibniz, as we will see in the next section.

produced after the fact, as retroactively fabricated in the image of what resembles it.⁴⁸

Deleuze, then, contends that possibilities are simple copies of the things of which they are supposed to be the possibility, and that they are then assigned a false priority over that from which they are copied. When we try to move from possibilities to existing things, it is difficult to see what difference existence makes, since the possibility is already a perfect copy, or a proleptic instance, of the real, existing thing. The force of this criticism relies heavily on Deleuze's fundamental assumptions about what a philosophical account of reality is supposed to explain. Put simply, all of his work is oriented around the idea that philosophy must account for becoming. The notion of possibility bypasses becoming altogether, instead allowing for ready-made objects in the realm of possibility to play an explanatory role in relation to real things.

Leibniz is an excellent target for this objection, in that he posits essences of individual substances as possibilities understood by God. These possibilities allow God to see the full detail of the individual's possible existence and to use it as grounds for deciding which individuals to create. In Leibniz, as Deleuze contends about theories of possibility in general, it is difficult to see what existence adds to the possible. An existing substance plays out exactly that series of states already defined as possible in its essence.

Leibniz, of course, has theological grounds for his use of the notion of possibility. As we have seen, he conceives of God's understanding as a realm of possibilities. Since God thinks everything eternally, possibilities have a stable reality as objects of his

⁴⁸ DR 211-12 (272-73)

understanding. In addition, God has the power to bring about anything he can conceive, so all possibilities have potential reality. Deleuze would probably acknowledge that all of this is legitimate, to the extent that one accepts the underlying premise of an omniscient and omnipotent God. Deleuze's contention, I think, is that in the absence of such an assumption, to try to account for existence in terms of possibilities is simply to engage in the retroactive projection of explanatory copies of real things. Without an omnipotent God to back them up, possibilities explain nothing metaphysically.

Deleuze has no interest in salvaging Leibniz's theological claims, but he does want to retain various aspects of Leibniz's philosophy, including what he sees as Leibniz's theory of individuals. To do this, he tries to disarm the possibility-dependent dimension of Leibniz's thought. We can distinguish two main approaches or strategies that he uses, one followed in *Difference and Repetition*, the other in *The Fold*.

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze is trying to portray Leibniz as one of the sources for his idea of the virtual. He is well aware, however, of the predominance of the notion of possibility in Leibniz's thought. Thus he writes,

Any hesitation between the virtual and the possible, the order of the Idea and the order of the concept, is disastrous, since it abolishes the reality of the virtual. There are traces of such an oscillation in the philosophy of Leibniz.⁴⁹

We will see below to some extent how Deleuze discovers his notion of the virtual in Leibniz. For now, let us just note Deleuze's interpretive strategy here, which is to detect opposed tendencies in Leibniz and to side with the 'good' tendency (oriented towards the virtual) against the 'bad' one (oriented towards the possible). Given his criticism of the

⁴⁹ DR 212-13 (274-75)

notion of the possible, Deleuze has to eliminate those aspects of Leibniz's thought that depend on it in order to adopt Leibniz's better half as a supporter of his own position.

In *The Fold*, Deleuze's approach is different. Instead of seeing Leibniz as vacillating between the virtual and the possible, Deleuze includes both notions in his systematic presentation of Leibniz's philosophy. He explains the situation as he sees it in the following passage:

The world has actuality only in the monads, each of which expresses it from its own point of view, on its own surface. But the coupling of the virtual-actual does not resolve the problem. There exists a second, very different coupling of the possible-real. For example, God chooses one world among an infinity of possible worlds: the other worlds also have their actuality in monads that express them, Adam who does not sin or Sextus who does not rape Lucretia. Therefore there exists an actual that remains possible, and that is not forcibly real. The actual does not constitute the real; it must itself be realized, and the problem of the world's realization is added to that of its actualization.⁵⁰

Actualization, the movement from the virtual to the actual, goes from world to monads in Deleuze's reading of Leibniz, as we will see below. Here, rather late in his discussion of Leibniz, Deleuze acknowledges that what are actualized in monads are only *possible* worlds, and that God must choose one for realization. It seems, then, that Deleuze is incorporating Leibniz's notion of the possible along with his own notion of the virtual into his overall reading of Leibniz. This appearance turns out to be misleading, however, for Deleuze adds a strange twist to the notion of realization that he claims to detect in Leibniz. He writes, "The world is a virtuality that is actualized in monads or souls, but also a possibility that must be realized in matter or in bodies."⁵¹ What is strange is that

⁵⁰ *The Fold* 104 (140), translation slightly modified. It is odd that Deleuze speaks of God's creation of the world as an 'example.'

⁵¹ *The Fold* 104 (140)

realization should be conceived as realization “in matter or in bodies.” The issue of what possible world God creates, for Leibniz, is not a question about which world will gain a material aspect, but about which monads conceived by God will actually exist. Even here, then, under the name of the possible, Deleuze is substituting a notion that he finds more congenial. In fact, the account of the realization of the possible in *The Fold* ends up having notable similarities to the account of existence in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. In both cases it is a matter of the possession of an infinite grouping of ‘parts’ that gives material expression to the individual. In his reading of Spinoza, we saw, Deleuze develops a notion of ‘extensive parts’ in every attribute as constituting a kind of matter for existence. It is this material dimension that Deleuze identifies, in *The Fold*, with the realization of the possible. Whatever the value of Deleuze’s discussion of the topic of matter and bodies in Leibniz, the equivalence he posits between this topic and the question of the realization of possibility does not seem to correspond to anything in Leibniz, as far as I can see.

It seems to me, then, that Deleuze’s account of possibility in *The Fold* does not correspond to the use that Leibniz makes of the notion of possibility. The main topic of Deleuze’s discussion is the status of bodies, matter and corporeal substance in Leibniz’s metaphysics, which is a difficult and controversial area that I have not and will not try to address here. The sections of Deleuze’s discussion that I am criticizing insofar as they are presented as an interpretation of possibility in Leibniz may well have value as an account of body or corporeal substance. To clarify the limited scope of my criticism, let me state again the role that possibility plays in Leibniz’s account of the essences of

individual substances. There are infinitely many possible individual substances or monads. These can be combined into infinitely many possible worlds, which have reality only as objects of God's understanding. God chooses one of these worlds, the best combination of individuals, for creation, and this is the actual world. All of this can be described in terms of individual substances, and does not require any reference to bodies or matter. The only monads that are actual are the ones that belong to the world that God chooses. Deleuze's claim that other possible worlds than the one that exists "have their actuality in monads that express them," and that the actual world requires some additional "realization" in bodies or matter, does not reflect Leibniz's view.

In a way, then, Deleuze has eliminated the notion of the possible, to which he objected in *Difference and Repetition*, from his interpretation of Leibniz in *The Fold*, under the guise of retaining it. But even the strange modification of Leibniz's notion of possibility that is present in *The Fold*, Deleuze presents as belonging historically to Leibniz's epoch but not surviving into our own. The justification for recognizing separate processes of actualization and realization is the notion that there are impossible worlds, one of which must be selected to be the real one. In the conclusion to *The Fold*, Deleuze asserts that "the selection is what tends to be disappearing," such that "the world is now made up of divergent series," series that were separated into impossible worlds on Leibniz's account.⁵² Since we are no longer in a historical period that rejects the coexistence multiple impossible worlds, there is no

⁵² *The Fold* 137 (188)

longer any need for a separate process of realization based on the selection of one world, and the possible, even in its modified form, can be eliminated.

In Leibniz, Deleuze is confronted with a philosopher who embraced a notion that he rejects. We have seen that he has two ways of dealing with this. In *Difference and Repetition*, he portrays Leibniz as oscillating between the virtual and the possible, and he sides with the Leibniz of the virtual, the ‘Dionysian’ Leibniz, against the Leibniz of the possible.⁵³ In *The Fold*, Deleuze incorporates the terminology of the possible into his interpretation, but in a way that gives a different meaning to this notion than the one he associated with it in *Difference and Repetition*. The approach of *Difference and Repetition* seems to me to portray the situation more accurately. There, at least, it is acknowledged that Leibniz made use of something very like the notion of possibility that Deleuze rejects.

ii. *World and Individual*

Deleuze has an unusual account of the relationship between world and individual in Leibniz, an account that is worth exploring in detail both for what it brings to light as far as an interpretation of Leibniz is concerned, and for the way it anticipates aspects of Deleuze’s own philosophy. Much of this account is concealed in the following statement of Deleuze’s: “God himself conceives individual notions only as a function of the world that they express, and chooses them only through a calculus of the world.”⁵⁴

⁵³ cf. DR 214 (276)

⁵⁴ *The Fold*, 50-51 (68)

Let us initially focus on the first part of this statement, the claim that “God himself conceives individual notions only as a function of the world that they express.” This seems to contrast sharply with the interpretation of Leibniz I gave above according to which any individual can be conceived and created on its own. On that interpretation, an individual belonging to the actual world could have been created without any of the other individuals that make up that world and so, far from being conceived as a function of that world, it can be conceived and actually exist in complete isolation from that world. As we saw, Leibniz affirms that God can create a monad in isolation in a reply to a letter from Des Bosses, who had written that “God could not create any one of these monads which thus exist without constructing all the others which equally exist now.” Leibniz answers that God “can do it absolutely,” although he cannot do it on the hypothesis of his own decree that “all things should function most wisely and harmoniously.”⁵⁵ If it is not obvious enough that what can be created separately can also be conceived separately, Leibniz states elsewhere that “God has knowledge of possible things, not only as separate, but as coordinated in innumerable possible worlds, from which, by his most wise decision, he chose one.”⁵⁶ Leibniz thereby affirms God’s separate knowledge of possible individuals as well as his knowledge of them as coordinated into worlds. If we take ‘world’ in the sense of a creation scenario or set of substances that God creates together, then I would argue that Deleuze’s claim that God conceives individual notions only as a function of the world they express is inaccurate.

⁵⁵ G II 493; L 610; quoted in Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne 100.

⁵⁶ G III 30; quoted in Mates 71 n. 9.

The opposition between Deleuze's claim and the reading of Leibniz I have offered can perhaps be avoided, however, if what Deleuze means by the 'world' that individual notions express is not the set of substances that God creates. As we have seen above, there are other senses of 'world' in Leibniz, and one of these is the world that is 'included' in a monad, independently of what other substances might exist. We saw that Leibniz writes, "God could give to each [substance] its own phenomena independent of those of others, but in this way he would have made as many worlds without connection, so to speak, as there are substances."⁵⁷ These "worlds without connection," the worlds included in each substance, are what make up the internal series of perceptions of those substances. And in fact, even when God creates a world in which all of the substances mirror one another, these substances are still "worlds without connection" in the sense that each one independently produces the series of its perceptions without any direct causal influence from or on the others. In this sense of world, Deleuze's statement that "God himself conceives individual notions only as a function of the world that they express" seems quite reasonable. It would be equivalent to saying that God conceives of an individual notion in terms of the world that the individual includes, the world without connection to the worlds of other individual substances that it would form if it were created on its own or with some random group of substances.

This way of interpreting Deleuze is undermined, however, by the second part of the statement we are considering, where Deleuze states that God "chooses [individual

⁵⁷ "Clarification of the Difficulties . . ." G IV 519; L 493; also, Leibniz's reference to "the world which is in us" (DM §14; A 6.4 1550; G IV 439; AG 47), and his statement that "each mind is a world apart" ("New System" par. 16, L 458).

notions] only through a calculus of the world.” In speaking of God’s choice of individual notions, Deleuze must be referring to God’s choice of which individuals to create, and the “calculus of the world” seems to refer to the determination of the best possible world. The best possible world, however, is a particular set of substances, not just the included world of some substance or other. What God calculates, as we have seen, is which set of substances involves a maximum of metaphysical perfection and harmony, and also a maximum of happiness and virtue for rational creatures. The most relevant sense of ‘world’ for this second part of Deleuze’s statement, then, is that of a creation scenario or set of substances, not the sense of ‘included world’ which allowed us to make sense of the first part.

Of course, the two senses of ‘world’ are not entirely unrelated. What is involved in God’s choice of a harmonious set of substances is the coordination of their included worlds with one another, so that God cannot determine which set of substances makes the best possible world without considering the worlds that these substances each individually include. But Deleuze’s complete statement looks misleading at best, since the first part is false on any sense of ‘world’ besides that of the included world, while the second part refers primarily to world as creation scenario. In fact, however, what is behind this difficulty is a much more fundamental disagreement between Deleuze’s interpretation of Leibniz and the one I have proposed. The crux of this disagreement is a sense of ‘world’ that Deleuze ascribes to Leibniz, one that is different again from the various senses I considered above.

Deleuze arrives at his interpretation of ‘world’ in Leibniz, in large part, by assigning a fundamental place to the Leibnizian theme of ‘mirroring’ or ‘point of view.’ Leibniz writes, for instance, that the nature of a substance “makes each substance represent the entire universe accurately in its own way and according to a definite point of view”;⁵⁸ and he also states that “each monad is a living mirror, or a mirror endowed with an internal action, and . . . represents the universe according to its point of view”⁵⁹ Deleuze thinks that to do justice to this aspect of Leibniz’s thought, we must assign the world some sort of ontological priority over the individual substances that make it up. “If not,” he writes, “the theme of the mirror and of point of view would lose all meaning.”⁶⁰ Deleuze seeks additional support for this priority of the world in Leibniz’s statements in the correspondence with Arnauld that God chooses the world and not the individual. As we saw in chapter 2, Leibniz writes:

[I]n order to proceed with accuracy, one must say that it is not so much because God decided to create this Adam that He decided everything else; but that the decisions which He takes regarding both Adam and other particular things are a consequence of the decision He takes regarding the whole universe⁶¹

Below I will argue that in interpreting Leibniz the way he does on these points, Deleuze gives an ontological weight to what is in Leibniz’s view a priority of the world over the individual only in the order of God’s reasoning about what to create. But first I want to follow Deleuze’s interpretation a bit further.

⁵⁸ “New System” par. 14, L 457

⁵⁹ “Principles of Nature and Grace” par. 3, L 637

⁶⁰ *The Fold* 25 (35)

⁶¹ GP II 41; Mason 44

Since Deleuze thinks that being a point of view on a world *is* fundamental to the notion of what it is to be a monad or individual substance for Leibniz, he tries to account for the priority of the world on which they are all points of view. Insofar as it ‘pre-exists’ the monads on his account, the world is qualified as ‘virtual’ and the elements that compose it are called ‘pre-individual.’ Deleuze uses a rather abstract vocabulary to talk about this sort of world. For instance, he writes:

There is an antecedence to monads, although a world does not exist outside of the monads that express it We begin with the world as with a series of inflections or events: it is a *pure emission of singularities*.⁶²

The term ‘inflection’ is used by Deleuze as part of the guiding theme of ‘folds’ that runs through *The Fold*. For our purposes, it is equivalent to ‘event,’ for Deleuze writes, “Inflection is the event that happens to the line or to the point.”⁶³ The world, then, is a series of events, or, as Deleuze adds with emphasis, “a pure emission of singularities.” ‘Singularity’ or ‘singular point’ is one of Deleuze’s most important terms, and is prominent in *Difference and Repetition*. It is also equivalent to ‘event,’ but it is used both to emphasize the pre-individual nature of the events in question and to contrast remarkable events with ordinary occurrences which merely continue an event. Continuing with the passage from p. 60, Deleuze writes:

Here, for example, are three singularities: to be the first man, to live in a garden of paradise, to have a wife created from one’s own rib. And then a fourth: to sin. Singularity-events of this kind hold a relation with “ordinaries” or “regulars” . . .
”⁶⁴

⁶² *The Fold* 60 (81)

⁶³ *The Fold* 41 (55)

⁶⁴ *The Fold* 60 (81)

In Deleuze's view, these 'singularity-events' are what compose the world in its priority over individuals. The world in its virtual pre-existence is not an object of perception, but an ordered series of pre-individual determinations, a series of events. The individual Adam is formed around the four singularities that Deleuze mentions. An individual is a point of view on the world not by perceiving it, but by actualizing certain of its events in a privileged way. Deleuze writes,

An individual is established first of all around a certain number of local singularities, which are its "primary predicates": thus, for Adam, the four predicates previously considered. That is the real definition of the individual: *concentration, accumulation, coincidence of a certain number of converging preindividual singularities.*⁶⁵

The fundamental perceptions of monads, on the other hand, are 'hallucinatory': "since the world does not exist outside the monads, these are minute perceptions lacking an object, that is, hallucinatory microperceptions."⁶⁶ The world is not the object of monadic perception, but the pre-individual source of monadic content.

Deleuze tries to apply Leibniz's notion of the selection of the best possible world to this conception of world. To do this, he offers an interpretation of Leibniz's notion of impossibility that tries to show how it is applicable at this level. In Deleuze's view, impossibility is an original relation invented by Leibniz and not reducible to contradiction. He writes, "Leibniz innovates when he invokes a profoundly original relation among all possible worlds. . . . Leibniz gives the new relation the name of *impossibility.*"⁶⁷ It is interesting, first of all, that Deleuze considers impossibility

⁶⁵ *The Fold* 63 (84-85)

⁶⁶ *The Fold* 86, modified (114-15)

⁶⁷ *The Fold* 59 (79)

a relation among possible worlds. As far as I can see, in Leibniz it is more like a relation among possible individuals. Any individuals that are compossible may belong to the same possible world, those that are not, may not. But, as already mentioned,⁶⁸ this is complicated by the fact that there seems to be no way that possible individual substances considered in themselves can be impossible, and Leibniz allows for a creation scenario in which substances having no common world would be created together. Thus, it is only other considerations that render individuals compossible or impossible, namely, the assumption of some general laws of harmony such as those that God follows to ensure that each individual substance is like a point of view on one and the same world.

Deleuze describes a Leibnizian world as “an infinity of converging series, capable of being extended into each other, around singular points.”⁶⁹ This is a pre-individual world, and if individuals are chosen only for the world they actualize and express, then it is among worlds that the relation of impossibility must first hold. Deleuze states that “another world appears *when the obtained series diverge in the neighborhood of singularities.*”⁷⁰ This ‘divergence’ is not further explicable, it seems. But it is what separates all the pre-individual singularity-events into distinct compossible worlds among which God then chooses. Deleuze writes:

The play of the world has several aspects: it emits singularities; it puts forward infinite series that go from one singularity to another; it invents rules of convergence and divergence according to which these series of possibles are organized in infinite totalities, each totality being compossible, but two totalities

⁶⁸ In ch. 2, section 2, above.

⁶⁹ *The Fold* 60, modified (80)

⁷⁰ *The Fold* 60 (80)

together being impossible with each other; it allots the singularities of each world in one way or another in the nucleus of monads or individuals that express this world. Thus God does not merely choose the best of all worlds – that is, the richest compossible totality in possible reality – but he also chooses the best allotment of singularities in possible individuals (other allotments of singularities and other demarcations of individuals could be conceived for the same world).⁷¹

The invention of “rules of convergence and divergence” is here attributed simply to “the play of the world,” [*le jeu du monde*]. This already seems rather un-Leibnizian. But it is the last statement of the quoted text that most clearly indicates that we have strayed rather far from a Leibnizian conception of ‘world.’ That statement suggests that, given the choice of the best possible world, it is not yet determined what individuals will exist. According to Deleuze there is another choice, that of the best “allotment of singularities in possible individuals.” At the very least, it is clear that Leibniz does not use the term ‘world’ in the way that Deleuze does, for when Leibniz discusses God’s choice of the best possible world, it is always taken to determine which individuals will exist, not to leave that open as a further matter for a second application of the principle of the best.

More generally, I do not think that this question of the “allotment of singularities in possible individuals” makes sense on Leibnizian terms. Deleuze does not offer any evidence that Leibniz had a conception of events as pre-existing individual substances, nor does he seem to me to offer a convincing case that Leibniz’s metaphysics implicitly relies on such an assumption. Events for Leibniz seem to me to be changes in the perceptions of substances, not an ontological category independent of substance. I do not think, then, that Leibniz had this conception of a pre-individual world of events from which individuals would be formed as its expressions and actualizations, nor that the

⁷¹ *The Fold* 66 (89)

conception of individual substances as points of view on a world has a place at the most fundamental level of Leibniz's metaphysics, the level at which it is a matter of the worlds among which God chooses. Those worlds, it seems to me, are *composed* of individuals, and in those with any significant degree of harmony, the individuals that compose them do appear as points of view on a shared included world, but as a direct consequence of their selection according to laws of harmony.

I think it is a great exaggeration on Deleuze's part to suggest that without the movement from world to individual, as if the world pre-existed the individual in some way ('virtually'), the themes of mirror and point of view would "lose all meaning." Rather, in the interpretation of Leibniz that seems more accurate to me, their status for an understanding of Leibniz's ontology of individual substance is simply not nearly so fundamental as Deleuze supposes.⁷² What I have argued above is that Leibnizian substances appear as mirrors or points of view only insofar as they are coordinated with other substances in a 'mirroring world,' a set of substances selected precisely in virtue of the fact that they can all be considered to express one and the same phenomenal world. That a substance is a mirror or a point of view, then, is not informative about the basic ontological structure of the substance, but about which substances are being combined in possible or actual existence. The theory of the individual as a point of view on a virtually pre-existing world of events seems to me to be Deleuze's own theory, not one to be found in Leibniz.

⁷² See *The Fold* 19ff. (27ff.)

Overall, Deleuze seems to me to be much farther from Leibniz on the points discussed here than his own presentation makes it appear. Very closely connected in Leibniz's metaphysics are the roles played by possibility and by God's understanding as the ground of possibilities. Deleuze quietly eliminates both of these elements, and the result, obviously, is a metaphysics that differs dramatically from Leibniz's own. But on top of this, Deleuze seems to me to reverse the order of ontological priority between individual and world. Whereas for Leibniz individuals are ontologically basic and worlds are essentially groups of individuals, Deleuze gives the world a 'virtual' priority over the individuals in which it is actual.

The aim of this chapter has been to differentiate between the interpretations of Spinoza and Leibniz proposed by Deleuze and the interpretations proposed above in the preceding chapters, and also to prepare the ground for the following chapter, in which I will offer an interpretation of Deleuze by way of parallels that can be established with Spinoza and Leibniz. As I noted at the outset, the few isolated points that I have touched on here do not amount to an evaluation of Deleuze's work on Spinoza or Leibniz. The critical points I have made, however, do serve to point out the difference between understanding Deleuze's interpretations of Spinoza and Leibniz, and trying to understand Deleuze by drawing connection to Spinoza and Leibniz. The latter is the task of the chapter to follow, while the former falls mainly outside the scope of this dissertation, with the exception of the few points made here.

Some key concepts that will be relevant in the next chapter have appeared in the course of this one, especially the pairs intensive-extensive and the virtual-actual. Here I have mainly argued that these concepts do not have the prominence in Spinoza or Leibniz that Deleuze assigns to them in his interpretations of these philosophers, and that their presence is rather indicative of Deleuze's attempt to find precursors of his own thought in the philosophers he reads. In what follows, I will be trying to understand these concepts through connections with Spinoza and Leibniz – not based on the idea that they were already present in Spinoza and Leibniz, but by working out parallels, sometimes in the form of contrasts, between the role they play in Deleuze's ontology and elements that play a similar role in Spinoza or Leibniz.

Chapter 4: Deleuze

In this chapter I will offer an interpretation of some basic elements of Deleuze's ontology as it is presented in *Difference and Repetition*, on the basis of a parallel with the ontologies of Spinoza and Leibniz discussed above in chapters 1 and 2. There are a couple of reasons for this way of approaching Deleuze. One reason is that there is little secondary literature, as far as I know, that tries to compare Deleuze to Spinoza and Leibniz directly, rather than to Deleuze's reading of Spinoza and Leibniz. I have tried to show in the last chapter that there is good reason to consider the two undertakings as significantly different. Another reason for this approach is that Deleuze is difficult to understand philosophically, partly because of the originality of his terminology and the obscurity of his writing style. Much of the existing secondary literature offers some degree of clarification of Deleuze's arguments in his own terms, but it does not tend to offer reference points within the philosophical tradition. My interpretation, I hope, will at least provide the service of situating Deleuze with reference to a couple of important positions in the history of philosophy. Of course, the account I offer of Deleuze will also be subject to the limitations resulting from this approach. The parallel with Spinoza and Leibniz highlights certain elements in Deleuze's thought and misses others.

There are a number of terminological difficulties involved in dealing with Deleuze, and I would like to mention two of them here, although hopefully further

clarification will come in the main discussion. The principal Deleuzian term that I will use for the equivalent of ‘essence’ in Spinoza and Leibniz is ‘virtual Idea.’ This is used by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* above all. Section 1 of this chapter will be devoted to an account of what Deleuze means by this term, so I won’t attempt to explain it in advance here. But it is important to note that many Deleuzian terms are occasionally used with an equivalent sense: event, structure, sense, problem, etc. My assumption in reading Deleuze is that there is a relatively consistent ontological theory underlying various writings that use different terminology to express it. Virtual Ideas are an element in that ontology, the element that corresponds best to essence in the philosophies of Spinoza and Leibniz.

A second difficult term in Deleuze, and one that is central to my project, is the term ‘individual.’ In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze uses it mainly in a sense that is specific to him, as corresponding to an ontologically basic individual understood as an intensity, what Deleuze at one point calls a “pure individual.”¹ This notion will be discussed in the course of section 2 of this chapter. Throughout my discussion above, however, I have referred to the ‘ontology of individuals’ in Spinoza and Leibniz; when I refer to Deleuze’s ontology of individuals, I will be referring not to his special sense of ‘individual,’ but to individuals in something closer to an everyday sense of the term, or

¹ DR 250 (322). For abbreviations used in citing texts by Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze, see the list at the end of the main text. References will be to the English translations of Deleuze’s works, with page numbers of the French editions following in parentheses.

what Deleuze calls “identifiable and recognisable individuals,”² but with the ontological complexity that Deleuze’s whole account gives them.

The three sections of this chapter, then, will correspond to the tripartite division of chapters 1 and 2. The first section concerns essence, or in this case Deleuze’s theory of virtual Ideas. There, I will show how Deleuze contrasts and compares his notion of the virtual with traditional notions of essence, and then I will discuss how his theory of virtual Ideas assigns an ontological significance to the notion of structure. The second section will concern Deleuze’s theory of actualization. The important role of intensity in Deleuze’s ontology will here be introduced, along with the other aspects of actualization. The third and final section will deal with actual individuals, asking, in parallel with my discussions of Spinoza and Leibniz, what role the virtual-intensive plays in the activity of the actual individual.

1. Virtual and Essence

The aim of this section is to offer an interpretation of Deleuze’s theory of virtual Ideas by drawing a parallel between this theory and the theories of individual essence in Spinoza and Leibniz that I have considered above. First, I will show that Deleuze himself considered his theory of virtual Ideas both in contrast to, and as a possible replacement for traditional theories of essence. Then, after briefly reviewing my conclusions from earlier chapters about the theory of essence in Spinoza and Leibniz, I

² DR 281 (360)

will consider how Deleuze compares with Spinoza and Leibniz with respect to the ground of essence and the resemblance or non-resemblance between an essence and the existing thing, its actualization. From there, I will draw a closer parallel between Deleuze and Spinoza on the nature of essence as structure, and contrast both of them with Leibniz on this point. Deleuze's structures, however, seem to incorporate a temporal dimension, a progressive differentiation that distances him from Spinoza and can even be seen to bring him closer to Leibniz to a certain extent. I will conclude with the question of what virtual Ideas or essences there are for Deleuze, a question which will remind us of the distance, despite the many similarities, that still separates him from either Spinoza or Leibniz.

A number of Deleuze's comments on his notion of the virtual serve to justify drawing a parallel between the virtual in Deleuze and essence in previous philosophers, and thus the parallel with Spinoza and Leibniz that I am drawing here. It is clear that Deleuze sees, first of all, a strong contrast between his conceptual pair virtual-actual and the traditional pair essence-existence. Often he tries to clarify what he means by virtual and actual by opposing them to the traditional concepts. For instance, he states:

I don't think virtuality can ever correspond to the actual in the way essence does to an existence. This would be to confuse the virtual with the possible. In any event, the virtual and actual correspond but do not resemble one another.³

Here, Deleuze's assumption is that essence is equivalent to possibility. We have already considered Deleuze's critique of possibility in the last chapter. Deleuze thinks that possibilities are copies of actual things that are assigned a false priority over the things

³ Gilles Deleuze, "The Method of Dramatization," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, Ed. David Lapoujade, Trans. Michael Toarmina, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004, 110 ("La méthode de dramatisation" in *L'île déserte et autres textes: Textes et entretiens 1953-1974*, Ed. David Lapoujade Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 2002, 154)

from which they are copied. An actual thing therefore resembles its possibility perfectly. We will see in the next section that the virtual is meant to serve as one pole of a process that goes from virtual to actual, rather than as a non-actual equivalent of an actual individual. One sense of the contrast between virtual and essence, then, is simply to make the point that virtual Ideas are not possibilities in the sense to which Deleuze objects.

In another passage contrasting virtual Ideas with essences, Deleuze writes:

Ideas are by no means essences. In so far as problems are the objects of Ideas, problems belong on the side of events, affections, or accidents, rather than of theorematic essences. Consequently, the domain of Ideas is that of the inessential.⁴

Here, instead of equating essence and possibility, Deleuze opposes essence to accident and places Ideas on the side of accidents rather than essences. The question of essence, he writes, is the question “What is X?”;⁵ the questions that concern Ideas, on the other hand, are “How much, how and in what cases?”⁶ The former type of question does not lead to anything on its own, Deleuze claims. With reference to Plato, he writes:

The question ‘What is X?’ animates only the so-called aporetic dialogues – in other words, those in which the very form of the question gives rise to contradiction and leads to nihilism, no doubt because they have only propaedeutic aims – the aim of opening up the region of the problem in general, leaving to other procedures the task of determining it as a problem or as an Idea.⁷

⁴ DR 187 (242-43)

⁵ In French, “*qu’est-ce que?*”

⁶ DR 188 (243)

⁷ DR 188 (243)

Deleuze contrasts virtual Idea and essence, then, insofar as the latter is conceived as an answer to the question ‘What is X?’, while the former is not. This is the second sense in which virtual Idea and essence are opposed for Deleuze.

The relationship between virtual Idea and essence is not simply one of opposition, however. Deleuze also sees virtual Ideas as a *replacement* for essences. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, however, one of the challenges in reading Deleuze is the variety of terms he uses to refer to the same elements of his system. ‘The virtual,’ ‘virtual Ideas,’ ‘structures,’ ‘multiplicities,’ ‘problems,’ ‘events,’ ‘singularities,’ ‘the transcendental field’ and ‘sense’ are all effectively equivalent terms when it comes to the discussion of what replaces essences in Deleuze’s thought, and these are just those terms that predominate in *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*. For instance Deleuze states, “To reverse Platonism is first and foremost to remove essences and to substitute events in their place, as jets of singularities,”⁸ thereby giving the equivalence of events and singularities, and offering both as replacements for essences. He also writes, “It is true that sense is the characteristic discovery of transcendental philosophy, and that it replaces the old metaphysical Essences,”⁹ and in this context transcendental philosophy includes Deleuze’s own philosophy. Manuel DeLanda, for his part, says this about the concept of multiplicity in Deleuze: “In the first place, one may ask what role the concept

⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, Ed. Constantin V. Boundas, Trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 53 (*Logique du sens*, Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1969, 69); henceforth LS. In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze states: “The task of modern philosophy has been defined: to overturn Platonism.” (DR 59 [82]) And in *The Logic of Sense*: “What does it mean “to reverse Platonism”? This is how Nietzsche defined the task of his philosophy or, more generally, the task of the philosophy of the future.” (LS 253 [292]).

⁹ LS 105 (128)

of a multiplicity is supposed to play and the answer would be a replacement for the much older philosophical concept of an *essence*.”¹⁰ These are not a whole series of different proposals for what should replace essences, but a variety of ways of stating the same proposal. As already noted, I shall prefer the term ‘virtual Idea,’ which is prominent in *Difference and Repetition*, to refer to the Deleuzian replacement for essences.

Instead of essences, then, we will have virtual Ideas. And, in a way, it is virtual Ideas that will account for what is truly ‘essential.’ Deleuze writes,

It will be said that the essence is by nature the most ‘important’ thing. This, however, is precisely what is at issue: whether the notions of importance and non-importance are not precisely notions which concern events or accidents, and are much more ‘important’ within accidents than the crude opposition between essence and accident itself.¹¹

What is important is what is determined by the virtual Idea. The Idea thus takes over from the essence its role as ‘most important.’ It is as reasonable, then, to view the theory of virtual Ideas as a proposal for a new sort of essence, as it is to view it in simple opposition to the notion of essence. And Deleuze even allows that the term ‘essence’ might be retained: “No doubt, if one insists, the word ‘essence’ might be preserved, but only on condition of saying that the essence is precisely the accident, the event, the sense”¹²

Let us look at a longer quote from *The Logic of Sense*, which ends with a line quoted above. Although I will not be discussing it in detail, it provides a sense of the role

¹⁰ Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, London: Continuum, 2002, 9

¹¹ DR 189 (245)

¹² DR 191 (248)

that Ideas (or events, as they are referred to here) play in replacing essences in Deleuze's thought:

Events are ideal. Novalis sometimes says that there are two courses of events, one of them ideal, the other real and imperfect—for example, ideal Protestantism and real Lutheranism. The distinction however is not between two sorts of events; rather, it is between the event, which is ideal by nature, and its spatio-temporal actualization [*effectuation*] in a state of affairs. The distinction is between *event* and *accident*. Events are ideational singularities which communicate in one and the same Event. They have therefore an eternal truth, and their time is never the present which actualizes [*effectue*] them and makes them exist. Rather, it is the unlimited Aion, the Infinitive in which they subsist and insist. Events are the only idealities. To reverse Platonism is first and foremost to remove essences and to substitute events in their place, as jets of singularities.¹³

While above we saw Deleuze placing virtual Ideas on the side of accident as opposed to essence, here Deleuze distinguishes Idea (or event) and accident. Accidents belong to the actual, while Ideas are in some sense eternal. The proximity between Deleuze's theory of virtual Ideas and some aspects of traditional theories of essence is here quite obvious. Below I will try to work out some of the details of this proximity, in relation to Spinoza and Leibniz in particular.

The two ways in which Deleuze relates his theory of the virtual to theories of essence, namely as standing in opposition to them or as a substitution for them, are nicely illustrated in the secondary literature by the approaches of Manuel DeLanda and Bruce Baugh, respectively. As I already noted in the introduction, DeLanda frames his account of Deleuze's theory of the virtual with the idea that "Deleuze is *not* a realist about

¹³ LS 53 (68-69). Translation slightly modified, with '*effectuation*' rendered as 'actualization' rather than 'realization', consistent with the rest of the English translation of *The Logic of Sense*. See, for example, LS 109 (133).

essences,”¹⁴ while Baugh asserts that “Deleuze is a realist about essences.”¹⁵ The issue is obviously terminological, since Baugh insists that Deleuze’s theory of essences does not have any of the features that DeLanda claims are characteristic of theories of essences. Since my purpose is a comparison of Deleuze’s theory of individuals with those of Spinoza and Leibniz, articulated around the essence-existence distinction, I will effectively follow Baugh in treating Deleuze’s theory as a proposal for a new sense of ‘essence.’ And in fact the theories of individual essence in Spinoza and Leibniz do not fit very well with the traditional theories of essence to which DeLanda opposes Deleuze either.

It will be helpful to review briefly the theories of essence in Spinoza and Leibniz outlined above.¹⁶ In Spinoza, we saw first of all that essences are contained in the attributes of God, on the basis of the laws involved in those attributes. The essence of an individual body, in the attribute of extension, is defined by a ratio or relation of motion and rest that characterizes that body. The essence defines roles for the various parts of the individual, although the parts themselves may be replaceable. As Matheron puts it, “Every physical individual is a system of movements and of rest that, abstracting from perturbations originating externally, functions in a closed cycle: a system, the functioning of which results in the reproduction of this same system.”¹⁷ The essence of the individual defines the functioning of the system, indicating what motions are to occur in all of the

¹⁴ DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* 3

¹⁵ Bruce Baugh, “Real Essences without Essentialism,” in *Deleuze and Philosophy*, Ed. Constantin V. Boundas, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, 32

¹⁶ See chapter 1, section 1, and chapter 2, section 1.

¹⁷ Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968, 43

parts of the individual in relation to any given motion of one or more of its parts. The ideal activity of such an individual, in isolation from all others, would be to carry out its motions perpetually. Contained in God's attributes, then, are essences of all individuals that fall under the laws of the attribute.

In Leibniz, by contrast, we saw that essences have their reality first of all in God's understanding. God conceives of all possible individuals and thus has in his understanding what Leibniz calls a 'complete concept' of every individual. These concepts grasp perfectly what Leibniz defines ontologically as a complete being: individuals that contain within themselves all of their determinations and depend on nothing else for any aspect of their identity. The determinations of these individuals are perceptions or perceptual states, and the essence of such an individual is defined by Leibniz as the law of the series of its states, a principle of activity according to which it produces all of its own states spontaneously.

So far, then, I have argued that there is an element in Deleuze's ontology that can be seen to correspond to the role played by essence in traditional ontologies, at least to the extent that an essence is what accounts for what is 'most important' about that of which it is the essence, even if it does not do this in the traditional way. Now I will turn to an account of Deleuze's theory of virtual Ideas, drawing parallels to Spinoza and Leibniz that will bring out some similarities and contrasts.

The first parallel I want to draw is between the ground of the reality of the virtual in Deleuze and the ground of the reality of essences in Spinoza and Leibniz. I noted in my discussion of Spinoza above that for him the role of ground of the reality of essences

is played by God's attributes, such that the essences of individual modes are said to be contained in the attributes.¹⁸ The laws of nature in the attribute, such as the laws of motion and rest in the attribute of extension, are what determine the essences to be contained in the attribute. Since the attributes are aspects of God himself, God is seen as producing these essences in himself. For Leibniz, on the other hand, essences are taken to be possibilities understood by God, rather than products of God.¹⁹ The ground of their reality is God's understanding, and his understanding of them is prior to his production of anything.

Let us first consider Deleuze in relation to Leibniz on this point. In the previous chapter, I briefly discussed Deleuze's critique of the notion of possibility and how this applies to Leibniz. Deleuze clearly rejects the equivalence of essence and possibility, and he considers that one of Spinoza's virtues is to have rejected the conception of God necessary to ground such a theory of essence – the conception of a God that is transcendent in relation to created things. Whatever grounds the reality of virtual Ideas in Deleuze, then, it does not seem that it can be anything like the ground of essences in Leibniz.

Spinoza's God, unlike Leibniz's, is presented primarily as an immanent principle of production for all things, including essences. At a very general level, this notion is more congenial to Deleuze, since he shares with Spinoza the positing of a productive principle at the heart of his ontology. As Peter Hallward succinctly puts it: "Deleuze

¹⁸ See chapter 1, section 1.

¹⁹ See chapter 2, section 1.

presumes that being is creativity.”²⁰ The primary name given to this creative principle in *Difference and Repetition* is ‘difference’. Just as Spinoza’s God produces both essences and existing things, in Deleuze difference as pure creativity produces both virtual Ideas and the actualizations of those Ideas. However, the link between Deleuze and Spinoza on this point is still quite weak. Although Spinoza’s God is something like a creative principle, it is one that creates in a manner organized by natural laws. We saw that if essences are contained in the attributes, for Spinoza, it is on the basis of the natural laws determined within those attributes, such as the laws of motion and rest for the attribute of extension. The principle of creative differentiation that grounds Deleuze’s philosophy, by contrast, is hardly a ground in the traditional sense.²¹ Spinoza’s attributes are meant to allow, in principle at least, *a priori* insight into the essences that they contain, much as Leibniz’s God has *a priori* insight into what is possible. Deleuze’s principle of difference dissociates the ‘ground’ from any such *a priori* comprehension. Deleuze’s own reproach to Spinoza, at the end of *Difference and Repetition*, is for Spinoza’s failure to “make substance turn around the modes.”²² For Deleuze, substance still has too much independence from its modes in Spinoza, it is still too much a traditional ground. To make substance turn around the modes, Deleuze replaces substance, or Spinoza’s God, with a principle of difference metaphorically understood as a “throw of the dice,” an

²⁰ Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, London: Verso, 2006, 1

²¹ Deleuze states that this ground amounts to a “universal *ungrounding*” (DR 202 [261]). And he writes: “The eternal return has no other sense but this: the absence of any assignable origin – in other words, the assignation of difference as the origin . . .” (DR 125 [164]).

²² DR 304 (388)

“ontologically unique throw” of the dice.²³ This supplies an immanent creative principle that has its reality entirely in its productions, and thus does not have the independence of Spinoza’s God or substance.

This positive conception of a purely creative ground, in any case, is what gives Deleuze’s virtual Ideas a certain independence from their actualizations, much as the grounding of essences in God, for Spinoza and Leibniz, gives these essences a certain independence from existing individuals. As I said, Deleuze is clearly opposed to any notion of this creative principle that would tie it to some transcendent entity like the God of Leibniz; but it is also not an absolute entity, like Spinoza’s God, with a nature of its own. Given these complications, I think Hallward overstates the case when he writes that “Deleuze is not an anti-foundational philosopher,”²⁴ and goes on to explain how the pure affirmation of creativity serves as the ‘foundation’ for Deleuze’s philosophy. This sort of foundation precisely has the feature that it does not provide a priori answers to a lot of questions. Does not Deleuze therefore end up looking a lot like an anti-foundational philosopher in many respects? Nonetheless, Hallward is right that there is some kind of principle serving as a foundation of sorts, and to this extent I think there is a degree of proximity between Deleuze and Spinoza on this issue of the ground or foundation of essences.

Virtual Ideas have their ‘ground’, then, in a creative principle of some kind. As a next step in determining how they relate to notions of essence in Spinoza and Leibniz, I will consider a point on which Deleuze insists, and which he presents as a contrast with

²³ DR 304 (388); cf. DR 197-200 (255-58)

²⁴ Hallward, *Out of This World* 134

theories of essence and existence. The point on which Deleuze insists is the *non-resemblance* between the virtual and the actual. We have already seen that Deleuze states:

I don't think virtuality can ever correspond to the actual in the way essence does to an existence. This would be to confuse the virtual with the possible. In any event, the virtual and actual correspond but do not resemble one another.²⁵

Deleuze also puts the point this way: "Every object is double without it being the case that the two halves resemble one another, one being a virtual image and the other an actual image. They are unequal odd halves."²⁶ Deleuze clearly thinks that in theories of essence and existence, the essence and existence resemble one another. What sort of 'resemblance' is meant?

Leibniz, it seems to me, may well be the best example of a philosopher for whom essence and existence resemble one another. First of all, in Leibniz the correspondence between essence and possibility, which Deleuze here supposes, does indeed hold. And in Leibniz it is plausible to see not only some degree of resemblance, but a perfect resemblance between essence and existence. The essence of an individual, in Leibniz, prefigures in God's understanding the entire course of the individual's existence in all its detail. Both the principle of activity that characterizes the individual and the series of states produced according to that principle of activity are grasped in the essence. Existence changes nothing in any of this. One way to understand Deleuze's refusal of a resemblance between the virtual and the actual, then, is as a refusal of a theory of essence such as that of Leibniz, in which the course of an individual's existence is already

²⁵ "The Method of Dramatization" 110 (154)

²⁶ DR 209-210 (270-71)

grasped in its essence. Whatever else Deleuze may adopt from Leibniz, this sets a significant distance between them as far as the ontology of individuals is concerned.

Is there in Spinoza a resemblance between the essence of an individual and its existence, similar to what one finds in Leibniz? If we think of Spinoza's ideal scenario, in which an individual is considered in isolation and would play out the series of its states purely on the basis of how it affects itself, it can seem that there is.²⁷ This picture of the individual seems very close to Leibniz, and it may seem that Spinoza at least incorporates the resemblance of essence and existence as an ideal, even if an unattainable one. In fact, however, I think that even in the ideal scenario, no resemblance comparable to that found in Leibniz is present. This is because the essence, for Spinoza, defines a structure of relations of parts, but not the actual parts that will come to play the roles defined by the structure. Since the actual states of the individual depend on these actual parts, the actual states of the individual are not determined by its essence, in contrast with Leibniz's theory. Spinoza's ideal scenario of an individual playing out the series of its states on the basis of its essence alone is based on the assumption that some actual parts have come to play the roles defined by the essence. To this extent, then, it seems to me that the resemblance between essence and existence, to which Deleuze opposes his theory of virtual Ideas, is not present in Spinoza.

However, there is another source of resemblance in Spinoza, one that is not present in Leibniz. This arises from the fact that Spinozan essences are defined within an attribute. Essences of extended things, bodies, are defined within the attribute of

²⁷ See chapter 1, section 3.

extension, and in terms of the sort of determinations proper to the attribute, in this case motion and rest. There is an aspect of Deleuze's theory of virtual Ideas that could make it seem as though something similar is the case for Deleuze. We will see that Deleuze equates his virtual Ideas with 'structures' in the sense in which these are posited by authors grouped under the term 'structuralism.' The structuralists investigated domains like language and society, and Deleuze does not hesitate to speak of "the linguistic multiplicity" or "the social multiplicity."²⁸ This could give the impression that Deleuze has an ontology of distinct domains like attributes, so that the virtual and the actual would at least, in each case, belong to the same domain. Although Deleuze's presentation does seem to point in this direction at times, I think this is ultimately misleading. Two aspects of his ontology work against this correspondence of domain across the virtual and the actual. The first is that the Ideas are all part of a single domain of pure difference, despite their being referred to different domains with respect to their actualizations. Thus Deleuze writes, "In a certain sense all Ideas coexist, but they do so at points, on the edges, and under glimmerings which never have the uniformity of a natural light."²⁹ And in the following passage Deleuze explains his position at greater length, but using the terminology of 'problems' (for virtual Ideas), 'dialectical' (for virtual) and 'solutions' (for actual things):

Problems are always dialectical: the dialectic has no other sense, nor do problems have any other sense. What is mathematical (or physical, biological, psychical or sociological) are the solutions. It is true, however, that on the one hand the nature of the solutions refers to different *orders* of problem within the dialectic itself; and on the other hand that problems – by virtue of their immanence, which is no

²⁸ DR 193 (250)

²⁹ DR 186-87 (241-42)

less essential than their transcendence – express themselves technically in the domain of solutions to which they give rise by virtue of their dialectical order. Just as the right angle and the circle are duplicated by ruler and compass, so each dialectical problem is duplicated by a symbolic field in which it is expressed. That is why it must be said that there are mathematical, physical, biological, psychical and sociological problems, even though every problem is dialectical by nature and there are no non-dialectical problems.³⁰

Even though structuralist investigations assign a structure to a given area of actuality, it is not in the nature of structures to be separated into areas or domains like this. From the side of the virtual, then, there is not separation into anything resembling Spinozan attributes. But neither is it the case that actualization proceeds according to domains, as if every actual individual belonged to some structural subdivision of reality. What ensures this is a second aspect of Deleuze's ontology, one that is not indebted to structuralism. This, as we will see in our discussion of actualization, is Deleuze's conception of the role of individuation in the actualization of virtual Ideas. To put it briefly, individuation proceeds independently of structural domains and may well cut across them. In Deleuze, then, there is nothing like the attribute to provide a context that both the virtual Idea and the actual individual would share. Virtual Ideas ultimately belong simply to pure difference or pure creativity, not to any attribute or subdivision of reality. This puts a significant distance between Deleuze and Spinoza.

There is an aspect of Deleuze's theory that goes even further than this to undermine any resemblance between virtual Ideas and their actualizations. In Spinoza, as in Leibniz, an essence in the sense we have been considering is the essence of an individual. Deleuze's virtual Ideas, by contrast, are pre-individual. They are for

³⁰ DR 179 (232)

actualization by individuals, but they do not stand in any one-to-one relationship with actually or potentially existing individuals. In Spinoza, one can talk about the essence of my body, and in designating the essence, one has designated also the individual body that actualizes that essence. In Leibniz, one can talk about the essence of the monad that is my mind, and in doing so one has already pinpointed the possible individual that may actualize that essence. In Deleuze, however, if one could talk about a given virtual Idea, one would not yet have identified any individual as the potentially actual counterpart to that Idea. The virtual and the actual do not have individuality in common. The virtual is pre-individual, and individuality arises with actualization.

So far I have discussed Deleuze's theory of virtual Ideas in very general terms. At this point, I would like to go into a bit more detail, while extending the comparison of Deleuze with Spinoza. We have seen that Leibnizian essences make a poor parallel to Deleuzian virtual Ideas because of Deleuze's insistence on the non-resemblance between the virtual and the actual. Spinozan essences make much better candidates for comparison because, as we saw, there is no resemblance between the essence and the existence of the individual, in the sense that the essence does not define or determine any actual state of the individual. For this reason, it is in developing further the parallel with Spinoza's theory of essence, as I have presented it in chapter 1, above, that I will attempt to give a positive characterization of Deleuze's theory of virtual Ideas.

As I have already noted in passing, one of the terms that Deleuze makes equivalent to 'virtual Idea' is 'structure.' The notion of structure provides a link to Spinoza, given the interpretation that I proposed above, which considers the essence of a

body to be a structure relating motions of parts. My comparison of Deleuze's theory of virtual Ideas with Spinoza's theory of individual essence will thus amount to an investigation of Deleuze's notion of structure. Deleuze states that "The Idea is . . . defined as a structure,"³¹ and he also writes, "The reality of the virtual consists of the differential elements and relations along with the singular points which correspond to them. The reality of the virtual is structure."³²

The equivalence of virtual Idea and structure for Deleuze suggests that we might learn something about virtual Ideas from his essay, "How Do We Recognize Structuralism?," and indeed it is in this essay that he lays out most clearly some of the basic features of what will be called virtual Ideas in *Difference and Repetition*. There is an important difference in the manner of presentation, however; in *Difference and Repetition* these structures are presented largely as elements in an ontology, while in the essay they are presented as tools for investigating different domains such as language, culture or economics. In the essay, Deleuze is pointing to the similarities between the work of a number of theorists.³³ What he presents is a discussion of the features of structures in general as they appear in the work of all these authors. He states the intention of the essay this way: "We thus propose only to discern certain formal criteria of recognition, the simplest ones, by invoking in each case the example of cited authors,

³¹ DR 183 (237)

³² DR 209 (269-70)

³³ He mentions Roman Jakobson, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, and the writers associated with the literary journal *Tel Quel*.

whatever the diversity of their works and projects.”³⁴ But the general theory of structures that Deleuze works out will be an element in Deleuze’s own ontology, no longer presented as an overview of the work of various authors, but as a dimension of reality that itself has the nature of structure: the virtual. Thus the features of structure, as they are presented in the essay, will be retained by Deleuze more or less intact, but the status of structure will change from that of a result arrived at by a certain theoretical approach in various domains, to an ontological element that is prior to and independent of the determinations specific to these domains.

The most important point about structure, for Deleuze, is that it is a domain of reality with its own distinct features that are determined internally. In the essay, the discovery of this domain is at first posited as the discovery of a “third regime” beyond those of “the real and the imaginary,” that of “the symbolic.”³⁵ As the essay progresses, however, Deleuze gradually introduces more of his own vocabulary, and refers to the domain of structure as “the virtual.”³⁶ The most important feature of virtual structures is that they define places in a ‘space’ that is their own:

It is not a matter of a location in a real spatial expanse, nor of sites in imaginary extensions, but rather of places and sites in a properly structural space, that is, a topological space. Space is what is structural, but an unextended, pre-extensive space, pure *spatium* constituted bit by bit as an order of proximity, in which the notion of proximity first of all has precisely an ordinal sense and not a signification in extension. . . . In short, places in a purely structural space are

³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” in *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, Ed. David Lapoujade, Trans. Michael Toarmina, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004, 171 (“À quoi reconnaît-on le structuralisme?” in *L’île déserte et autres textes: Textes et entretiens 1953-1974*, Ed. David Lapoujade Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 2002, 239)

³⁵ “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” 171 (240)

³⁶ “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” 178 (250)

primary in relation to the things and real beings which come to occupy them . . .
³⁷

We can see here a parallel with Spinoza's theory of the essences of individual modes of extension. Such an essence, we saw, defines roles for extended moving parts, although those parts are replaceable. A Spinozan essence is thus a kind of structure, one that defines movements in relation to one another, without defining them in relation to anything exterior. Deleuze's notion of structure is much more abstract, in that nothing can be said at first about what is related to what in the structure. He considers examples from the domains of language, sociology, economics, literature, and others as well. Despite the greater abstractness of Deleuze's theory, his structures have the similarity to Spinoza's that they define places or roles that will only be filled in the actualization of the structure. Deleuze says that the world of the virtual is a world of "roles without actors."³⁸ We can already see that actualization will be more complex for Deleuze than for Spinoza, because for Deleuze it is not yet determined what sort of thing will come to fill the roles defined by the structure, whereas for Spinoza this is determined by the attribute under which an essence falls; in extension, it is a matter of extended parts assuming the relation of motion and rest defined by the structure or essence.

Deleuze recognizes two basic aspects of structures or virtual Ideas: "Every structure presents the following two aspects: a system of differential relations according to which the symbolic elements determine themselves reciprocally, and a system of

³⁷ "How Do We Recognize Structuralism?" 174 (243)

³⁸ DR 219 (282)

singularities corresponding to these relations and tracing the space of the structure.”³⁹ The symbolic elements are undetermined in themselves, and receive their determination only from the relations into which they enter with one another. Deleuze refers to this as a process of reciprocal determination. Using dy and dx to stand for these symbolic elements, he writes,

Dy is totally undetermined in relation to y , and dx is totally undetermined in relation to x : each one has neither existence, nor value, nor signification. And yet the relation dy/dx is totally determined, the two elements determining each other reciprocally in the relation. This process of reciprocal determination is at the heart of a relationship that allows one to define the symbolic nature.⁴⁰

The differential relations are just these relations of reciprocal determination into which the undetermined differential elements enter. At this level of discussion, there is nothing more to say about what these elements and relations are. They gain specificity only relative to a particular domain of actualization. For instance, Deleuze mentions phonemes as an example of symbolic elements in the domain of language. “It is clear that the phoneme is embodied in letters, syllables and sounds, but that it is not reducible to them. . . . Phonemes do not exist independently of the relations into which they enter and through which they reciprocally determine each other.”⁴¹ We can compare this theory of structure with Spinoza’s notion of an individual essence, and see that what would correspond to the symbolic elements of Deleuze’s theory would be motions, and what would correspond to the differential relations would be relations of motion and rest.

³⁹ “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” 177 (247). What Deleuze here calls ‘symbolic elements’ are sometimes called ‘genetic elements’ or ‘differential elements’ or simply ‘elements.’

⁴⁰ “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” 176 (246). What Deleuze here calls “the symbolic nature” is equivalent to the virtual.

⁴¹ “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” 176 (246)

The motions that are related to one another in a Spinozan individual essence do seem to be reciprocally determined – the motion called for in each case is the motion required to maintain the structure, which must be determined in relation to the motions of the other parts of the structure.

Through the reciprocal determination of symbolic elements, a structure is formed, and at the same time, according to Deleuze, singular points in the structure are determined. Deleuze calls this determining of singular points a process of ‘complete determination’ – the structure is completely determined in its own right when its singular points are determined or distributed in its space. Deleuze writes,

Corresponding to the determination of differential relations are singularities, distributions of singular points which characterize curves or figures (a triangle for example has three singular points). In this way, the determination of phonemic relations proper to a given language ascribes singularities in proximity to which the vocalizations and significations of the language are constituted. *The reciprocal determination* of symbolic elements continues henceforth into *the complete determination* of singular points that constitute a space corresponding to these elements.⁴²

In a moment I will turn to the question of what is to be understood by singularities or singular points. First, I would like to address the sense in which Deleuze speaks of ‘complete’ determination. Comparison with Leibniz and Spinoza is helpful here. For Leibniz, the complete concept of an individual, as we saw, determines the entire series of its actual states. For Deleuze, at this point, no actual state of the individual has been determined, we are still limited to the virtual. The complete determination of a virtual Idea, then, does not at all imply the complete determination of an actual individual. In Spinoza, an individual essence corresponds to an actual individual, even though the

⁴² “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” 177 (247)

essence does not determine the states of the individual. But for Deleuze not even this is the case, as I have already pointed out. The complete determination of a structure or virtual Idea, then, is complete only in the virtual. Deleuze writes, “What is complete is only the ideal part of the object, which participates with other parts of the object in the Idea (other relations, other singular points), but never constitutes an integral whole as such. What the complete determination lacks is the whole set of relations belonging to actual existence.”⁴³

A Spinozan essence of an individual body is a structure within the attribute of extension, while a Deleuzian virtual Idea is a pure structure, without reference to any given domain or attribute. But there is another difference from Spinoza that has not come out yet in my discussion. Spinoza’s individual essences are eternal. God causes the essences of individual modes to be contained in his attributes simply by existing with the attributes he has, and since God’s existence is eternal, the essences are also eternal.⁴⁴ Deleuze describes his virtual Ideas as eternal as well,⁴⁵ yet Deleuze sees in his Ideas or structures something akin to a temporal progression. He makes this point in an obscure mathematical discussion focusing on the work of Evariste Galois. Deleuze writes, “Galois’s ‘progressive discernibility’ unites in the same continuous movement the processes of reciprocal determination and complete determination It constitutes the

⁴³ DR 209 (270)

⁴⁴ See chapter 1, section 1.

⁴⁵ We saw this earlier in this section, in a quote from *The Logic of Sense* in which Deleuze is using the term ‘event’ rather than ‘virtual Idea’: “Events are ideational singularities which communicate in one and the same Event. They have therefore an eternal truth” (LS 53 [68-69]).

total figure of sufficient reason, into which it introduces *time*.”⁴⁶ As far as I can tell, there is no hint of this in Spinoza. In fact, Deleuze could be said to be closer to Leibniz in this respect – Leibniz who allowed that in the concept of an individual there must be contained something of existence and time.⁴⁷ For Deleuze, however, there is something of time in the virtual, but nothing of existence, for there is nothing in the virtual resembling the actual states of an actual individual. For Deleuze, in any case, the processes of reciprocal determination and complete determination that he describes as constituting structures are joined in a process of progressive determination or progressive differentiation. This feature of virtual Ideas or structures will be important once we come to the discussion of actualization. For an understanding of what this progressive differentiation might amount to as far as the structure itself is concerned, I think Manuel DeLanda’s discussion of Deleuze in *Intensive Science* provides significant aid.

Manuel DeLanda, in *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, gives an account of how Deleuze’s theory of the virtual and the actual may be related to mathematical models used in accounting for physical and biological processes. His discussion goes from the mathematical concepts and the scientific investigations that motivate their use, to a more general interpretation that approximates Deleuze’s ontology. Although I cannot reproduce that discussion here, I will try to draw on a couple of key points, first to

⁴⁶ DR 180 (234)

⁴⁷ As we saw in chapter 2, section 1, Leibniz writes that “the concept of a species contains only eternal or necessary truths, whereas the concept of an individual contains, regarded as possible [*sub ratione possibilitatis*], what in fact exists or what is related to the existence of things and to time” (G II 39; Mason 41).

explicate the notion of singularities or singular points, and then to give an account of Deleuze's notion of the progressive differentiation of a virtual Idea.

A Deleuzian virtual Idea, like a Spinozan individual essence, provides the structure of a process or dynamical system, not of a static object. In Spinoza, it is a matter of a dynamical system of moving parts in extension, while in Deleuze the dynamical system could be in any domain of reality. In Spinoza, as we have seen, it is also a matter of defining an individual process or individual dynamical system, while a Deleuzian virtual Idea does not correspond to one actual individual. Manuel DeLanda clarifies the way Deleuze's virtual Ideas relate to the actual systems that actualize them by comparing the virtual Idea to a 'state space,' a multi-dimensional mapping of the possible states of a system. A singular point in the state space could be a point (representing a particular state of the system) on which the system tends to converge. The same virtual Idea, understood in this way, can correspond to different physical systems. DeLanda gives an example in the following quote:

Let me give a simple example of how singularities (as part of what defines a multiplicity) lead to an entirely different way of viewing the genesis of physical forms. There are a large number of different physical structures which form spontaneously as their components try to meet certain energetic requirements. These components may be constrained, for example, to seek a point of minimal free energy, like a soap bubble, which acquires its spherical form by minimizing surface tension, or a common salt crystal, which adopts the form of a cube by minimizing bonding energy. We can imagine the state space of the process which leads to these forms as structured by a single point attractor (representing a point of minimal energy). One way of describing the situation would be to say that *a topological form* (a singular point in a manifold) guides a process which results in many different physical forms, including spheres and cubes, each one with

different *geometric* properties. This is what Deleuze means when he says that singularities are like ‘implicit forms that are topological rather than geometric’.⁴⁸

The singular point, in this case, represents a state in which a system has minimized free energy. Two different actualizations are considered in the example: a soap bubble, which minimizes surface tension and thus acquires a spherical shape, and a salt crystal, which minimizes bonding energy and thus acquires the shape of a cube. Spherical or cubical shape are determinations belonging to the actual, they are not determined in the virtual Idea. But singular points in process – the point of minimal free energy, in this case – are determined in the Idea. Singularities, or singular points, then, are such critical points in a process, determined in the Idea independently of any particular actualization. DeLanda’s examples are rather simple ones, however. The following quote from Dan Smith goes farther towards capturing the difficulty of the notion of singular point and its many domains of application:

The point where someone breaks down in tears, for example, or boils over in anger is a singular point in someone’s psychic multiplicity, surrounded by a swarm of ordinary points. In physics, the point where water boils (or freezes) is a singularity within that physical system. The question: what is singular and what is ordinary? is one of the fundamental questions posed by Deleuze’s theory of multiplicities or Ideas. An acquaintance suddenly gets cross with me, and his unexpected anger may seem to mark a critical point, a phase transition, a singularity in his psychic being – but then someone leans over to me and whispers: ‘Don’t worry, he does that all the time, it’s completely ordinary.’ When water boils or freezes, it’s a phase transition, a singularity, but at the same time it is something that is completely ordinary.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* 15-16. DeLanda’s quote is from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 408 (*Mille plateaux*, Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1980, 508).

⁴⁹ Smith, “Deleuze, Kant, and the Theory of Immanent Ideas,” 51-52.

Part of what is said here concerns the difficulty of identifying singular points in the domain of the actual, and the way such identifications tend to be tied to a particular perspective. Whatever the difficulties, however, the notion of singular point implies that the structure of a process or dynamical system includes the determination of critical points where dramatic transitions can occur, whether the object under consideration be a physical system, someone's psyche, or anything else at all.

With this notion of a singular point in hand, we can turn to a consideration of progressive differentiation. DeLanda introduces another important notion to account for this, that of a symmetry-breaking transition. First of all, however, he gives an account of the relevant notion of *symmetry*:

[F]or the purpose of defining progressive differentiation we need to consider groups whose members are not objects but *transformations* (and the combination rule, a consecutive application of those transformations). For example, the set consisting of rotations by ninety degrees (that is, a set containing rotations by 0, 90, 180, 270 degrees) forms a group, since any two consecutive rotations produce a rotation also in the group, provided 360 degrees is taken as zero. The importance of groups of transformations is that they can be used to classify geometric figures by their *invariants*: if we performed one of this group's rotations on a cube, an observer who did not witness the transformation would not be able to notice that any change had actually occurred (that is, the visual appearance of the cube would remain invariant relative to this observer). On the other hand, the cube would not remain invariant under rotations by, say, 45 degrees, but a sphere would. Indeed, a sphere remains visually unchanged under rotations by *any amount* of degrees. Mathematically this is expressed by saying that the sphere has *more symmetry* than the cube relative to the rotation transformation. That is, degree of symmetry is measured by the number of transformations in a group that leave a property invariant, and relations between figures may be established if the group of one is included in (or is a subgroup of) the group of the other.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* 17-18

Symmetry is here defined relative to transformations, and the relevant question is whether the transformation has any effect at all. The less an object is affected by transformations, the more symmetrical it is said to be. For our purposes, this is basically a mathematical way of talking about how much structure, or how complex a structure, an object has. An object that has more symmetry has a less complex structure, while one that has less symmetry has a more complex structure. Degree of symmetry is effectively degree of complexity of structure, or, in Deleuzian language, degree of differentiation.

Based on this notion of symmetry, in any case, DeLanda is able to define a symmetry-breaking transition in the following passage:

When two or more entities are related as the cube and the sphere above, that is, when the group of transformations of one is a subgroup of the other, it becomes possible to envision *a process which converts one of the entities into the other* by losing or gaining symmetry. For example, a sphere can ‘become a cube’ by losing invariance to some transformations, or to use the technical term, by undergoing a *symmetry-breaking transition*.⁵¹

A symmetry-breaking transition is thus a transition to a higher complexity of structure, a step towards a more differentiated structure. Our concern, of course, is not with geometrical figures, but with Deleuze’s virtual Ideas. The virtual Idea involves a sort of time in that it involves a progressive differentiation, an order that goes from less differentiated, or less structured, to more differentiated, or more structured states.

All of this, as before, is within the virtual itself. The best analogy for this progressive differentiation, or rather the clearest instance of the actualization of such a progressive differentiation for Deleuze, is the differentiation of a fertilized egg. As DeLanda writes, “the progressive differentiation of the spherical egg is achieved through

⁵¹ DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* 18

a complex cascade of symmetry-breaking phase transitions.”⁵² The virtual Idea itself is conceived by Deleuze to include the structure of progressive differentiation enacted in the differentiation of the egg, to the extent that each phase of the egg’s development involves a more complex structure.

With the notion of progressive differentiation, then, Deleuze incorporates into his notion of structure the self-constitution of the structure, a series of increasingly differentiated structural phases. Certain differential elements come into relation first, others follow, until the structure with all its singular points is completely determined. The progression we are talking about is still entirely virtual, it does not involve any actual time and space. But this progressive aspect of the virtual Idea itself will be important for Deleuze’s discussion of actualization, which will involve the actualization of this progression, and not just of the fully differentiated virtual Idea.

There is nothing in Spinoza or Leibniz to correspond to this progressive differentiation of the virtual Idea. Spinoza’s individual essences do not seem to involve any progressive aspect at all. Leibniz states, as I mentioned, that the concept of an individual involves something of existence and time, but what he is referring to is the progression of actual states implied by the essence as law of the series of the individual’s states, not a progression that would go from less to more differentiated. Each state of a Leibnizian individual is infinitely complex, one does not seem to be any more

⁵² DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* 19. “Phase transitions are events that take place at critical values of some parameter (temperature, for example) switching a physical system from one state to another, like the critical points of temperature at which water changes from ice to liquid, or from liquid to steam.”

differentiated than another. This notion of progressive differentiation, then, is something that separates Deleuze from both Spinoza and Leibniz.

This concludes my account of Deleuze's theory of virtual Ideas. They are, I have said, structures that are internally defined, made of differential relations that bring about a reciprocal determination of the elements of the structure. These structures include a progressive dimension that goes from less to more differentiated, and that defines singular points in the structure which are to be understood as critical transitions in processes that might actualize the structure. It remains to be asked, then, what virtual Ideas there are. Unlike the theory of essences in Spinoza and Leibniz, it seems that in Deleuze there is nothing that allows for an a priori answer to this question. We have seen that virtual Ideas are referred back to a principle that Deleuze likens to a throw of the dice. If the attributes of God in Spinoza and God's understanding in Leibniz can each be considered as a kind of realm of essences, the realm of essences in Deleuze is the realm of pure difference. Essences are not defined in relation to natural laws, such as the laws of motion, as they are in Spinoza. (Deleuze will consider such laws to arise only at a later stage, as a result of the actualization of Ideas.) Neither are essences a set of logical possibilities, based on an ontological notion of individuality, as in Leibniz. (Deleuze considers logical possibility a retroactive projection, as far as ontology is concerned, as we saw in chapter 3.) The only thing to which Deleuzian essences, virtual Ideas, are subject, then, is a pure principle of creativity, or, in a sense, no principle at all. There is no 'order' to which virtual Ideas are subject. One could say that in Deleuze the realm of essences creates itself by chance.

Given the abstractness and ‘unprincipledness’ of Deleuze’s principle for the ontological production of virtual Ideas, it is clear that there could be little to say about them on that basis alone. Thus, even though the main thrust of Deleuze’s account in *Difference and Repetition* is the insistence that the actual must be understood as an actualization of the virtual, the virtual is always approached by way of the actual, as the virtual of some actual. What virtual Ideas there are, then, is worked out only in the investigation of some actual area or other. It is time to turn, then, to Deleuze’s account of the actualization of virtual Ideas.

2. Actualization and Existence

In the previous section, I have tried to show that what Deleuze puts in place of essences, as they appear in the ontologies of Spinoza and Leibniz, is a theory of virtual structures. Now it is time to examine what corresponds to existence in Deleuze’s theory. The passage from virtual to actual is an important element in Deleuze’s theory, and it plays a different role than coming into existence in Spinoza, or selection for existence in Leibniz. In both of those philosophers, the important point is to establish a separate principle for existence as opposed to essence. Deleuze, by contrast, is much more concerned to establish a continuity between the virtual and its actualization, and to oppose what he sees as a conception of existence as a “brute eruption.”⁵³ My first task,

⁵³ DR 211 (273)

then, will be to show how his account of actualization avoids such a conception and proposes to understand actualization as a process with the virtual at one pole and the actual at the other. What complicates this picture is a third theoretical element, the intensive. I will argue that the virtual and intensive are effectively identical on Deleuze's view as far as the initial pole of the process of actualization is concerned, and that they become distinguished only in relation to this process itself. I will then look ahead to the other pole of the process, actual individuals determined by extensive parts and qualities, before turning to an account of the process of actualization itself. This process will turn out to be double, involving a process relative to virtual Ideas, which Deleuze calls differentiation,⁵⁴ and a process relative to intensities, which Deleuze calls dramatisation, explication or individuation.

Deleuze is strongly opposed to essence-existence models in which existence seems to add nothing to what is already included in the essence of the thing. Alain Badiou describes his position well, which is based on the critique of possibility:

In referring a thing to its possibility, we simply separate its existence from its concept. Its concept possesses the totality of the thing's characteristics and, examining the concept, we can state that the thing is possible, which means that it can exist, it only lacks existence. But if existence is all that is lacking, if all the

⁵⁴ The word is spelled with a 'c' in order to retain a distinction that Deleuze draws using two French terms: *différentiation* and *différenciation*. Paul Patton makes the following comment in his "Translator's Preface" to *Difference and Repetition*: "Deleuze makes extensive use of the distinction in French between *différencier*, to make or become different, and *différentier*, which is restricted to the mathematical operation. Because of the extent and significance of his use of this distinction . . ., I have had to follow his terminology and introduce 'differentiate' as a term of art in English" (DR xi-xii). Deleuze himself uses the term 'differentiation' to refer, not to a mathematical operation, but to the determination of the virtual Idea itself. 'Differentiation', as we will see, refers to a process that is involved in the actualization of the Idea.

rest is determined as possible in the concept, then existence is “a brute eruption, a pure act or leap.” Such a conception is pure anathema for Deleuze.⁵⁵

Deleuze opposes his virtual Ideas to such concepts of possible things, and according to him it is “on the basis of [the virtual’s] reality that existence is produced, in accordance with a time and space immanent in the Idea.”⁵⁶ Coming into existence, then, is conceived as the actualization of a virtual Idea, a process that Deleuze also refers to as differentiation: “actualisation or differentiation is always a genuine creation,” he writes. “For a potential or virtual object, to be actualised is to create divergent lines which correspond to – without resembling – a virtual multiplicity.”⁵⁷

Deleuze’s theory of the actualization of virtual Ideas is meant to provide an alternative to theories in which existence is conceived as a brute eruption. Actualization is a process rather than a simple leap. In Spinoza and Leibniz, by contrast, the coming into existence of an essence does seem to be conceived as a kind of instantaneous occurrence, to the extent that it can be called an occurrence at all. This is most evident in Leibniz, where existence comes about as the result of a miraculous act of creation by God. There is nothing process-like about this at all, there is indeed a brute eruption of existence as the result of God’s choice to create. The situation in Spinoza is a bit different, because the existence of individual modes is considered to follow from interactions of already-existing individuals. There is a sort of process related to coming into existence, then, in that certain actions of existing individuals are responsible for

⁵⁵ Alain Badiou *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, Trans. Louise Burchill, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 48 (*Deleuze. La clameur de l’être*, Paris: Hachette, 1997, 72-73). Badiou quotes DR 211 (273).

⁵⁶ DR 211 (273)

⁵⁷ DR 212 (274)

bringing about the configuration of parts that makes for the existence of a new individual. This process, however, is not one that connects essence and existence, but one that connects different existing individuals. Spinoza does not say anything about that point in the process when a new individual arises, and thus a new essence has come into existence. This transition seems to be just as instantaneous in Spinoza as in Leibniz, even though it occurs as the result of a process that involves existing things, rather than through a direct act of God. Thus, in Spinoza, even though coming into existence is not a brute eruption with respect to other existing things, it is a brute eruption with respect to the essence that is actualized. Deleuze's theory of actualization is meant to eliminate this instantaneous jump from non-actual to actual essence. Coming into existence will be conceived as a process in the sense that there will be progressive phases of actualization of the virtual Idea, and these will take time to occur.

How can Deleuze conceive of actualization as a process? This is possible largely on the basis of a significant difference between his conception of virtual Ideas, and the conception of essences in Spinoza and Leibniz. This difference is that virtual Ideas themselves, as we have already seen in the previous section, involve a structure of progressive differentiation, a series of phases that go from less to more differentiated. There is no parallel to this in the conception of essence in Spinoza or Leibniz. Although Deleuze conceives of Ideas as in some sense eternal, they involve a sort of time that is proper to them.⁵⁸ Essences in Spinoza and Leibniz are more straightforwardly eternal.

⁵⁸ Deleuze refers to "a purely logical time" (DR 205 [265]), "a purely logical, ideal or dialectical time" (DR 211 [272]), and says that "the times of differentiation incarnate the time of the structure, the time of progressive determination" (DR 217 [280]).

There are no phases of the essence, there are just states of the individual. If the concept of a Leibnizian individual involves time, this is because the series of the individual's states somehow follow from the essence, not because the essence itself (the law of the series that explains that series of states) involves any sort of progression. The same essence has existence, whatever state the existing individual might be in. For Deleuze, actualization involves going through the phases of the Idea, from least differentiated to most differentiated, so that the actual individual arises gradually, and is only fully determined at the end of the process. For Deleuze, we can say that a child is less actualized than an adult. For Spinoza, the relation between child and adult actually seems to create problems of determining whether we are dealing with the same individual or not,⁵⁹ since he has no way of dealing with partial actualization. Leibniz avoids such problems only by positing an individual essence so complex that it is difficult to conceive of at all.⁶⁰

I have said that Deleuze's theory of the actualization of Ideas is meant to avoid a notion of brute eruption into existence, and that it accomplishes this by having the Idea itself involve phases of progressive differentiation. However, it might be argued that this simply pushes the problem of brute eruption back to the initial, least differentiated phase. How does the initial phase of the Idea come to be instantiated? Deleuze's solution to this problem is to view the very reality of virtual Ideas as situated at one pole of the process of actualization. In Spinoza and Leibniz, there are distinct principles for the reality of essences and the reality of existing things. In Spinoza, essences depend on the attributes

⁵⁹ See *Ethics* 4p39s.

⁶⁰ See chapter 2, section 3.

in which they are contained, while existing things form their own causal series and depend on one another. In Leibniz, essences depend on what God conceives, while existing things depend on what God chooses to create. Even though in both cases the two principles are referred back to God as their ultimate source, this does not attenuate the distinction in the principle governing each domain. In Deleuze, by contrast, the principle that gives reality to the virtual, pure difference, is the same one that drives the process of actualization; in its role in driving the process of actualization, however, Deleuze calls it ‘intensity.’

The intensive, I will argue, is not a separate domain from the virtual, but rather is indiscernible from it, except with respect to the two roles that the virtual and intensity play with respect to actualization. This is not stated by Deleuze in so many words. He speaks of the relation between intensity and virtual Ideas in this way:

A whole flow of exchange occurs between intensity and Ideas, as though between two corresponding figures of difference. Ideas are problematic or ‘perplexed’ virtual multiplicities, made up of relations between differential elements. Intensities are implicated multiplicities, ‘implexes’, made up of relations between asymmetrical elements which direct the course of the actualisation of Ideas⁶¹

The two corresponding figures of difference, it seems to me, are indiscernible when they are considered in themselves and not in relation to actualization. This is apparent in a number of ways from Deleuze’s discussion of them. Both the virtual and the intensive are referred to as a ‘*spatium*’; both the virtual and the intensive are referred to as the domain in which eternal return holds; and both are ascribed some sort of eternity by Deleuze.

⁶¹ DR 244 (315)

We have already seen the following quote from Deleuze's essay on structuralism, in which the space proper to a virtual Idea or structure is referred to as a "pure spatium":

It is not a matter of a location in a real spatial expanse, nor of sites in imaginary extensions, but rather of places and sites in a properly structural space, that is, a topological space. Space is what is structural, but an unextended, pre-extensive space, pure *spatium* constituted bit by bit as an order of proximity, in which the notion of proximity first of all has precisely an ordinal sense and not a signification in extension.⁶²

In *Difference and Repetition*, when he comes to the discussion of intensity, Deleuze writes that "The original depth . . . is indeed space as a whole, but space as an intensive quantity: the pure *spatium*."⁶³ These two references, it seems to me, are not indicative of a change in terminology, but rather of the effective identity of the realms of the virtual and the intensive, considered in themselves.

In a similar manner, Deleuze refers the eternal return to both the realm of the virtual and the world of intensity. With respect the virtual, he writes, "Of what is repetition said in the eternal return if not the will to power, the world of the will to power with its imperatives, its throws of the dice and its problems resulting from such throws?"⁶⁴ The 'problems' referred to here are the virtual Ideas.⁶⁵ In the discussion of intensity, Deleuze writes the following:

When we say that the eternal return is not the return of the Same, or of the Similar or the Equal, we mean that it does not presuppose any identity. On the contrary, it is said of a world *without identity*, without resemblance or equality. It is said of a world the very ground of which is difference, in which everything rests upon

⁶² "How Do We Recognize Structuralism?" 174 (243)

⁶³ DR 230 (296)

⁶⁴ DR 201 (260)

⁶⁵ The equivalence is given, for instance, with the reference to "problem or Idea" (DR 197 [255]).

disparities, upon differences of differences which reverberate to infinity (the world of intensity).⁶⁶

My concern is not with Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal return, but only with the link that is established between the virtual and the intensive. Both, it seems, are the world of the eternal return, the world of pure difference, which Deleuze takes as the fundamental principle of his ontology.

As a third point in favour of viewing the world of the virtual and the world of intensity as equivalent in themselves, there is the eternity that Deleuze seems to ascribe to each. With respect to the virtual, using the term 'event' to refer to virtual Ideas, Deleuze writes, "Events are ideational singularities which communicate in one and the same Event. They have therefore an eternal truth"⁶⁷ And with respect to intensity, he writes that qualities and extensities, "once reduced to their seminal reasons, . . . will remain for ever affixed in the intensive space of positive differences."⁶⁸ My contention is that Deleuze is not talking about two different eternal spheres, but that the virtual and the intensive are in certain respects one and the same. Their distinction is with respect to actualization, while in themselves they are each equivalent to the world of pure difference itself that is the basis of Deleuze's ontology.⁶⁹

It seems to me that Deleuze's account of actualization seeks to avoid a brute eruption of the virtual Idea into existence by starting from an indistinguishably dual

⁶⁶ DR 241 (311)

⁶⁷ LS 53 (68-69)

⁶⁸ DR 244 (314)

⁶⁹ Another indication of the indiscernibility of virtual Ideas and intensity is given when Deleuze, in discussing the dynamism he associates with intensity, states that dynamism "is internal to Ideas" (DR 218 [281]).

principle, the virtual-intensive. The virtual Idea and intensity are two figures of pure difference in itself. I noted in the last section that the principle of virtual Ideas for Deleuze is what he calls the ‘throw of the dice,’ a self-differentiation of difference. Actualization has no further principle, it is just the continuation of the tendency of difference to distinguish itself. The first step of actualization, then, is the self-differentiation of difference into these two figures. We have already considered virtual Ideas, which present difference as structure. Intensity, in turn, presents difference as force or energy; Deleuze refers to “energy in general or intensive quantity.”⁷⁰ Difference, then, is both what is actualized and what drives actualization.

Before going on to discuss the process of actualization in more detail, it is worth looking at what an actual individual will be for Deleuze, in comparison with Spinoza and Leibniz. Because of Deleuze’s insistence on the non-resemblance of virtual and actual, it is not so clear from the theory of virtual Ideas just what an existing individual would be. In Spinoza, essences of individuals are contained in the attributes, and since the attributes we know are thought and extension, the individuals we are concerned with will either be bodies or minds. In Leibniz, the individuals at the basis of his ontology are mind-like monads, unextended individuals whose states are perceptual states. Unlike Spinoza and Leibniz, Deleuze’s theory of virtual Ideas does not say anything about what sort of individual will actualize a given Idea. An actual individual might be a body or a mind, but it might also be a work of art or a scientific theory. We have seen how Deleuze’s virtual Ideas are similar to Spinoza’s essences, in that both define roles for components

⁷⁰ DR 240 (310)

rather than the actual states of individuals. In the essence of a Spinozan body, the roles are filled by actual movements. In a Deleuzian Idea, the roles are filled by intensities, but these intensities can be of many different kinds. They can be colours in a painting, words in a poem, temperatures in a liquid, emotions in a psyche. Deleuze writes,

The intensive character of the systems considered should not prejudice their being characterized as mechanical, physical, biological, psychic, social, aesthetic or philosophical, etc. Each type of system undoubtedly has its own particular conditions, but these conform to the preceding characteristics even while they give them a structure appropriate in each case: for example, words are genuine intensities within certain aesthetic systems; concepts are also intensities from the point of view of philosophical systems.⁷¹

Deleuze's theory does not set up an ontological hierarchy among these different domains of actual individuals. There is no basic type of actual individual, of which the others would be derivative modifications.

What Deleuze does have to say, in general terms, about actual individuals, is that they are determined by extensities and qualities, which arise only at the level of the actual and are not features of the virtual or the purely intensive. Thus a salt crystal has one shape and a soap bubble has another; a human body has parts of a certain length and thickness, bones of a certain density, skin of a certain colour; a painting has patches of colour of precisely this or that shade and measuring exactly these or those dimensions. Also relevant is that actual individuals take certain amounts of time to perform certain actions, and move at certain speeds and according to certain rhythms. All of these things are determined in actualization and are features of actual individuals.

⁷¹ DR 117-18 (155)

The question of actualization, then, is how we get from virtual Ideas and intensities in a world of pure difference to an actual individual with determinate spatial, temporal and qualitative features. Actualization, as Deleuze conceives it, divides into two processes: a process relative to virtual Ideas, which Deleuze calls differentiation, and a process relative to intensities, which is given three main names, which are dramatisation, individuation and, in the following quote, explication. Deleuze writes, “We speak of differentiation in relation to the Idea which is actualised. We speak of explication in relation to the intensity which ‘develops’ and which, precisely, determines the movement of actualisation.”⁷² The Idea is what is actualized, while intensity “is the determinant in the process of actualisation.”⁷³ Difference, again, as the basic principle to which both the virtual Idea and intensity correspond, is both what is actualized and what determines the process of actualization. It is now time to consider each of these aspects of the process of actualization in turn.

The first aspect of the process of actualization that we must consider is what Deleuze calls ‘differentiation.’⁷⁴ A long passage in the essay “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” is one of Deleuze’s clearest expositions of what he means by differentiation.

What is it that coexists in the structure? All the elements, the relations and relational values, all the singularities proper to the domain considered. Such a coexistence does not imply any confusion, nor any indetermination for the relationships and differential elements coexist in a completely and perfectly determined whole. Except that this whole is not actualized as such. What is actualized, here and now, are particular relations, relational values, and

⁷² DR 245-46 (316)

⁷³ DR 245 (316)

⁷⁴ See note 2, above.

distributions of singularities; others are actualized elsewhere or at other times. There is no total language [*langue*], embodying all the possible phonemes and phonemic relations. But the virtual totality of the language system [*langage*] is actualized following exclusive rules in diverse, specific languages, of which each embodies certain relationships, relational values, and singularities. There is no total society, but each social form embodies certain elements, relationships, and production values (for example “capitalism”).⁷⁵

The first thing to note is that Deleuze speaks of ‘domains’ of structure. Language and society are the two examples he gives here. In *Difference and Repetition* he gives a longer list, writing: “we can distinguish *ordinal varieties* [of Ideas] according to the nature of the elements and the differential relations: for example, mathematical, mathematico-physical, chemical, biological, psychical, sociological, and linguistic Ideas...”⁷⁶ In the virtual, everything in a given domain coexists without any strong distinction, and in fact Deleuze holds that all Ideas coexist in this way.⁷⁷ We can take the first step of differentiation to be the separating out of a domain, such as language or society, from the virtual as a whole. Still, as Deleuze says, what coexists in the virtual Idea or structure of this domain is far more than what is actualized in any given case. Differentiation, then, implies a selection within the domain as well. Deleuze says that only certain relations, relational values, and distributions of singularities are actualized at a given time. In *Difference and Repetition* he gives a mathematical example that is helpful for understanding this, namely, the equation for conic sections. In the domain of mathematics, the particular relation that is actualized might be the equation for conic sections, the particular value of that relation might give an ellipse, a parabola or a

⁷⁵ “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” 179 (250-51)

⁷⁶ DR 187 (242)

⁷⁷ DR 186-87 (241-42)

hyperbola, and each of these is defined by different singular points, such as their focal points. An ellipse, here used as an example of an actual thing, can thus be understood as the result of a differentiation of the virtual totality of mathematical relations. In the continuation of the quote from “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?”, Deleuze makes a distinction between structure and sub-structure:

We must therefore distinguish between the total structure of a domain as an ensemble of virtual coexistence, and the sub-structures that correspond to diverse actualizations in the domain. Of the structure as virtuality, we must say that it is still undifferentiated, even though it is totally and completely differentiated. Of structures which are embodied in a particular actual form (present or past), we must say that they are differentiated, and that for them to be actualized is precisely to be differentiated.⁷⁸

Deleuze distinguishes here between virtual structure and embodied, differentiated structure. An ellipse embodies a certain structure – a particular relation and certain singular points. A given language embodies a certain structure – relations between phonemes and the singular points around which meanings are determined. Differentiation is thus described as proceeding from a virtual totality of structure in some domain to a differentiated sub-structure in that domain. Differentiation refers to a selection of structural elements, elements which can virtually coexist, but which cannot all be actualized together. The virtual domain of language is thus a sphere where all phonemic relations coexist; the virtual domain of society is a domain where all social relations coexist. Deleuze uses the term ‘Idea’ with a certain ambiguity between the structure of a domain as a whole, and the substructure embodied in a certain actualization.

⁷⁸ “How Do We Recognize Structuralism?” 179 (251), translation modified.

Deleuze conceives of differentiation as a double process. He refers to the two halves of the process in a couple of different ways: as distribution and qualification,⁷⁹ as resulting in extensities and qualities; or as resulting in species and parts, when the context is biological, as it often is in *Difference and Repetition*. “[D]ifferentiation differentiates itself into these two correlative paths, species and parts, determination of species and determination of parts.”⁸⁰ The two halves of the process refer to the two main components of virtual Ideas or structures, the differential relations on the one hand, and the singular points that correspond to these relations on the other. Deleuze writes,

Ideas contain all the varieties of differential relations and all the distributions of singular points coexisting in diverse orders ‘perpllicated’ in one another. When the virtual content of an Idea is actualised, the varieties of relation are incarnated in distinct species while the singular points which correspond to the values of one variety are incarnated in the distinct parts characteristic of this or that species.⁸¹

Some comparison with Spinoza might be helpful in understanding the correspondence between varieties of relation and the distinct species in which they are incarnated. We have already seen how Spinoza defines individual bodies by the relation of motion and rest that characterizes them. Such a ‘relation’ would actually have to be an extremely complex set of interconnected relations to capture all the related motions that are coordinated in the functioning of an individual as complex as the human body, for example. While Deleuze would not limit the definition of an organism to determinations of motion and rest, the comparison with Spinoza gives an indication of the complexity of what is meant by ‘relation’ here. Different species, then, would be actualizations of

⁷⁹ DR 255 (328)

⁸⁰ DR 217 (281)

⁸¹ DR 206 (266)

different complex relations, presumably involving physical, chemical, and specifically biological elements.

The process of differentiation as Deleuze presents it can seem to bear a resemblance to the traditional notion of a division into genus and species. Deleuze is aware of this, and argues against this resemblance with reference to what he sees as the virtue of the process of division in Platonism:

Aristotle indeed saw what is irreplaceable in Platonism, even though he made it precisely the basis of a criticism of Plato: the dialectic of difference has its own method – division – but this operates without mediation, without middle term or reason; it acts in the immediate and is inspired by Ideas rather than by the requirements of a concept in general. It is true that division is a capricious, incoherent procedure which jumps from one singularity to another, by contrast with the supposed identity of a concept. Is this not its strength from the point of view of the Idea?⁸²

Differentiation is not a matter of a logical division of a genus, such as language, into its possible species, but of how actual languages take from the structural space of language certain relations and not others, certain elements and not others. It is important to note that actualization and differentiation are identical; that is, there is not a differentiation first, and actualization on this basis. This, it seems to me, would be to restore the idea of domain of possibilities. Each differentiated sub-structure would correspond to a possible actualization. Deleuze's view, I think, is that there are precisely those sub-structures that are in fact actualized, and in addition to these there is the virtual totality. The virtual totality of language is differentiated through the historical development of actual languages; the virtual totality of society is differentiated through the historical formation

⁸² DR 59 (83)

of actual societies. Thus Deleuze argues that differentiation as he understands it is not a matter of going from the general to the specific:

Rather than going from more to less general, determination progresses from virtual to actual in accordance with the primary factors of actualisation. The notion of ‘generality’ here suffers the disadvantage of suggesting a confusion between the virtual, in so far as it is actualised by a process of creation, and the possible, in so far as it is realised by limitation.⁸³

Differentiation is conceived as creation, not limitation. Even though differentiation requires a selection from among the relations and singularities of the virtual domain, this selection occurs not through a logical division of the domain, but through the creation of an actual entity to incarnate those relations and singularities. This can be contrasted with Leibniz’s account of God’s selection of individuals for existence. Leibniz’s God chooses from among all possible individuals that set that will make up the best possible world. The set of existing individuals can be understood as a limitation of the set of all possible individuals. Deleuze’s virtual, however, is not a set of possible individuals, in fact it does not prefigure actual things at all, but is a pure domain of relations and singular points. Unlike in Leibniz, then, where creation follows selection, in Deleuze selection and creation are indistinguishable.

We have considered differentiation, the first aspect of the actualization of virtual Ideas, a process that goes, as we have seen, from differential relations and singularities in the virtual Idea to differentiated species and parts, or qualities and extensities, in actual things. But how does differentiation occur? We have seen that it is not meant by Deleuze to be an operation in thought alone. In *Difference and Repetition* he asks, “How

⁸³ DR 215 (278)

does actualisation occur in things themselves?”⁸⁴ It depends, Deleuze argues, on another process, the process proper to intensities, and to which he gives three different names: dramatisation, explication, and individuation. Individuation is perhaps the most important of these names; Deleuze writes, “The essential process of intensive quantities is individuation.”⁸⁵ Intensity, we saw, is the other of the two fundamental “figures of difference” (the first being Ideas themselves) in Deleuze’s philosophy.⁸⁶ In actualization, Ideas and intensity are distinguished, with differentiation referred to Ideas, as we have seen, and dramatisation/explication/individuation referred to intensity.

As far as I can tell, dramatisation, explication and individuation are all the same process looked at in different ways. Their equivalence can be seen from the fact that they are all assigned the role of ‘agent’ of differentiation or actualization. In one passage, for instance, Deleuze assigns that role to spatio-temporal dynamisms, or the process of dramatisation: “Beneath the actual qualities and extensities, species and parts, there are spatio-temporal dynamisms. These are the actualising, differentiating agencies.”⁸⁷ In another, he assigns it to explication: “We speak of explication in relation to the intensity which ‘develops’ and which, precisely, determines the movement of actualisation.”⁸⁸ And in another, finally, he assigns it to individuation: “Individuation does not presuppose any differentiation; it gives rise to it.”⁸⁹ Dramatisation, explication and individuation are all ways of talking about the process proper to intensities. This is the process that we

⁸⁴ DR 214 (276)

⁸⁵ DR 246 (317)

⁸⁶ DR 244 (315), quoted above.

⁸⁷ DR 214 (276)

⁸⁸ DR 245-46 (316)

⁸⁹ DR 247 (318)

must now consider to complete our account of actualization, taking each of its three guises in turn.

When Deleuze talks about the process of intensities in terms of dramatisation and spatio-temporal dynamisms, his main concern is to emphasize that virtual Ideas are actualized by processes that progressively form a space and a time proper to the individual to be actualized. He writes,

It is the dynamic processes which determine the actualisation of Ideas. But what is their relation to this actualisation? They are precisely *dramas*, they dramatise the Idea. On the one hand, they create or trace a space corresponding to the differential relations and to the singularities to be actualised. . . . On the other hand, the dynamisms are no less temporal than spatial. They constitute a time of actualisation or differentiation no less than they outline spaces of actualisation.⁹⁰

Dramatisation, then, concerns the spatial and temporal processes through which a virtual Idea is actualized. These could be processes of any sort, depending on the domain in which the actualization occurs, although in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze's main reference points, as far as actualization is concerned, are biological. He illustrates what he means by dramatisation in the following way:

Embryology shows that the division of an egg into parts is secondary in relation to more significant morphogenetic movements: the augmentation of free surfaces, stretching of cellular layers, invagination by folding, regional displacement of groups. A whole kinematics of the egg appears, which implies a dynamic. Moreover, this dynamic expresses something ideal. . . . Types of egg are therefore distinguished by the orientations, the axes of development, the differential speeds and rhythms which are the primary factors in the actualisation of a structure and create a space and a time peculiar to that which is actualised.⁹¹

Actualization, then, far from being a simple transition from virtual to actual, involves a whole complex series of processes that bring into existence the qualities and parts

⁹⁰ DR 216-17 (279-80)

⁹¹ DR 214 (276-77)

characteristic of actual individuals. The structure of a virtual Idea, the differential relations and singular points, here acquire a spatio-temporal expression that is creative in relation to the virtual Idea. Deleuze writes, “Dynamism thus comprises its own power of determining space and time, since it immediately incarnates the differential relations, the singularities and progressivities immanent in the Idea.”⁹²

How is dramatisation related to intensity? Deleuze’s main discussion of dramatisation occurs at the end of the fourth chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, as a lead in to the discussion of intensity in the following chapter. Deleuze asks, “Where, however, does this power of dramatisation come from?”⁹³ The answer is given in the fifth chapter. He writes,

Intensity is the determinant in the process of actualisation. It is intensity which *dramatises*. It is intensity which is immediately expressed in the basic spatio-temporal dynamisms and determines an ‘indistinct’ differential relation in the Idea to incarnate itself in a distinct quality and a distinguished extensity.⁹⁴

Dramatisation, the enacting of a virtual Idea in some initial spatial and temporal processes, is here assigned to intensity. This, then, is the first aspect of the role of intensity in actualization: it progressively traces out a space and time of actualization. Now we must consider the other two ways in which Deleuze characterizes the process of intensities: as explication and as individuation.

Deleuze refers to the process of intensities as explication mainly in order to give an account of what he considers to be a certain illusion related to how intensity is understood to operate in physical systems. There is a “transcendental physical

⁹² DR 218 (282)

⁹³ DR 221 (285)

⁹⁴ DR 245 (316)

illusion,”⁹⁵ he thinks, in that the intensities that drive physical systems seem to be cancelled out in the operation of the system. “Intensity is difference, but this difference tends to deny or to cancel itself out in extensity and underneath quality.”⁹⁶ As a simple physical example, we could imagine a situation in which the air in a room is hotter on one side than the other. The difference in temperature will bring about a series of changes whereby the very difference in temperature that brought about the changes is cancelled out, and the room reaches a uniform temperature. While Deleuze does not object to this picture on the level of physics, or actual systems, he brings up the physical view of intensity mainly to argue that it is not the whole story. Intensity is explicated, it is cancelled, but at the same time, Deleuze claims, it remains in itself. Deleuze writes, “Difference in the form of intensity remains implicated in itself, while it is cancelled by being explicated in extensity. . . . [D]ifference has never ceased to be in itself, to be implicated in itself even while it is explicated outside itself.”⁹⁷ And also:

Difference is explicated, but in systems in which it tends to be cancelled; this means only that difference is essentially implicated, that its being is implication. For difference, to be explicated is to be cancelled or to dispel the inequality which constitutes it. . . . We cannot conclude from this that difference is cancelled out, or at least that it is cancelled in itself. It is cancelled in so far as it is drawn outside itself, *in* extensity and *in* the quality which fills that extensity.⁹⁸

Deleuze brings up the process of explication, then, to account for a mistaken view of intensity, to denounce an illusion, rather than to introduce an additional aspect of his own theory. Intensity as remaining implicated in itself, on the other hand, is the starting point

⁹⁵ DR 228 (294)

⁹⁶ DR 223 (288)

⁹⁷ DR 228 (294)

⁹⁸ DR 228 (293-94)

for the third way of looking at the process of intensities, individuation. This is what we must consider now.

The process that Deleuze calls individuation is a recapitulation of the whole process of actualization, now seen from the point of view of intensity. Actualization can be thought of as the formation or creation of an actual individual from the starting point of the virtual-intensive. For Deleuze, however, this process is individual from start to finish; it goes from intensive individuals to actual individuals.

What are intensive individuals? With his account of individuation, Deleuze develops his own theory of ‘monads,’ rather different from that of Leibniz. Deleuze’s ‘monads’ are the implicated intensities that remain in themselves even as they are cancelled in the systems in which they are explicated. Here is the parallel that Deleuze draws between his account of intensity and Leibniz’s ontology of monads. He writes,

Intensity or difference in itself thus expresses differential relations and their corresponding distinctive points. It introduces into these relations, and between Ideas, a new type of distinction. Henceforward, the Ideas, relations, variations in those relations and distinctive points are in a sense separated: instead of coexisting, they enter states of simultaneity or succession. Nevertheless, all the intensities are implicated in one another, each in turn both enveloped and enveloping, such that each continues to express the changing totality of Ideas, the variable ensemble of differential relations. However, each intensity *clearly* expresses only certain relations or certain degrees of variation. Those that it expresses clearly are precisely those on which it is focused when it has the *enveloping* role. In its role as the *enveloped*, it still expresses all relations and all degrees, but *confusedly*.⁹⁹

In this account, each intensity is like a monad, and the totality of virtual Ideas is like the world that they all express, each from its own point of view or with its own particular zone of clear expression. This is the same account that Deleuze presents as an

⁹⁹ DR 252 (325), translation slightly modified.

interpretation of Leibniz in *The Fold*, as we saw earlier.¹⁰⁰ There I criticized this account as an interpretation of Leibniz; here the point is to see what role it plays in Deleuze's own ontology. These intensive monads, it seems to me, are Deleuze's characterization of intensity insofar as it is indistinguishable from the virtual. The virtual-intensive, apart from its actualization, is a world where all virtual Ideas coexist and all intensities express the totality of virtual Ideas. This world of intensive monads, then, is the starting point of actualization, as far as intensity is concerned.

Deleuze is concerned to establish that in the process of actualization intensive individuals are prior to the qualities and extensities, or species and parts, that are characteristic of actual individuals. Individuation does not occur by way of differentiation into species and parts. Rather, it is differentiation that depends on individuation, as Deleuze explains in the following passage:

The individual is neither a quality nor an extension. The individual is neither a qualification nor a partition, neither an organisation nor a determination of species. The individual is no more an *infima species* than it is composed of parts. Qualitative or extensive interpretations of individuation remain incapable of providing reasons why a quality ceases to be general, or why a synthesis of extensity begins here and finishes there. The determination of qualities and species presupposes individuals to be qualified, while extensive parts are relative to an individual rather than the reverse. It is not sufficient, however, to mark a general difference in kind between individuation and differentiation in general. This difference in kind remains unintelligible so long as we do not accept the necessary consequence: that individuation precedes differentiation in principle, that every differentiation presupposes a prior intense field of individuation. It is because of the action of the field of individuation that such and such differential relations and such and such distinctive points (pre-individual fields) are actualised As a result, they then form the quality, number, species and parts of an individual, in short, its generality. . . . Individuation does not presuppose any differentiation; it gives rise to it. Qualities and extensities, forms and matters,

¹⁰⁰ See chapter 3, section 2.

species and parts are not primary; they are imprisoned in individuals as though in a crystal.¹⁰¹

Actualization accounts for the genesis of actual individuals, individuals that can be characterized by the qualities and parts which make them up. But from the beginning of the process, there are already intensive individuals, or what Deleuze calls pure individuals: “The vital egg is nevertheless already a field of individuation, and the embryo is a pure individual, and the one in the other testifies to the primacy of individuation over actualisation – in other words, over both organisation and the determination of species.”¹⁰² Differentiation, the process whereby aspects of the virtual structure to be actualized are selected to be incarnated in actual qualities and parts, is subordinated to individuation. The key point in Deleuze’s account of individuation is that actualization is individual right from the beginning, in the sense that it is an intensive ‘monad’ that first expresses a virtual Idea and starts it on the way to actualization.

We can sum up the role of intensity in actualization, then, with the two processes of individuation and dramatisation (since explication, as we saw, concerns an illusion associated with intensity rather than concerning what is proper to intensity itself). A virtual Idea is first expressed in an intensive individual, this is the first step in its actualization. Intensity then determines the spatio-temporal processes that progressively form the actual parts and qualities of the actual individual. This is Deleuze’s antidote to the notion of a brute or inexplicable eruption into existence. The essence of a thing is its

¹⁰¹ DR 247 (318)

¹⁰² DR 250 (322)

dynamical structure, its Idea, but this dynamical structure has to be enacted, or as Deleuze says, dramatised.

As far as I can see, there is nothing in Spinoza or Leibniz to correspond with the processes of differentiation, individuation and dramatisation that Deleuze describes in accounting for actualization. Here the parallel I am drawing between Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze provides only contrasts. Essence, in the accounts of it given by Spinoza and Leibniz, does not need to be differentiated in being actualized; the actual essence, the essence of the existing individual, corresponds perfectly to the non-actual essence, the essence as contained in God's attribute or God's understanding. Actualization does not occur through a process but instantaneously, through God's act of creation in Leibniz, or through the causal activity of other finite individuals in Spinoza. Deleuze's theory of actualization, then, puts a significant distance between his ontology of individuals and that of Spinoza or Leibniz. His theory of virtual Ideas, by contrast, could still be seen as standing in close proximity at least to Spinoza's theory of individual essences, as discussed in the previous section.

Let us conclude this section by looking at a passage where Deleuze sums up the process of actualization. He writes,

The world is an egg. Moreover, the egg, in effect, provides us with a model for the order of reasons: (organic and species related) differentiation-individuation-dramatisation-differentiation. We think that difference in intensity, as this is implicated in the egg, expresses first the differential relations or virtual matter to be organised. This intensive field of individuation determines the relations it expresses to be incarnated in spatio-temporal dynamisms (dramatisation), in species which correspond to these relations (specific differentiation), and in organic parts which correspond to the distinctive points of these relations (organic differentiation). Individuation always governs actualisation: the organic parts are

induced only on the basis of the gradients of their intensive environment; the types determined in their species only by virtue of the individuating intensity.¹⁰³

Differentiation here refers to the determinations of virtual Ideas themselves. Individuation and dramatisation are the two aspects of the role played by intensity in actualization. Differentiation, finally, occurs on the basis on the dynamic processes already underway. The result of process, as we have already seen, is an actual individual, an individual with determinate qualities and parts. The question that remains to be asked, then, is what role the virtual-intensive continues to play in the activity of the actual individual. This will be the topic of the final section of this chapter.

3. Actual Individuals

I want to ask, now, what role the virtual plays in an actual individual on Deleuze's account, much as I asked, with respect to Spinoza and Leibniz, what role the essence plays in the actual individual. The general answer that applies to all three, I think, is that the essence or virtual Idea acts as a principle of activity. The differences are significant, however. In this section I will argue that what Deleuze accounts for with the virtual-intensive are certain transformations of the actual individual. To do this, I will first contrast Deleuze's account of the regular activity of actual individuals with that of Spinoza and Leibniz to show that for Deleuze, unlike for Spinoza and Leibniz, regular activity is accounted for with actualization in the first place, and needs no further appeal to the virtual-intensive. Then, I will consider Deleuze's account of learning in *Difference*

¹⁰³ DR 251 (323)

and Repetition as an account of how an actual individual, in certain cases, undergoes transformations that do involve renewed appeal to the virtual-intensive. I will develop the two main aspects of learning for their general ontological significance – the role of intensity in initiating a transformation, and the consequent counter-actualization that brings the virtual Idea back into play and frees a space for a new actualization. I will conclude with a discussion of how Deleuze’s account of actual individuals relates to those of Spinoza and Leibniz.

Deleuzian actual individuals, like those of Spinoza and Leibniz, are dynamical systems. Or, as James Williams says, “For Deleuze . . . the individual is a series of processes that relates Ideas, intensities and actual identities.”¹⁰⁴ An actual individual is always passing through a series of actual states. In Spinoza and Leibniz, the essence of the individual acts as the principle of its activity in that it provides a kind of rule for this series of actual states. In Spinoza, as we saw, the essence prescribes motions in the parts of the individual that compensate for motions imposed from without, and thus serve to maintain the relation of motion and rest by which the individual is characterized. In Leibniz, the essence or law of the series produces the whole series of perceptual states through which the individual passes. In both cases, then, the essence plays a constant role in the individual’s regular activity. For Deleuze, however, an individual’s actual activity seems to belong to the actual, to arise with actualization, rather than being something that is accounted for directly from the virtual Idea. The actual individual itself, for Deleuze, is considered a product of the process of actualization. The actual

¹⁰⁴ James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003, 186

activity of that individual is just as much a product as the individual's qualities and extensive parts. No further appeal to the virtual, then, seems to be necessary to explain this regular activity.

One of the themes of *Difference and Repetition* is the extent to which we, as actual beings, tend to view things in terms of the actual and to forget or miss the virtual-intensive. We have already seen how, with respect to intensity, Deleuze criticizes the view of it that would see it as existing only to be cancelled out in the activity of a system. However, he does not deny that, as far as actual systems are concerned, intensities do behave in this way. He criticizes this view in order to point the way to a metaphysics of intensity, not to offer a different account of actual activity. As far as the actual is concerned, Deleuze accepts that there is a "tendency on the part of differences of intensity to cancel themselves out in qualified extended systems."¹⁰⁵ This is how the regular activity of actual individuals is to be understood in Deleuze – it is the activity whereby differences in intensity in actual systems cancel themselves out.

So far, then, we have seen that while the essences of individuals in Spinoza and Leibniz act as continuous principles of activity, producing the series of actual states through which the actual individual passes, Deleuze's virtual-intensive sphere gets covered over in actualization and the activity of the actual individual is considered as just another ossified result of actualization, rather than as an activity produced directly by the virtual-intensive sphere. No further appeal to the ontological domain of the virtual-intensive is required to account for the regular activity of an actual individual. I will

¹⁰⁵ DR 224 (289)

argue, however, that there are exceptional cases of activity that do require renewed appeal to the virtual-intensive. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze discusses some such exceptional cases under the topic of ‘learning.’ I would argue that cases of learning are a subset of a more general ontological category – cases of transformation in which a renewed appeal to the virtual-intensive is called for.

Learning certainly does involve this appeal to the virtual-intensive for Deleuze.

He writes,

In fact, the Idea is not the element of knowledge but that of an infinite ‘learning’, which is of a different nature to knowledge. For learning evolves entirely in the comprehension of problems as such, in the apprehension and condensation of singularities and in the composition of ideal events and bodies. Learning to swim or learning a foreign language means composing the singular points of one’s own body or one’s own language with those of another shape or element, which tears us apart but also propels us into a hitherto unknown and unheard-of world of problems. To what are we dedicated if not to those problems which demand the very transformation of our body and our language?¹⁰⁶

The first thing to note is that learning “tears us apart” and involves us in a transformation of some kind. What is torn apart, in fact, is some aspect of the stable, actualized form we have acquired.¹⁰⁷ What happens in learning, then, is not a continuation of the regular activity of the actual individual. Learning involves us, as we will see below, in a counter-actualization, a move away from the actual back towards the virtual. First, however, I want to consider what sets off this occurrence. Deleuze does not think it arises spontaneously from within the individual. Rather, what drives learning, just as what drives actualization in the first place, is intensity, in this case an encounter with intensity

¹⁰⁶ DR 192 (248)

¹⁰⁷ Deleuze considers that the ‘I’ and the ‘Self’ belong to differentiation or actualization; see DR 257 (330).

that affects an already-actual individual. For intensity as it is encountered by actual individuals, Deleuze sometimes uses the term ‘sign.’ Deleuze writes, “To learn is indeed to constitute this space of an encounter with signs”¹⁰⁸ And he also writes: “Everything that teaches us something emits signs; every act of learning is an interpretation of signs or hieroglyphs.”¹⁰⁹

A sign, for Deleuze, is something sensed, but it is an object of sensibility that does something other than provide an object of reflection or representation. We encounter a sign in the world of actual things, the world of qualities and extensities, but what we encounter is intensity. Intensity in this sense is not an object of knowledge; as Deleuze says, “we know intensity only as already developed within an extensity, and as covered over by qualities.”¹¹⁰ But what we know and what we can encounter are not identical. Thus Deleuze considers ‘sensory distortion’ as one route to a direct encounter with intensity:

The point of sensory distortion is often to grasp intensity independently of extensity or prior to the qualities in which it is developed. A pedagogy of the senses, which forms an integral part of ‘transcendentalism’, is directed towards this aim. Pharmacodynamic experiences or physical experiences such as vertigo approach the same result: they reveal to us that difference in itself, that depth in itself or that intensity in itself at the original moment at which it is neither qualified nor extended.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ DR 23 (35)

¹⁰⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*, Trans. Richard Howard, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 4 (*Proust et les signes*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964, 11)

¹¹⁰ DR 223 (288)

¹¹¹ DR 237 (305). Deleuze even detects an interest in such sensory distortions in Leibniz (as well as finding there his own theory of virtual Ideas); he writes, “Every time Leibniz speaks of Ideas, he presents them as virtual multiplicities made of differential relations and singular points, which thought apprehends in a state close to sleep, stupor, swooning, death, amnesia, murmuring or intoxication” (DR 213 [275]).

Intensity, then, is something that can be encountered directly, although it cannot be grasped in the manner of an object of knowledge. It is this encounter with an intensity that sets off learning.

In my discussion of Leibniz in chapter 2, I noted that perception, for Leibniz, has an ontological significance.¹¹² Sensation, insofar as it involves the encounter with an intensity, has a similarly ontological significance for Deleuze.¹¹³ An actual individual, after all, is a dynamical system driven by intensities. The encounter with a new intensity has the potential to disrupt the system and thus transform the individual. It can be noted, as well, that there is no reason to assume that sensation, in the special sense that Deleuze gives it, is limited to minds. The encounter with an intensity is something that presumably can happen to any dynamical system driven by intensities. Just as, in Leibniz, perceptions are simultaneously appetitions that drive an individual substance from state to state, sensations, for Deleuze, when they involve this encounter with intensity, simultaneously bring about a change in the activity of the individual itself. There can be something akin to the encounter that sets off learning, then, even for non-human actual individuals. The potential for this type of transformation, I would argue, is a general feature of Deleuze's ontology of individuals, and not something limited to human beings.

I have compared Deleuze to Leibniz with respect to the ontological sense that he gives to sensation. Where Deleuze differs from Leibniz, and comes closer to Spinoza, is

¹¹² See chapter 2, section 1.

¹¹³ Deleuze writes: "We know that sensation or perception has an ontological aspect . . ." (DR 230 [296]).

in the theme of ‘encounter’, which accompanies his notion of learning. A Spinozan individual too is subject to encounters with what is outside it that can disrupt its regular process. In fact, as we have seen, a Spinozan individual is always receiving impressions from without, and these constantly play into its activity.¹¹⁴ But for Spinoza, basically two outcomes seem to be countenanced: either the individual succeeds in maintaining itself in the face of this potential disruption, through compensating motions in its other parts, or else the individual is destroyed. For Deleuze, by contrast, there is not this stark alternative. In fact, for him transformation is valorized and mere self-maintenance is denigrated. As Ronald Bogue writes, for Deleuze, “To interpret signs is to overcome ‘stock notions,’ ‘natural’ or ‘habitual’ modes of comprehending reality.”¹¹⁵ Instead of presenting an alternative between self-maintenance and destruction, the encounter with an intensity for Deleuze represents an opportunity for transformation and also the only opportunity for genuine thought. As Bogue, again, puts it: “Only through a chance encounter with an unsettling sign can thought be jolted from its routine patterns, and only through such an encounter will the object of thought cease to be arbitrarily selected and attain the necessity of something that itself chooses thought, that constrains thought and sets it in motion.”¹¹⁶ I am looking into Deleuze’s theory of learning for its relevance to his ontology of individuals, not for his views on what constitutes thought. What is

¹¹⁴ See chapter 1, section 3.

¹¹⁵ Ronald Bogue, “Search, Swim and See: Deleuze’s apprenticeship in signs and pedagogy of images” in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2004, 328; Bogue refers to Deleuze’s *Proust and Signs* 27.

¹¹⁶ Bogue “Search, Swim and See” 329

important here, then, is the notion of a jolting from routine, whether this be routine thought or routine activity of some other kind.

Deleuze's theory of learning, it seems to me, points the way to a more general theory of how actual individuals are transformed. If the virtual is a principle of activity for the actual individual, it is such only at intervals, at certain important moments. Deleuze claims, as we have seen in section 1, that his theory of the virtual accounts for what is most 'important':

It will be said that the essence is by nature the most 'important' thing. This, however, is precisely what is at issue: whether the notions of importance and non-importance are not precisely notions which concern events or accidents, and are much more 'important' within accidents than the crude opposition between essence and accident itself.¹¹⁷

From the point of view of an existing individual, these important events, I would argue, are those occurrences where something like learning comes into play, when the very structure of the individual is put back into question in some respect, when its regular activity is suspended. So far, we have considered how this transformation is initiated – through the chance encounter with a sign or intensity. Now we must consider what happens as a result of this encounter.

What we have seen so far is the role that intensity plays in Deleuze's theory of learning. Deleuze in fact gives two definitions of learning, one relating it to intensity, and the other relating it to the virtual Idea. He writes,

[L]earning may be defined in two complementary ways, both of which are opposed to representation in knowledge: learning is either a matter of penetrating the Idea, its varieties and distinctive points, or a matter of raising a faculty to its

¹¹⁷ DR 189 (245)

disjoint transcendent exercise, raising it to that encounter and that violence which are communicated to the others.¹¹⁸

The second of the two definitions that Deleuze gives here is equivalent to what we have already been discussing: the encounter with a sign that disrupts normal activity and sets off learning (although Deleuze here puts it into the language of the theory of faculties that he develops in *Difference and Repetition*). The first definition is what we must now consider – how learning is “a matter of penetrating the Idea,” that is, of returning to the virtual from the actual.

In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze introduces a term that is helpful in this respect, the term ‘counter-actualization.’¹¹⁹ The term has three related meanings, as far as I can tell. First, counter-actualization refers to a tendency in the virtual itself, apart from its tendency to be actualized. In *The Logic of Sense*, and then again twenty years later in *The Fold*, Deleuze uses a quote from Blanchot to make this point. He writes,

On one side, there is the part of the event which is realized and accomplished; on the other, there is that “part of the event which cannot realize its accomplishment.” There are thus two accomplishments, which are like actualization and counter-actualization.¹²⁰

Deleuze’s point here is that the virtual is not exhausted in its actualization, but remains available for other, divergent actualizations. All of the differential elements of a structure

¹¹⁸ DR 194 (251)

¹¹⁹ In French, *contre-effectuation*. *Effectuation* is used in *The Logic of Sense* synonymously with *actualisation* in *Difference and Repetition*, and it is translated by the same English word, actualization. Deleuze seems to prefer *effectuation* when he is speaking of virtual *events*, and *actualisation* when he is speaking of virtual *Ideas*, even though the two terms are effectively synonymous.

¹²⁰ LS 151-52 (178). The quote from Blanchot can be found in Maurice Blanchot, *L’espace littéraire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1955, 202. A portion of the same quote from Blanchot appears in *The Fold*, 105 (141), although the English translation there seems to be incorrect.

have the same reality eternally, no matter what is the case with their actualization. This sense of counter-actualization is not the one that concerns us here, however, because we are interested in counter-actualization relative to an actual individual.

A second sense of counter-actualization refers to the grasping in thought of this tendency of the virtual to remain in itself even as it is actualized. Bela Egyed has suggested that the term ‘vice-diction’ in *Difference and Repetition* is a synonym for counter-actualization in *The Logic of Sense*,¹²¹ and if so, it seems mainly to be synonym for this second sense. Vice-diction is “the procedure capable of following and describing multiplicities and themes,”¹²² i.e., the procedure for thinking a virtual Idea. In *The Logic of Sense*, however, Deleuze is critical of the Idea that the virtual can simply be thought. There, Deleuze considers the thought of the event as something dangerous, related to alcoholism, schizophrenia, etc. For him, there seems to be no such thing as thinking the event without living it in some way that is genuinely threatening to the one living it. Deleuze worries about the ridiculousness of the “abstract thinker” with respect to counter-actualization.¹²³ Counter-actualization as a mere thought process, a general recognition that the virtual does not disappear in its actualization, misses the point. Deleuze writes,

Counter-actualization is nothing, it belongs to a buffoon when it operates alone and pretends to have the value of *what could have happened*. But, to be the mime of *what effectively occurs*, to double the actualization with a counter-actualization, the identification with a distance, like the true actor and dancer, is to give to the

¹²¹ Bela Egyed, “Counter-Actualisation and the Method of Intuition,” in *Deleuze and Philosophy*, Ed. Constantin V. Boundas, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, 83, n. 3

¹²² DR 189 (245)

¹²³ LS 156 (183)

truth of the event the only chance of not being confused with its inevitable actualization.¹²⁴

Counter-actualization must correspond to a new actualization within the actual individual, for which Deleuze takes from Blanchot the figure of a ‘wound.’¹²⁵ This leads us to a third sense of counter-actualization, which is the one that concerns us.

In this third sense, counter-actualization does not refer just to the virtual’s indifference to its actualization or to the possibility of grasping the virtual in thought. In the discussion of vice-diction in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze indicates in passing that there is an ontological dimension to it: “There is an objectivity on the part of adjunction and condensation [the two procedures into which Deleuze divides vice-diction], and an objectivity of conditions, which implies that Ideas no more than Problems do not exist only in our heads but occur here and there in the production of an actual historical world.”¹²⁶ My interest, then, is not in the general implication of counter-actualization, that the virtual does not disappear in its actualization, but in what counter-actualization implies for the actual individual. Counter-actualization, in this sense, is what it sounds like: a process in the opposite direction from actualization, going from actual individuals to the world of the virtual-intensive, rather than the other way around. Thus Deleuze says that the “ultimate sense” of counter-actualization coincides with the eternal return, which we saw in the previous section was characteristic of the virtual and the intensive at the limit where they coincide in pure difference.¹²⁷ A complete

¹²⁴ LS 161 (188)

¹²⁵ LS 151 (177-78)

¹²⁶ DR 190 (246)

¹²⁷ LS 178 (209); see above, section 2.

movement towards the virtual would seem to amount to the destruction of the actual individual, the abolishment of everything that makes it actual, all of its qualities and extensive parts. As far as an actual individual is concerned, then, it seems that counter-actualization can only ever be partial. What I am interested in is the role that Deleuze sees limited counter-actualizations playing in the activity of actual individuals.

This limited, ontological counter-actualization seems to me to correspond with Deleuze's definition of learning as "a matter of penetrating the Idea." This notion of counter-actualization can be elaborated, I think, along the same lines as the original notion of actualization discussed in the previous section, i.e., it can be seen to involve, instead of differentiation, a degree of de-differentiation. Let us consider what de-differentiation might mean.

Deleuze mentions de-differentiation in the context of a discussion of biological species. He writes,

[I]t has often been noticed that all modes of reproduction imply phenomena of organic 'de-differentiation'. The egg reconstitutes the parts only on condition that it develops within a field which does not depend on them. It develops within the limits of the species only on condition that it also presents phenomena of specific de-differentiation.¹²⁸

The qualities and extensities that characterize the differentiated species in question are not present in the fertilized egg. The egg represents a kind of return toward the virtual, where differentiation has yet to occur. The de-differentiation is not at all total; the species itself remains differentiated from other species, but the egg, it seems, is linked to that species only by virtue of the virtual Idea that it actualizes.

¹²⁸ DR 249 (320-21)

We can generalize this notion of de-differentiation in order better to understand counter-actualization. Counter-actualization will involve de-differentiation, it seems to me, whether it is a matter of organic species or not. A return to the virtual will involve some degree of dissolution of actual structures. Deleuze is concerned with this in *The Logic of Sense*, and especially with the danger of a de-differentiation that would go too far. With respect to the effect of counter-actualization in the actual, he writes:

[H]ow is it to be prevented from precipitating destruction, even if this meant losing all accompanying benefits – the organization of language and even life itself? How could we not reach the point at which we can only spell letter by letter and cry out in a sort of schizophrenic depth, but no longer speak at all?¹²⁹

Here Deleuze envisions a descent into de-differentiated language, where the actualized structure that allows for meaningful speech has largely dissolved. One is left, it seems, trying to speak without a language, or trying to speak directly from the very Idea of language. This extreme can be compared with the more limited case of trying to learn a foreign language. Here too, Deleuze seems to think that some degree of counter-actualization, and thus of de-differentiation, must come into play. One cannot learn a new language with the structures of the language one knows already. The language of the learner must become de-differentiated to some extent – there is a kind of return to the virtual Idea of language that frees the space for the actualization of the new language.

For the Deleuzian actual individual, then, the virtual-intensive remains a source of potential transformations. The intensive plays the role of initiating transformation, shocking an individual out of its routine activity. This can set off a partial counter-

¹²⁹ LS 157 (183)

actualization, the suspension of some of the individual's qualities or partitioning, the freeing up of a space for a new actualization.

Let us compare what we have seen about actual individuals in Deleuze with what we saw in Spinoza and Leibniz. In Spinoza and Leibniz, the essence in the actual individual plays the role of a principle of activity for that individual. The series of states through which the individual passes results from the essence, either in conjunction with affections that come from without, in the case of a Spinozan individual, or in perfect self-sufficiency, in the case of a Leibnizian monad. There are a number of reasons why this cannot be the case for Deleuze. First of all, there is no individual essence in Deleuze's theory. The theoretical element that I have discussed in parallel with individual essences in Spinoza and Leibniz is what Deleuze calls a virtual Idea; however, this Idea constitutes a pre-individual structure of differential relations, rather than defining the essence of an individual. In relation to it, the actual individual is differentiated, that is, the individual reflects a selection of structural elements from among those that coexist in the virtual Idea. The regular activity of the individual, then, is among the determinations that arise with actualization, not something that flows directly from the virtual Idea itself. This regular activity that is seen as flowing from the essence on Spinoza and Leibniz's accounts is seen as covering over the virtual-intensive sphere from which it originates, on Deleuze's account.

The activity that is accounted for by the Spinozan or Leibnizian individual essence is continuous, it is a passage through a continuous series of states. Deleuze, on the other hand, reserves appeal to the virtual Idea to account for discontinuous

occurrences of a special kind, cases of ‘learning’ or transformation. Thus the virtual-intensive does appear as a kind of principle of activity for Deleuze, but of a very different kind from the individual essences of Spinoza and Leibniz. The essence of a Spinozan individual body, we saw, determines compensating motions in its parts to preserve it against the potentially destructive impact of motions that come from without. The essence of a Leibnizian monad determines it to pass from perceptual state to perceptual state according to a law of the series that is unique and internal. When a Deleuzian actual individual ‘learns’, however, or undergoes a transformation, Deleuze conceives of this as dissolving some of the actual structure that characterizes the individual and leaving it open to a partial new actualization whose results may be unpredictable.

In a sense, both Spinoza and Leibniz present us with individuals that can be characterized as closed systems of activity. The essence defines the activity of the system and does not change. We saw that for Spinoza it is only the disturbance of externally imposed motions that prevents an individual from continuing with its characteristic activity forever. Leibniz’s monads actually do last forever, unless God chooses to annihilate them. In one sense, perhaps, Spinoza’s individuals are more ‘open’ than Leibniz’s, because they are affected from without. But the activity of the individual is aimed at compensating for these affections, which appear mainly as a threat. In another sense, Leibniz’s individuals could be viewed as more open systems, since they seem to undergo much more extreme transformations while preserving their identity – for instance, death is conceived as a transformation rather than as the destruction of the individual. Deleuze’s individuals are open in a way that is much stronger. Like

Spinozan individuals, they are subject to affections from without, but unlike Spinoza's individuals, their response does not always consist in simply compensating for the imposed affection. We saw that Deleuze conceives of learning, or transformation, as originating in an encounter with an intensity. This sets off a process of counter-actualization, in which the individual loses some of its actual structure and becomes available for restructuring. Deleuze's individuals are 'nomads' compared to the individuals of Spinoza or Leibniz, they are open to dramatic transformations. Deleuze is explicit about this openness of his own sort of monad: "it could be said that the monad, astraddle over several worlds, is kept half open as if by a pair of pliers." Deleuze concludes that "nomadology" now overtakes monadology.¹³⁰

In this chapter I have tried to give an account of Deleuze's ontology of individuals that would put it into relation with the theories of Spinoza and Leibniz discussed in the previous chapters. We have seen that what plays a role similar to essence in Deleuze is his theory of virtual Ideas, which are pure structures defined only by differential relations, singular points, and progressive determination. These structures are actualized, then, by being differentiated, that is, by having certain of their component relations and singular points progressively incarnated in actual qualities and extensive parts. This process of differentiation, however, is driven by another process, assigned to another form of difference, difference in intensity. Intensive individuals, Deleuzian monads, are what drive the process of actualization, so that the process can also be characterized as

¹³⁰ *The Fold* 137 (188-89)

individuation, a transition from intensive to actual individuals. As for the actual individuals themselves, we saw that they do not need any appeal to the virtual-intensive to account for their regular activity, but that there are certain cases of transformation that do bring the virtual-intensive back into play. These are transformations analogous to what Deleuze describes as ‘learning’ in *Difference and Repetition*.

If there is an overall impression to be had from this chapter, and thus from this study overall, concerning Deleuze’s relationship to Spinoza and Leibniz, I think it is more an impression of distance than one of proximity. There are no individual essences in Deleuze, unlike in Spinoza and Leibniz. The virtual Idea remains pre-individual – it defines a structure that is indifferent to what individual or individuals might actualize it. There is nothing in Spinoza and Leibniz to parallel Deleuze’s account of actualization, precisely because for them essences are individual, so for the essence to be actualized is just for the individual of which it is the essence to exist. Finally, the role played by the Deleuzian virtual-intensive with respect to the actual individual is very different from the role played by Spinozan or Leibnizian essences. The latter act as continuous principles of activity, while the former acts intermittently as a principle of transformation.

Of course, this impression of distance is partly a matter of perspective. Viewed from further away, in relation to the whole variety of philosophical positions, Spinoza, Leibniz and Deleuze can be seen to share some fundamental ideas about essence, which formed the basis of this comparison and which I mentioned at the outset. They agree at least that essence is an ontological notion, that it is tied to individuals, and that it provides some kind of principle of activity for actually existing individuals.

A Rationalistic Epilogue

I would like to end with a question for which I do not have an answer, and which moves outside the scope of my topic: are there good reasons for accepting Deleuze's ontology? This question arises quite naturally from the overall comparison with Spinoza and Leibniz, since both were philosophers who held very strongly that they could and should convince rational people to accept their philosophical conclusions.

If Spinoza and Leibniz are rightly known as rationalists, it is because they think the most basic and general account of what there is in the world, a basic ontology, can be arrived at largely by reason alone. The major first step is the demonstration of the nature and existence of God. Then all that remains is to show what God would produce, which is the finite individuals that have been the topic of my discussion here. There is a strong parallel between the order of thought and the order of being. Just as God is a necessary being from whom other beings follow or by whom other beings are created, so the rational thinker can grasp the necessity of God and that other beings follow from, or are created by him.

Deleuze, it seems to me, retains the parallel between the order of thought and the order of being that is characteristic of these rationalistic metaphysicians. Difference, as a creative principle, grounds (or ungrounds) both being and thought. Reason, however, seems to be absent from this bottom level of Deleuze's system.

Deleuze's way of talking about his work strongly suggests that he rejected the idea of convincing anyone of his ideas. He rejects discussion in philosophy. He asserts that anyone is free to take or leave whatever they want from his work. He claims to have little interest in his own earlier books, and only to be concerned with what he is working on now. He insists that philosophical theories are a matter of taste. What he does seem to hope is that his work will have some impact, will affect people strongly in some way, will be taken up partially in new, creative developments.

This seems to be consistent with how thought fits into Deleuze's system. The primary aim of thought seems to be to reach back towards the ground of difference, much as for the rationalists the aim was to reach back towards God. What difference produces, however, is not rational insight, but the new, the different.

Deleuze, then, would not be inclined to offer us reasons for accepting his ontology. But the question remains: are there such reasons?

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