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Contents

Monadologism, Inter-subjectivity and the Quest for Social Order

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Abstract

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz presents the idea of monads, as non-communicative, self-actuating system of beings that are windowless, closed, eternal, deterministic and individualistic. For him, the whole universe and its constituents are monads and that includes humans. In fact, any 'body', such as the 'body' of an animal or man has, according to Leibniz, one dominant monad which controls the others within it. This dominant monad, he often refers to as the soul. If Leibniz's conception of monads is accepted, it merely establishes human subjectivity, idiosyncrasies, biases, prejudices and individual points of view as the norm. How then do we ensure inter-subjectivity and the kind of social interaction requisite for the achievement of social order, since Leibniz's system forecloses the possibility of interaction and communication among monads? In this essay, we argue that just as Leibniz's monads synchronize only through the Supreme Monad (Monas Monadum), humans as social monads should also interact through a matrix of ideals like truth, honesty, sincerity, integrity, altruism, impartiality, compassion and trust. Since social order is actualised only within the context of linked social structures, relations and values, these utopian ideals would form the fulcrum through which humans relate and the very foundation that would anchor a viable social order. Our aim here is to establish a relationship between Leibniz's metaphysics and the physical domains of life by showing that metaphysical constructs can impinge on human social relations and well-being. The study employed the qualitative method of research through critical analysis of texts, library and archival materials.

Keywords: Leibniz's monads, inter-subjectivity, relational principles, social order

Introduction

The idea that humans, as gregarious beings, can be described as windowless and non-communicative is suggestive of a form of idealism that precludes inter-subjectivity and interactivism. In Leibniz's perspective, the whole universe and its constituents are monads, described as a simple and self-contained substance which is endowed with certain active and perceptive powers by its creator. In other words, a monad contains within itself, all that is necessary for its own existence, that is, the power to produce all the changes it undergoes from the beginning of its existence to eternity and would not require the influence or assistance of any other monad. Although, Leibniz made an elaborate description of the monads in the Monadology, but

it is in the Philosophical Papers and Letters that he expressed his view on what he believes is the ultimate constituent of reality. According to him, the 'monads' are the only true substances as they cannot be broken down and therefore cannot go out of existence. In the *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, Leibniz writes:

> …when I looked for the ultimate reasons for mechanism, and for the laws of motion themselves, I was very surprised to see that it was impossible to find them in mathematics, and that I should have to return to metaphysics. This is what led me back to entelechies, and from the material to the formal, and ultimately brought me to understand, after a number of corrections and improvements to my notions, that monads, or simple substances, are the only true substances, and that material things are only phenomena, albeit well-founded and well-connected (Leibniz, 1969:654).

The claim in the above expression that material things are merely phenomena is an assertion that material things are not real, the reason being that they are degradable aggregates that can seize to exist at any time. Real things in the opinion of Leibniz are expected to be eternal and should not require any external support for their existence. Just like in the Aristotelian sense 'accidents' cannot separate themselves from 'substances' and cannot also go outside of themselves, as the 'sensible species' or the material things used to do in the view of the Scholastics, so also neither substance nor accident can come into a monad from outside (Leibniz, 1714:2).

Accordingly, whatever changes a monad undergoes, though may seem to us as the effect of causes operating from without, yet are only the gradual and successive evolutions of its own internal powers. In other words, a monad still would have produced all the same changes and motions, even when there had been no other beings in the universe (Stempel, 1975:84). If Leibniz's conception of monads is accepted as presented, it merely establishes human subjectivity, idiosyncrasies, biases, prejudices and individual points of view as the norm. This poses a challenge for human inter-subjectivity and the kind of social interaction requisite to the achievement of social order.

In this essay, we examine first, the concept of monadic determinism which expresses non-interactivity of the monads, and second, against the claim by Leibniz that humans are monads, we examine the possibility of inter-subjective relations among social monads and how this can be harnessed for the achievement of the kind of social order requisite for human development and well-being. Leibniz's conception of monads implies some lev-

el of social distancing among humans, whereas inter-subjectivity is needed to build the kind of social order essential for human well-being and societal development. To achieve this, we propose a matrix of ideals or relational principles that would serve as basis for interaction among humans as social monads; ideals like truth, honesty, sincerity, integrity, altruism, impartiality, compassion and trust. Just as Leibniz's monads synchronize only through the Supreme Monad (*Monas monadum*), these ideals would also form the fulcrum for inter-subjective relations among humans and the very foundation upon which a viable social order could be erected. Our aim here is to existentialise Leibniz's metaphysical construct by establishing a relation between metaphysics and the physical domains of human social relations and well-being.

On the Ontological Status of Leibniz's Monad

In 'The Monadology' which is one of Leibniz's most important writings, he classified monads into different categories; One, those with perception only and are simply mere perceivers; Two, those with perception and memory which are able to perceive and respond to their perceptions and; Three, the ones with perception, memory and consciousness. This latter category of monads is able to perceive, reflect and is conscious (Leibniz, 1867:130). A simple interpretation of the above descriptions is that Monads are grouped into three categories which include inanimate matter, plants and animals and humans. Sometimes, however, for the sake of convenience, plants and animals are at times separated into different categories by some scholars, creating the impression in some quarters that Leibniz confusedly categorised the monads, into three and sometimes into four groups. For instance, whereas for Scot (2002), *Leibniz describes three levels of monads which may be differentiated by their modes of perception*, Gale interpreted Leibniz as proposing four types of monads which are; humans, animals, plants and matter. These monads all have perceptions in different degrees of their proximity to the *Monas monadum,* that is, the ultimate monad, in the sense that they have internal properties that express external relations. The first three, that is, humans, animals and plants are said to have substantial forms and appetition (that is consciousness and memory); the first two: humans and animals, have memory; only the first, that is human, has reason. Matter for him belong to the category of those with perception only and are simply mere perceivers. Despite the fact that these basic constituents have no causal relations to one another, they experience coherent lives due to a pre-established harmony instilled in them by God at their creation. This leads each of them to a programmed deterministic existence corresponding to the evolution of each monad (Gale, 2002:3). Thus, for Leibniz, interrelatedness of monads is an ideal and apparent relation which does not depend on physical interaction. These apparent activities of the monads are expressed in his doctrine of pre-es-

tablished harmony which he also attempted to use to address the Cartesian problem of mind-body interactionism.

The above description of the monads as closed, windowless, self-actuating and non-interactive raises some concerns for an understanding of human beings as social monads having freewill. The basic issue here is; if monads by definition are individualistic, non-communicative, non-interactive and deterministic entities, then they are best described existentially as 'beings-in-the-world' and not as 'beings-with-others'. This raises the probing question by Wildon Carr as to how such entities can become part of a community (Wildon, 1926:75). Leibniz not only presents a logically consistent theory of the composition or constitution of a universe in which every constituent is an active subject of experience living its own life, the coherent existence of these constituents is ascribable to a supreme agent who pre-established it.

Leibniz's description of the monads is better understood from his conception of substance. Leibniz believes that ontological issues about existence and the basic constituents of reality are vital for metaphysics and that everything is composed of or reducible to simple substances. A substance, he says, is essentially an active, genuine unity, endowed with perception, consciousness and memory, and it is the nature of an individual substance to have what he calls Complete Individual Concept. That is, a substance is a subject that contains within itself, all the properties of the predicate, which means that the predicate does not provide us with any new information about the subject. That subject (substance) as a matter of logical necessity is a necessary truth. For him, it is only soul-like monadic beings that are endowed with true unity and are capable of actions that can be called substances. It is in line with this that Daniel Garber opines that all living bodies have a dominant entelechy, which in the animal, is the soul (Garber, 2009:27). Leibniz views substance in a clearly different way from the materialists who propose that a substance is concrete, tangible and extended; that it is an aggregate and therefore divisible. Leibniz being an idealist is of the opinion that real substances are simple, invisible, and indivisible, not extended, not made up of aggregates and therefore cannot go out of existence. These indivisible and eternal substances are the monads which he describes as the true atoms of nature.

The deterministic tendency inherent in Leibniz's monads is seen in his explanation that each windowless monad behaves in accordance with its own created purpose and their purposes are synchronised or orchestrated in a harmonious manner that was pre-established by God. Just as the Sun may appear to be in motion when indeed, it does not move, so do the monads appear to interact when indeed, they do not interact. In Leibniz's opinion, there

could be no causal interaction between the mental and physical domains any more than between two corporeal objects (Sweet, 2004:76). Monads, he opines are:

> Living mirrors of the universe, each representing all other monads from a distinct and individual point of view. God perceives everything with equal clarity, and without any point of view; whereas created monads are limited by their perspectival point. The harmony of the total system consists in the fact that the perceptions of each individual monad inter-lock to form a single, consistent view of the universe as perceived by God (Tsui-James, 3003:77).

Therefore, bodies act as if there were no souls and souls act as if there were no bodies yet, both body and soul act as if the one was influencing the other. The basis for this apparent influence is provided by the *Monas monadum.* Leibniz poignantly underscores this point when he says; "the action of one finite substance on another consists only in the increase of the degree of expression together with the diminution of the expression of the other, insofar as God requires them to accommodate themselves to one another" (Beetham, 2005:559). The mind and body interaction and the monads mirroring each other can be compared to the working of two different clocks that are in perfect harmony. Empirically, for this to happen, there ought to be a physical connectivity between the two clocks, as Descartes thought should be the connection between the mind and the body, which he never found. But Leibniz opines that the synergy that exists between the two clocks or the mind and the body is as a result of the harmony pre-established between all substances. Souls act according to the laws of final causes while bodies act according to the laws of efficient causes or of motion, and are in harmony with each other (Beetham, 2005:555-561). The orchestrator of this pre-established harmony, according to Leibniz, is God. The above analysis clearly brings out, not only the individualistic, non-communicative and non-interactive predispositions of Leibniz's monads, but also their deterministic tendency which cannot be said to be ontologically compatible with the expected behaviour of social monads like humans having freewill.

Apart from their deterministic tendency, Leibniz's monads also betray solipsist inclinations. Solipsism is the claim that reality only exists in the self and that there can never be an existence external to the self. Put differently, it is the view that the individual mind is the primary source of knowledge and that nothing exists in the world unless one is aware of it. Gorgias of Leotini's extreme scepticism which asserted that, nothing exists, and that even if something exists, nothing can be known about it, and that even if something

could be known about it, that knowledge cannot be communicated to others (Russell, 1979:95), is today identified as one of the earliest form of solipsism.

Three major variants of solipsism could be identified: Metaphysical Solipsism which views the individual as the only source of reality while, the external world, people or objects have no existence of their own; Epistemological Solipsism which maintains that only the mental state of the observer is the true approximation of reality, while the external world needs not be contemplated upon because it does not exist in the first instance and; Methodological Solipsism which suggests that the individual self and mental processes are the only launching pads of reality, and that nothing can exist beyond the consciousness (Eketu, 2016:20). Clearly, Leibniz's idea of monads betrays a form of metaphysical solipsism, but with some elements of transcendentalism.

The idea of monads being solipsistic is to the effect that no monad can be said to have direct awareness of the 'mental' states of others. Even more worrisome is the insinuation from Leibniz's argument that no monad, being windowless and non-communicative, is able even to form any concept of a state of consciousness that is not its own (Leibniz, 1867:6). Leibniz's analysis portrays the monad as 'the personal I' which designates the full experience of the self in all its concreteness. The monad in this wise, bears in itself the whole 'me', that is, everything that falls under the unified situation of 'I think' or 'I intuit'. According to Moran, the monad refers to concrete ego or the person as an individual, a living concrete unity, established over time as a life with its own temporal field and capacity for self-development. Thus, monad does not refer only to the person merely in his or her present states, but involves the ways in which she or he has evolved intentionally, including various sedimented layers of intentionality. Such conception of the ontological status of monads which leads into solipsism is problematic, as it raises the challenge as to whether humans as social monads can ascribe certain conscious states to themselves and then turn around to question the veracity of whether other human bodies have associated mental states as well (Beetham, 2005:556-558).

Monadologism and Social Order

One of the implications of Leibniz's metaphysical monads is that reality only exists in the self and that there can never be an existence external to the self, further emphasising the individualistic, deterministic and solipsistic tendencies of monads. In a logically distributive manner, however, Leibniz included the class of humans in the class of monads (Leibniz, 1867:130). But whereas Leibniz's metaphysical monads neither affect nor are affected by other monads; and whereas they are self-sufficient and are programmed to behave

or perceive the world in their own peculiar ways, humans as social monads possess freewill; are not determined and thus, experience inter-subjective existence. For Leibniz, though the idea of social or physical interaction is incompatible with the life of the metaphysical monads (Russell, 1977:102), God already pre-established the activities of the monads and do not need to intervene by inputting motion or interaction. This means that Leibniz did not put forward his monadic theory to achieve human solidarity. To achieve inter-subjectivity, therefore, the monads need to be inputted with the ability to interact. This is what the concept of social monad is able to achieve.

The idea of social monads, which in other words refers to social beings, is better understood within the concept of inter-subjectivity and 'being-in-itself'. The question of 'being' had lingered from ancient philosophical epochs with Plato thinking of it as a transcendent reality within humans and Immanuel Kant later dismissing it as a near-impossible venture following his rigorous but challenging encounter with the question of who a human being is (Frierson, 2013:1). This concept was reawakened by Heidegger who in his *Being and Time*, opines that man is not just a 'being-in-the-world' but also a 'being-with-others'. Heidegger is of the view that "only man can raise the question about his 'being' or about 'being itself'" (Stumpf, 1971:479) and that humans are the only beings for whom the question of 'being' is important. He emphasizes that an understanding of 'being' is necessary for authentic existence, which existentially addresses the challenges associated with inter-subjectivity or 'being-with-others' (Unah, 1996:60).

To affirm humans as 'beings-in-the-world' and as 'beings-with-others' at the same time as Heidegger did, presupposes inter-subjectivity, and for there to be harmony and authentic existence in this form of relationship, there must be constant reconciliation of 'the self' with 'the other' (Oyeshile, 2011:7). Social monads or social beings experience this kind of communal relationship where all humans work in harmony towards achieving a common objective. In a community of social beings, beings interact and this interaction sustains their universe. The basic elements of sustainability in a communal society are co-operation, co-existence, togetherness and inter-subjectivity. This suggests that all beings within such a relationship are directly or indirectly connected to every other being, despite the differences that may exist among them. This relationship shows that humans as social monads, though egoistic, yet are capable of being altruistic or other-centered (Midgley, 2000:128). This shows that an individual can only be a person with the aid of other persons and that in the absence of others; no grounds exist for a claim regarding one's own standing as a person in the community (Menkiti, 2004:324). Humans as social monads engage continually in this kind of

relationship and this is what lubricates the human society and ensures its sustenance.

The society, therefore, is a network of life forces where beings go out of themselves to interact and share or communicate vital energies to one another (Senghor, 1966:4), and in the process enhance or complete the being of one another. This communal interaction of social beings leads to a strengthening of forces that sustains the society. However, when we contrast the individualism and self-sufficiency of Leibniz's metaphysical monads with the interactivism of social monads, it becomes impossible to rule out social conflicts arising from inequality, injustice, and intolerance, due to differing opinions originating from freedom of the will of humans, and this poses great threats to social order and the survival of society. How then can we transcend this challenge while still borrowing a leaf from Leibniz's metaphysics which provides a basis for monadic synchronisation in the *Monas monadum*?

Relational Principles as Basis for Inter-Subjectivity and Social Order

Leibniz's description of the monads as windowless and non-communicative is not to the point of logical unrelatedness, as the *Monas monadum* provides the harmonious synchronisation through pre-established harmony. However, Leibniz's *Monas monadum* cannot be said to provide the basis for interaction of social monads because humans, given their idiosyncrasies may not all subscribe to the same idea of a Supreme Being as basis for interaction. The idea of social monads asserts the primacy of person-to-person relationships which is not just a random, mechanistic combination of people in society but "a super-temporal unity founded", according to Saykina, "on an a priori sense of trust" (Guzel, 2015:247).

The point here is that there are certain ideals or principles of human valuation which are not subject to human biases, idiosyncrasies and prejudices such as truth, honesty, sincerity, integrity, altruism, tolerance, impartiality, compassion and trust, which are fundamental to organising the thoughts, beliefs and actions of humans and their relationship with one another. These concepts suggest the most significant aspect of goodness in humans responsible for the moulding of individual character in society, and an individual's adherence to or violation of these principles or ideals is significant to the retention of the individual's dignity in society. Also, investigations in economics and sociology have established several prima facie relationships between some of these principles and the smooth running of society (Thomas, 2012:101). Given this condition, a society suffused with individuals who relate on the basis of these principles and ideals would most likely yield an en-

vironment conducive to social order. This is because these principles are of high social import, as their meanings and significance are well brought out only within the context of social existence, even though they are not necessarily defined by individual beliefs, values, biases, prejudices and idiosyncrasies. Since humans live together in a community, and since the positive or negative consequences of any of these principles will affect the well-being of everyone in society, then these principles would provide a better basis for interaction among humans as social monads and for building a viable social order that would engender development.

Conclusion

In this essay, Leibniz's concept of metaphysical monads which expresses the non-interactivity of the monads has been examined, against the backdrop of social monads which stresses human inter-subjectivity and the kind of interactivism needed to build a viable social order requisite for development. We argue that just as Leibniz's Supreme Being (*Monas monadum*) provides a harmonious synchronisation of monads through pre-established harmony, humans as social monads should also interact through a matrix of relational principles or ideals like truth, honesty, sincerity, integrity, altruism, impartiality, compassion and trust. These utopian ideals, we conclude, would form the fulcrum for human inter-subjectivity and the very foundation upon which a viable social order could be erected.

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