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THREE MORAL THEMES OF LEIBNIZ'S SPIRITUAL MACHINE BETWEEN “NEW SYSTEM” AND “NEW ESSAYS”

The advance of mechanism in science and philosophy in the 17th century created a great interest to machines or automatons. Leibniz was no exception – in a memoir *Drôle de pensée* (1675) he wrote admiringly about a machine that could walk on water, exhibited in Paris.¹ The idea of automatic processing in general had a substantial role in his thought, as can be seen, for example, in his invention of the binary code and the so-called *Calculemus!*-model for solving controversies.²

In metaphysics, the idea of automaton was expressed most clearly in the 1695 article *New System of the Nature of Substances and their Communication, and of the Union which Exists between the Soul and the Body* and the ensuing correspondence with, among others, Foucher, Bayle, Lamy, Jaquelot and Masham. In the article Leibniz discussed the soul as a spiritual machine in the context of pre-established harmony. The basic idea of Leibniz's spiritual machine is that the soul or entelechy is an autonomous and spontaneous unity, consisting of internal active force, producing its own perceptions. In this paper I focus on three moral themes related to the spiritual machine: moral deliberation, moral identity and the goals of moral action. All these themes are more or less implicit in the *New System* but are discussed in more detail in the ensuing correspondence after the publication of the article and in Leibniz's later works, especially in *New Essays on Human Understanding* (1704), but also in later *Theodicy* (1710) and *Monadology* (1714).

The Spiritual Machine in the *New System* and in Subsequent Correspondence

In *New System*, published in *Journal des savants* 27. 6. 1695, Leibniz discussed the soul as a spiritual machine in the context of pre-established harmony.³ The article was very important because there for the first time Leibniz gave a public exposition of his metaphysical views. No wonder then that it led to a prolonged correspondence with several contemporary prominent philosophers, theologians and scientists.

- 1 The text is available at https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Dr%C3%B4le_de_Pens%C3%A9e,_touchant_une_nouvelle_sorte_de_repr%C3%A9sentations? (last visited 7. 4. 2023),
- 2 See *Guilielmi Pacidii initia et specimina Scientiae generalis*, A IV, 4, 492–493.
- 3 Noble has argued that Leibniz may have adopted the term from Spinoza's *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, but modified it to his own use, rejecting Spinoza's ethical views. I agree with this view, although I do not discuss it here. Christopher P. Noble: “Self-Moving Machines and the Soul: Leibniz Contra Spinoza on the Spiritual Automaton”, in: *The Leibniz Review* 27 (2017), pp. 65–89.

Leibniz starts the article with a brief autobiographical account of his intellectual development from scholasticism to modern mechanism and to rejection of Cartesian physics. Then he goes on to give his own controversial metaphysical views, starting with a rehabilitation of substantial forms. He argues that they consist of active force and must be understood as souls.⁴ Leibniz gives a new content to the Aristotelian concept of first entelechy in *De anima* II, 1, seeing it as consisting of primary force which includes activity rather than just actualization of a possibility.⁵

According to Leibniz, minds are superior to everything else in nature. They have special laws which raise them above the mechanical operations of matter: “We might say that everything else is made only for them.”⁶ In fact, “Minds or rational souls are like little gods, made in the image of God, and having within them a ray of the divine light.”⁷ Because of this, the minds strive to promote perfection which gives them pleasure and eventually happiness.⁸

However, minds cannot subsist in the world alone – bodies or natural machines are also needed.⁹ Towards the end of the article Leibniz goes on to discuss the communication between the soul and the body, rejecting both Cartesian and Occasionalist views. Instead, he argues: “We should say that God first created the soul [...] in such a way that everything in it arises from its own nature, with a perfect spontaneity as regards itself, and yet with a perfect conformity to things outside it.”¹⁰ He continues to argue that the soul’s inner sensations are a sequence of phenomena relating to external things, that is to say, internal perceptions. Each substance represents the whole world from its own perspective as if there exist only the soul and God in the world.¹¹ As there is a perfect agreement between all the substances, the soul and the body communicate with each other: “It is this mutual relationship, arranged in advance in each substance in the universe, which produces what we call

4 GP IV, 478–479.

5 GP IV, 479. In a preliminary draft to the article (1694) Leibniz gives this useful clarification of the active nature of the soul: “By ‘force’ or ‘potency’ I do not mean a power or faculty, which is only a bare possibility for action and which, being itself dead as it were, never produces action without being excited from outside; instead I mean something midway between power and action, something which involves an effort, an act, an entelechy – for force passes into action by so long as nothing prevents it” (R. S. Woolhouse/Richard Francks (eds.): *Leibniz’s “New System” and Associated Contemporary Texts*, Oxford 1997 (henceforth WF), pp. 22–23; GP IV, 472–473). In *Reflections on the Advancement of True Metaphysics and Particularly on the Nature of Substance Explained by Force* (1694), Leibniz repeats in almost the same words the account above and adds that the certain effort can also be called *conatus* (WF, p. 33). On substantial forms and entelechies, see also Julia Jorati: *Leibniz on Causation and Agency*, Cambridge 2017, pp. 12–13.

6 WF, p. 13; GP IV, 480.

7 WF, p. 13; GP IV, 479.

8 GP IV, 481.

9 On natural machines, see *Monadology*, § 64 and Justin E. H. Smith, *Divine Machines*, Princeton 2011.

10 WF, pp. 17–18; GP IV, 484.

11 GP IV, 484.

their communication, and which alone constitutes the union of soul and body.”¹² In this context Leibniz presents the idea of the soul as a machine:

This hypothesis [of concomitance] is certainly possible. For why could not God give to a substance at the outset a nature or internal force which could produce in it an orderly way (as in spiritual or formal automaton; but a free one, in the case of a substance which is endowed with a share of reason) everything that is going to happen to it, that is to say, all the appearances or expressions it is going to have, and all without the help of any created thing?¹³

He goes on to say that the nature of the substance necessarily requires some change in order to maintain its active force and that the representations of the soul will correspond to the changes of the universe itself. The basic idea of the spiritual machine is thus that the soul or entelechy is an autonomous and spontaneous unity, consisting of internal active force and producing its own perceptions.¹⁴ The entelechy remains the same despite undergoing an infinite number of changes. “Every mind is like a world apart, sufficient to itself, independent of every other created thing, involves the infinite, and expresses the universe, as so it is as lasting, as continuous in its existence and as absolute as the universe of created things itself.”¹⁵

One might wonder what is the reason for these infinite number of changes. In the article itself Leibniz is not clear about this, but in his earlier writings, such as the unpublished *Discourse on Metaphysics* of 1686, and in the first version of the paper from 1694? he gives more elucidations. In the first version he writes:

But in order to understand the nature of substance better, we have to realize that the perfect notion of each substance, although indivisible, involves the infinite, and always expresses all its past and all its future, in such a way that God or he who knows it completely, can see it all in the present.¹⁶

When this is combined with Leibniz’s insistence little earlier that souls can have their origin only in creation and end in annihilation, we can see that Leibniz’s view is that God creates the souls or substantial forms and knows all their states beforehand. However, the souls or spiritual machines produce their own perceptions and act spontaneously and free. But in a sense one can say that the machines follow a lawful series or programme (which include the complete history of the substance)

12 WF, p. 18; GP IV, 484–485.

13 WF pp. 18–19; GP IV, 485. To François Lamy Leibniz argues that there are no limits to God’s power, so he is well capable of making this kind of intelligent machine (GP IV, 584).

14 See also *Theodicy*, § 403 where Leibniz says that every present perception leads to a new perception (GP VI, 356–357). However, in *Monadology* § 19 Leibniz argues that the name “entelechy” is sufficient for simple substances, but for souls more distinct perceptions and memory are required. in § 26–29 he further argues that in this sense animals have souls, but only men are able to know necessary truths which again enable them to perform reflective acts. It should be noted that Leibniz, inspired by Hobbes (although rejecting his materialism), adopted the view that the foundation of the mind is a *conatus* or an endeavor already in the beginning of 1670’s. See Philip Beeley: “Points, Extension, and the Mind-Body Problem”, in: Roger S. Woolhouse (ed.): *Leibniz’s “New System” (1695)*, pp. 15–25, here pp. 21–22.

15 WF, p. 19; GP IV, 485–486. Leibniz clearly anticipated *Monadology* § 6 and § 18 here.

16 WF, p. 25; GP IV, 475.

established by God without being themselves aware of it.¹⁷ In the draft Leibniz says that the body transmits nothing to the soul – rather its states are produced by “the train of the soul’s thoughts and, so to speak, as if by dreams (or rather internal phenomena) which are regular, and so true that they can be accurately predicted.”¹⁸ To Simon Foucher Leibniz argued in a letter already in 1686 that each of the soul’s states is a consequence (although often a free consequence) of its preceding one¹⁹, so this must be what Leibniz had in mind when he described the path or development of the spiritual machine as the train of the soul’s thoughts.²⁰

Our best source to catch Leibniz’s meaning, however, can be found in his unpublished comments to Bayle’s note L of the article ‘Rorarius’ in *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1705?) which are staggeringly modern, almost as from the early days of computer science:

I think of the law of succession of a soul’s modifications not as simple decree of God, but as an effect of an enduring decree within the soul’s nature, like a law inscribed in its substance. When God puts a certain law or programme of future action into an automaton, he is not content merely to impose an order on it as a decree; at the same time he provides the means for its implementation – that is, he inscribes a law in its nature or constitution. He gives it a structure in virtue of the actions which he wants or allows the animal to do are produced naturally and in order. My notion of the soul is the same: I think of it as an immaterial automaton whose internal constitution contains in concentrated form, or represents, a material automaton, and produces in the soul representations of its actions.²¹

Leibniz refers here to the parallel functions of the immaterial and material automata or spiritual and natural machines. In a letter to Foucher, mentioned before, Leibniz sums up this parallelism as follows:

I maintain a concomitance or agreement between what happens in the two different substances, because God created the soul from the outset in such a way that all these things happen to it, or originate from its own resources, without there being any need for it thereafter to accommodate itself to the body, or the body to the soul. With each one following its own laws, the one acting freely, the other without choice, they meet together in the same phenomena.²²

17 Compare *Discourse on Metaphysics*, § 14. As happened with *Discourse*, this part of the *New System* also created criticism. For example, Isaac Jaquelot objected that in the Leibnizian view the actions of the soul are just unfolding of what is encapsulated and concealed. But Leibniz refused to see here a contradiction to freedom, as everything that is distinct in the mind of God is confused and imperfect in men’s mind. Therefore, our inclinations do not necessitate us – Leibniz goes on to argue that the question is not only of God’s foreknowledge, but a metaphysical matter, related to God’s creation where a compossible set of possibilities or sequences of events are actualized (GP VI, 559).

18 WF, p. 27; GP IV, 476–477.

19 A II, 2, 89–90.

20 In *De Affectibus* of 1679 Leibniz also anticipated this view. See Markku Roinila: “Affect and Activity in Leibniz’s *De affectibus*”, in: Adrian Nita (ed.): *Leibniz’s Metaphysics and Adoption of Substantial Forms*, Dordrecht 2015, pp. 73–88, here pp. 81.

21 WF, p. 104; GP IV, 548–549.

22 WF, p. 53; A II, 2, 89–90.

From this we can see that in his private correspondence Leibniz expressed his views long before he published the *New System*, but he continued to develop them. In the remarks to Bayle he clearly sees the two machines to work analogously, following systematically their own law-of-the-series, created by God.²³ However, the spiritual machine is superior to the natural one, as it can produce representations of the body's actions which is not possible for the body itself. A fairly late occurrence of Leibniz's way of thinking can be found in the *Theodicy*, § 52 where he says:

All is therefore certain and determined beforehand in man, as everywhere else, and the human soul is a kind of spiritual automaton, although contingent actions in general and free action in particular are not on that account necessary with an absolute necessity, which would be truly incompatible with contingency.²⁴

From this it is clear that Leibniz did not think in his mature period that the spiritual automaton is necessitated by its law-of-the-series. In the next section we will see how the machine deliberates between different courses of action.

Moral Deliberation

I will now turn to the moral aspects of the spiritual automaton. We saw above that God puts a law or program to the automaton. Leibniz makes it clear in many of his writings that human beings or rational souls as a rule strive for the metaphysical goodness or perfection, as God has created the world for that purpose. In the *New System* he says:

Everything tends to the perfection, not only of the universe in general, but also of these created beings in particular; for they are destined for such a degree of happiness that the universe becomes involved in it, in virtue of the divine goodness, which is communicated to each one to the extent that the sovereign wisdom can allow.²⁵

I will return to the goals of moral action at the end of the paper, but let us now turn to moral deliberations, the ethical choices of the daily life of a free spiritual automaton. The law or the program in Leibnizian substances can be found in their entelechy or substantial form, which, as we saw above, consists of primitive active force. The primitive force is to be distinguished from the secondary force, which is "limitation, accident, or variation of this primitive force."²⁶ So there is the basic striving of the entelechy which is limited or modified by secondary forces which by this account seem to be passive forces in conflict with the active force. Leibniz does not

23 Leibniz illustrates the parallelism with an example of an opera singer reading notes but who sings directly from memory (GP IV, 549–550).

24 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: *Theodicy. Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, ed. by Austin Farrer, trans. by E. M. Huggard (henceforth H), La Salle, IL, 1985, 151; GP VI, 131. Of substantial forms as souls, see Robert Merrihew Adams: *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, New York 1994, pp. 316–320.

25 WF, p. 15; GP IV, 481.

26 First version of *New System*, WF, p. 23; GP 4, 473.

specify this conjecture in the *New System* itself but returns to the theme in *New Essays on Human Understanding*. In the beginning of chapter xxi, book II, § 1 he (Theophilus) starts by saying that

Force would divide into 'entelechy' and 'effort'; for although Aristotle takes 'entelechy' so generally that it comprises all action and all effort, it seems to me more suitable to apply it to *primary acting forces*, and 'effort' to *derivative ones* [...] when an entelechy – i. e. primary or substantial endeavour – is accompanied by perception, it is a soul.²⁷

In § 5 of the same chapter the discussion turns to moral issues. When Philalethes, representing Locke, argues that the active power in the soul is the will and the actual exercise of that power is volition, Theophilus agrees and adds: "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."²⁸

Leibniz also adds that any endeavour results in action unless it is prevented. This applies not only to volitions, but voluntary movements of our bodies as well due to the pre-established harmony.

In addition to these efforts related to the will, there are also others which arise from minute perceptions and of which we are not aware of, unlike our volitions. Leibniz calls them appetitions.²⁹ These inclinations arise from confused perceptions and are related to the passive elements in the operations of the soul which Leibniz also addressed in his remarks to Bayle's Note L to 'Rorarius'. He says that "Our perceptions are never perfectly uniform, as a straight line is; they are always clothed in something sensible, which involves something confused, even though it is itself clear."³⁰ In the same way our perceptions of pleasantness and unpleasantness might be misguided – we get a feeling which is "clear, but confused because its sources are not perceived."³¹ Thus the perceptions of the spiritual automaton that are produced are in very many cases not distinct and therefore prone to errors. The confused elements in the striving of the automaton can lead to moral errors which bring about displeasure and sorrow.

To return to *New Essays*, in book II, chapter xxi, § 63 he says that "often one does not so much as raise the question of whether the future good is preferable – one acts solely on impressions, with no thought of bringing them under scrutiny."³²

27 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: *New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, Cambridge 1996 (henceforth RB), RB & A VI, 6, 169.

28 RB & A VI, 6, 172. Compare also NE II, xxi, § 19 where Theophilus argues that we can only will what we think good and the more developed the faculty of understanding is, the better are the choices of will (A VI, 6, 180).

29 A VI, 6, 173.

30 WF, p. 105; GP IV, 550.

31 Ibid.

32 RB & A VI, 6, 203. In NE II, xxi, § 12 Leibniz describes them as "flying thoughts", involuntary thoughts of moral unease which come to us both externally (objects affecting our senses) or internally (traces left by previous perceptions which continue to mingle with new perceptions) (A VI, 6, 177).

The impressions or confused images Leibniz discusses in *New Essays* are also addressed in his letter to Sophie Charlotte in the same year. Leibniz argues that the spiritual machine strives for the good instinctively, without always thinking clearly:

Let us say that everything in bodies happens mechanically, or in accordance with laws of motion, and that everything in the soul happens morally, or in accordance with perceived good or evil. So that even in our instinctive or involuntary actions, where it seems only the body plays a part, there is in the soul a desire for good or an aversion to evil which directs it, even though our reflection is not able to pick it out in the confusion[...].³³

The distinction between intended, conscious volitions and instinctive, confused striving for pleasure features in NE II, xxi, § 35 as well. Leibniz describes the struggle between flesh and spirit as a conflict “between different endeavours – those that come from confused thoughts and those that come from distinct ones.”³⁴

In NE I, iii Leibniz gives a more extensive exposition of instinctive knowledge he wrote about to Sophie Charlotte. I have discussed this topic in detail elsewhere³⁵, so it suffices to say here that Leibniz holds in § 1 that morality has indemonstrable principles of which one of the most important, but indemonstrable principle is that we should pursue joy (or pleasure of the mind) and avoid sorrow (displeasure of the mind). This is not known by reason but by an instinct.³⁶ The instinct is related to confused perceptions (as argued in I, ii, § 3–4). In the latter point he says: “This is how we are led to act humanely: by instinct because it pleases us, and by reason because it is right.”³⁷

To recap, there are two different kinds of impulses that affect the spiritual automaton: those that come from distinct volitions towards the good which are following the recommendations of the intellect and of which we are aware of, and those inclinations or appetitions which are related to confused perceptions and our instinctive drive towards the pleasure.³⁸ The multiplicity of these various inclinations in the mind gives rise to the fact that men are often unsure of their real motivations and consequently the spiritual machine is not always progressing to the optimal direction. In NE II, xxi, § 13 Leibniz describes the situation as follows:

If we do not always notice the reason which determines us, or rather by which we determine ourselves, it is because we are as little able to be aware of all the workings of our mind and of its usually confused and imperceptible thoughts as we are to sort out all the mechanisms which nature puts to work in bodies.³⁹

In § 39 he characterizes it as a constant conflict:

33 WF, p. 224; A I, 23, 347.

34 RB & A VI, 6, 186.

35 See Markku Roinila: “Common Notions and Instincts as Sources of Moral Knowledge in Leibniz’s *New Essays on Human Understanding*”, in: *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 8/1 (2019), pp. 141–170.

36 A VI, 6, 89.

37 RB & A VI, 6, 90–92.

38 Leibniz argues in NE II, xxi, § 41 that pleasure is to be understood as a sense of perfection.

39 RB & A VI, 6, 178.

Various perceptions and inclinations combine to produce a complete volition: it is the result of the conflict amongst them [...] all these perceptions are either new sensations or the lingering images of past ones. The eventual result of all these impulses is the prevailing effort, which makes a full volition.⁴⁰

This conflict determines the direction that the mind or the spiritual automaton proceeds to: “Everything which [...] impinges on us weighs in the balance and contributes to determining a resultant direction, almost as in mechanics, so that without some prompt diversion we will be unable to stop it.”⁴¹ So the determination of the multiple changes in the spiritual automaton seems to take place almost mechanically, depending on the balance of the different impulses and the forces behind them. Each moral deliberation is a result of a conflict of various perceptions and inclinations. In *Theodicy*, § 325 he returns to the topic, describing the soul’s balance as follows:

Nevertheless, as very often there are diverse courses to choose from, one might, instead of the balance, compare the soul with a force that puts forth an effort on various sides simultaneously, but which acts only at the spot where action is easiest or there is least resistance.⁴²

This late account suggests that Leibniz continued to think of the soul along the lines of the *New System*: the changes in the spiritual automaton are a result of two kinds of endeavours which are in conflict with each other.⁴³ The passive derivative forces limit the primitive active force of the entelechy, and the final decision is the result of this conflict. Leibniz is even clearer in *Theodicy*, § 87 where he says: “I have shown also how one may suppose that that soul is a primitive force which is modified and varied by derivative forces or qualities, and exercised in actions.”⁴⁴

Moral Identity

We have seen that the spiritual machine remains the same despite undergoing an infinite number of changes. This applies also to the moral life of the machine. In the *New System* Leibniz first makes it clear that the spiritual machine has a (personal) identity: “By means of the soul or form, there is in us a true unity which corresponds to what we call ‘I’; this can have no place in artificial machines or in a simple mass of matter, however organized it may be [...].”⁴⁵ He goes on to argue

40 RB & A VI, 6, 192.

41 § 40; RB & A VI, 6, 193.

42 H, 322; GP VI, 309. Compare this account to NE II, xxi, § 66 where Leibniz illustrates this kind of assessment to a rectangle consisting of two different estimates (length, breadth).

43 The same is true to machines of nature or bodies. See Leibniz’s letter to De Volder 20. 6. 1703 (AG 176) and Pauline Phemister: “Can Perceptions and Motions be Harmonized?”, in Roger S. Woolhouse (ed.): *Leibniz’s New System* (1695), pp. 141–168, here p. 147–149.

44 H, 170; GP VI, 150.

45 WF, p. 16; GP IV, 482.

that the spiritual machine is spontaneous and free to act, despite the fact that often our decisions take place as if mechanically as we saw in the previous section:

We are determined only in appearance [...] this...puts into a marvellous light the immortality of our soul and the perfectly unbroken conservation of our individuality, which is perfectly well-regulated by its own nature and sheltered from all external accidents, however it may appear to the contrary [...].⁴⁶

Leibniz sees the rational minds as self-sufficient unities or little gods as we saw above: “Every mind is like a world apart, sufficient to itself, independent of every other created being, involves the infinite, and expresses the universe, and so it is as lasting, as continuous in its existence and as absolute as the universe of created things itself.”⁴⁷

The essential part of the moral identity of the spiritual machines is that as they express the universe, that is, all other substances. They are part of the creation, and as they are minds, they are part of the city of God as its citizens. Leibniz gives a good account of this in his unpublished comments to Bayle’s Note H of ‘Rorarius’ and returns to this later on in many occasions as we shall see later on:

Because these rational substances have a double status or position: one physical, like all animals, as a consequence of their bodily mechanism, and the other moral, as a result of which they are in society with God, as citizens of the city of God. This means that they conserve not only their substance, but also their personality and the knowledge of who they are.⁴⁸

But let us now proceed to an important earlier letter to Sophie Charlotte from 1702, also known as *What is Independent of Sense and of Matter*. There Leibniz presents his new thoughts about the relationship between the mind’s perception in general and its perception of one’s activity:

This thought of myself, who perceives sensible objects, and of my own action which results from it, adds something to the objects of sense. To think of some colour and to consider that I think of it – these two thoughts are very different [...] It is the consideration of myself [...] which provides me with other concepts in metaphysics [...] even with those of logic and ethics.⁴⁹

From this we can see that personal identity is closely related to apperception on the other hand and ethics on the other. While the spiritual machine is a moral machine, deliberating constantly, it is also a rational machine which is conscious of at least some of its decisions and actions. This theme is also the topic of NE II, xxvii. He says in § 6 that a single individual substance can retain its identity only by preservation of the same soul, for the body is in continual flux.⁵⁰ In § 9 Leibniz makes a

46 WF, p. 19; GP IV, 485.

47 Ibid.

48 WF, p. 75; GP IV, 528. On the relationship between moral and metaphysical identity, see Samuel Scheffler: “Leibniz on Personal Identity and Moral Personality”, in: *Studia Leibnitiana*, 8/2 (1976), pp. 219–240.

49 L 549; GP VI, 502.

50 A VI, 6, 232–233.

strict distinction between rational and non-rational animals or between spiritual machines and natural machines:

Consciousness or the sense of I proves moral or personal identity. And that is how I distinguish the incessancy of a beast's soul from the immortality of the soul of man: both of them preserve real, physical identity; but it is consonant with the rules of divine providence that in man's case the soul should also retain a moral identity which is apparent to ourselves, so as to constitute the same person, which is therefore sensitive to punishments and rewards.⁵¹

In addition to apperception, moral identity is here connected to the law-of-the-series, the substantial form which includes the complete history of the substance. As rational souls are citizens of the City of God, the Divine judge has the power to punish or reward them. Moral identity is needed for the moral agents to be able to systematically advance God's purposes, the increase of metaphysical goodness or perfection. For these reasons, Leibniz argues forcefully against Locke that continuous moral identity is the foundation of moral philosophy:

To discover one's own moral identity unaided, it is sufficient that between one state and a neighbouring [...] one there is a mediating bond of consciousness, even if this has a jump or forgotten interval mixed into it. Thus, if an illness has interrupted the continuity of my bond of consciousness, so that I did not know how I had arrived at my present state even though I could remember things further back, the testimony of others could fill in the gap in my recollection. I could even be punished on this testimony if I had done some deliberate wrong during an interval which this illness had made me forget a short time later.⁵²

In addition to consciousness, there is a more substantial foundation for one's moral identity, which is of course the substantial form we have been discussing all along.⁵³ But Leibniz also introduces a new element to the idea of an entelechy presented in the *New System*, namely that the history of the spiritual automaton is largely founded on minute, unconscious perceptions. In NE II, xxvii, § 14 Theophilus says:

An immaterial being or spirit cannot 'be stripped of all' perceptions of its past existence. It retains impressions of everything which has previously happened to it, and it even has presentiments of everything which will happen to it; but these states of the mind are mostly too minute to be distinguishable and for one to be aware of them, although they may perhaps grow some day. It is this continuity and interconnection of perceptions which make someone really the same individual; but our awareness – i. e. when we are aware of the past states of mind – prove a moral identity as well, and make the real identity appear.⁵⁴

So the continuity of the moral identity is based on the minute perception of which we are not always aware of, but it is there, in the metaphysical level of the substantial form. In the *New System* Leibniz discusses only of perceptions in general, but in the *New Essays* he fully employs his new innovation, the minute perceptions, in explaining the gaps in our memory.

51 RB & A VI, 6, 236. Personal identity is framed very similarly in *Theodicy*, § 89.

52 RB & A VI, 6, 236.

53 See NE Preface, A VI, 6, 58.

54 RB & A VI, 6, 239.

Goals of Moral Action

We have seen that the spiritual machine is driven by a law-of-the-series which determines its history. Leibnizian history has always a beginning and an end (as God creates and annihilates the monads), so it is obvious that one can tell a developmental history of each spiritual machine. When this history is taken as a series of moral deliberations by someone with a moral identity, one can ask what one's ethical goals are. It should be noted, however, that Leibniz's views of this topic are not limited to *New System* and the subsequent texts, but are already present in his very early writings, such as *Elementa juris naturalis* (1669–1671). Be that as it may, I will show how the picture of moral ends given in *New System* is compatible with Leibniz's later texts, although I have to be very brief here.

So let us start with the *New System*. After arguing that souls are self-sufficient Leibniz says that all spiritual automats are essential for the purposes of God and his creation and that they are in this sense more important to the pre-established harmony than machines of nature:

We should conclude that each mind should always play its part in the way most fitted to contribute to the perfection of the society of all minds which constitutes their moral union in the City of God [...] What is all the more reasonable about this is that bodies are made only for minds which are capable of entering into association with God, and of celebrating his Glory. Thus as soon as we see that this Theory of agreements is possible, we see also that it is the most reasonable, and that it gives a wonderful sense of the harmony of the universe and the perfection of the works of God.⁵⁵

This line of thought is common in Leibniz's later writings. For example, In *Mondatology*, § 83 he says that while “the souls in general are living mirrors or images of the universe of creatures, the minds are also images of divinity itself, capable of knowing the system of universe.”⁵⁶ Again, men are little gods and can imitate the actions of God within their limited abilities.⁵⁷ Part of this is that rational souls can grasp the purposes of God's actions who strives to promote perfection. In the first draft of the *New System* Leibniz positions himself as a supporter of teleological views, even in philosophy of nature which goes against the mechanists of his day:

I even hold that the consideration of goodness, or of final causes, although to some extent it involves morality, is still usefully employed in the explanation of natural things, since the author of nature acts by the principle of order and of perfection, and with a wisdom which could not be surpassed.⁵⁸

So in the *New System* Leibniz presents himself as a follower of the scholastic doctrine of final causes and substantial forms, although his conception of them is very

⁵⁵ WF, pp. 18–19; GP IV, 484–485.

⁵⁶ AG, 233; GP VI, 621.

⁵⁷ See also *Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason*, § 14. It is quite in line with this thought that in NE II, xxi, § 71 Leibniz defines action as an endeavour towards perfection.

⁵⁸ WF, p. 22; GP IV, 472.

different from Aristotle, as we have seen.⁵⁹ The moral union in the city of God between minds and God, their creator, is of course a standard account in Leibniz's later texts.⁶⁰ However, sometimes both in the *New System* and in these later texts, such as *Monadology*, Leibniz discusses spirits (*esprit*) rather than spiritual automata/machines or minds.⁶¹

The principal difference of these later texts in comparison to the *New System* is their emphasis on theology and especially God's role as a supreme divine judge, who can reward the virtuous and punish the wicked.⁶² In the *New System* the theme is mentioned in passing in section 5,⁶³ but the principal concern is to present the idea of the pre-established harmony between spiritual and natural machines. In the *New Essays* the theme is even less pronounced, but that is understandable, given the context of the work.⁶⁴

Conclusions

We have seen that Leibniz in the *New System* and related comments and letters to Bayle and others largely presented or anticipated the moral views which can be found in his later texts. The continuity of his views concerning the moral aspects of the spiritual machine is evident although he seldom discusses souls in terms of a machine later on. The ethical themes under discussion were featured in the *New System* only in passing and are developed in more detail in later correspondence or in longer texts, deliberation especially in *New Essays* and *Theodicy*, moral identity in *New Essays* and the ends of ethics in more popular presentations of Leibniz's metaphysics, such as the *Monadology* and *Principles of Nature and Grace*.

There are some differences, however, concerning the details of these themes in the *New System* and in the later texts. For example, there are significant differences between epistemological views and the way theological aspects of Leibniz's metaphysics are presented.

In 1695 Leibniz did not yet include minute, unconscious perceptions as part of his epistemological vocabulary – in the *New System* he discusses perceptions and internal perceptions (*perceptions internes*) which are related to the knowledge of "I" and moral identity, that is, apperceptions. In § 14 he clearly means confused

59 See also *Monadology*, § 79 where Leibniz says that souls act according to final causes while bodies act according to laws of efficient causes.

60 See *Monadology*, § 84 & § 87, *Principles of Nature and Grace*, § 15 and *Theodicy*, § 118 & § 146.

61 *Monadology*, § 19 & § 82, although in § 18 he uses the term incorporeal automata. See also *Theodicy*, § 87.

62 See *Discourse on Metaphysics*, § 36, *Monadology*, § 89–90 and *Theodicy*, Preface (GP VI, 27–28).

63 GP IV, 479–480.

64 See, however, NE I, ii, § 12 (A VI, 6, 96) and IV, iii, § 27 (A VI, 389).

perceptions when he discusses the pre-established harmony between bodily functions and states of the mind, but he does yet not have a term for it.⁶⁵ Later on, the minute perceptions have a much larger role in Leibniz's epistemology and philosophy of mind, as can be seen in Leibniz's comments on Bayle's article "Rorarius" and in the *New Essays*.⁶⁶

In the *New System* God is presented rather as a creator of the spiritual and natural machines and the pre-established harmony than as a Divine judge or as a father-like character, as is the case in the *Discourse on Metaphysics* or in the *Monadology*.⁶⁷

It is also interesting that in the *New System* Leibniz discusses the machine as progressing or changing in a sense automatically. In the *New Essays* his basic view seems to be the same, but he discusses instinctive behaviour in the first book and deliberation in the framework of endeavours in the second book, also maintaining that we are in a sense acting automatically when we are not paying attention to our actions. While the same picture is given in *Monadology* § 28 and in *Theodicy* § 325, in *New Essays* Leibniz gives a much more detailed view of deliberation and the powers that affect it in book II, chapter xxi. So in this sense one can see Leibniz as supplementing the views expressed in the *New System*.

It is often argued that Leibniz's ethical views were formed in early 1670's, although he continued to develop them.⁶⁸ In my view, this is true, but one has to distinguish between three different, but closely related streams of Leibnizian moral philosophy. One originates in his work with natural law and is related to practical ethics, especially disinterested love (as can be seen in *Elementa juris naturalis* of 1669–1671 and much later in his participation in the controversy concerning pure love between Fénelon and Bossuet and others). Another one is theological which is especially related to divine justice and presented in an early form in *Confessio philosophi* of 1672/1673 and finally in the *Theodicy*. The third stream can be traced to *Theoria motus abstracti* of 1671 which was heavily influenced by Hobbes. There Leibniz argues that every body is a momentary mind, affected by *conatus*.⁶⁹ This dynamical and metaphysical orientation of the mind can be found also in *De Affectibus* of 1679 and finally in a mature form in the *New System* in 1695. As we have seen, there the dynamics of the spiritual automaton is related to Leibniz's ethical perfectionism which he develops in his later writings, especially *New Essays*, and which he shares with Spinoza despite many of their differences.⁷⁰

65 See GP IV, 484–485.

66 I have argued elsewhere that the minute perceptions have a substantial role in understanding the unsuccessful discussion concerning sudden change between Bayle and Leibniz. Markku Roinila: "Leibniz, Bayle and the Controversy on Sudden Change", in: Giovanni Scarafili/Leah Gruenpeter Gold (eds.): *Paradoxes of Conflicts*, Dordrecht 2016, pp. 29–40.

67 Compare *Discourse on Metaphysics*, § 3–4 and *Monadology*, § 84.

68 See, for example, John Hostler: *Leibniz's Moral Philosophy*, New York 1975, p. 9.

69 A VI, 2, 266. See also Leibniz's letter to Hobbes, July 1670 (A II, 1, 58).

70 See Valtteri Viljanen: *Spinoza's Geometry of Power*, Cambridge 2011, p. 82.