

## Leibniz's Model Of Creation And His Doctrine Of Substance

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The subject of creation has long been recognized as central to Leibniz's philosophy.<sup>1</sup> In general, the tendency has been to understand Leibniz's view of the creation of the universe as the actualization of a set of possible substances which stand together in a relation of pre-established harmony.<sup>2</sup> From there, scholarly interest generally seems to shift to questions concerning Leibniz's views on such related subjects as, e.g. the reasons behind God's choice to create one set of possibles rather than another, or the nature - necessary or contingent - of the relation between the possibles which God creates or actualizes. Undoubtedly these are all areas of serious and absorbing interest. Still, one concern which appears to have been overlooked is the quite literal question of how Leibniz views God's action in the creation of possibles in the first place. What does God actually do when he creates? What does this actualization of possibles actually amount to? In what follows I wish to detail the specifics of Leibniz's account of God's creation/actualization of the world. My main purpose in doing this is to draw attention to a little-noted but important feature of Leibniz's metaphysics. This is that Leibniz's view of creation is one which he uses specifically and intentionally to support his well-known view that existing things have their own force or power which is the source of their activity.

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Rescher's comment is representative: "Leibniz, more than any other modern philosopher, took seriously the idea of a creation of the universe, giving it a centrally important place in his system" (*Leibniz: An Introduction to his Philosophy* [Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1979], 13). A concise and clear discussion of some of the main issues attending Leibniz's account of creation can be found in G.H.R. Parkinson's *Logic and Reality in Leibniz's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 98-110. Please note the following abbreviations for works cited below: AT = *Oeuvres de Descartes*, eds. Adam, C. and Tannery, P. (Paris: Vrin/CNRS, 1966-76); Bod. LHS = E. Bodemann, *Die Leibniz-Handschriften der königlichen öffentlichen Bibliothek zu Hannover* (Hannover, 1895); CSM = *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); DMR = Nicolas Malebranche, *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*, ed. N. Jolley, trans. D. Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); G = *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. C.I. Gerhardt (Berlin & Halle, 1875-90); L = Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. & trans. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1989); LO = Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search After Truth/Elucidations of the Search After Truth*, ed. & trans. T.M. Lennon & P.J. Olscamp (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980); OC = *Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche*, ed. André Robinet (Paris: J. Vrin/CNRS 1958-1984); R = *Malebranche et Leibniz: Relations personnelles*, ed. André Robinet (Paris: J. Vrin, 1955).

<sup>2</sup> This is the standard account. There is at least one other account, according to which possible substances somehow actualize themselves by striving toward existence. For a useful discussion, cf. Catherine Wilson, *Leibniz's Metaphysics. A Historical and Comparative Study* (Manchester: University Press, 1989), 275ff.

There is plenty of evidence in Leibniz's writings that he has an account of God's creation of the universe which he intentionally employs to explain how substances are inherently active beings. This is especially apparent whenever Leibniz discusses the causal doctrine of his chief metaphysical rival, Malebranche, whose occasionalism directly opposes Leibniz's view that things possess their own force of action.<sup>3</sup> For Malebranche, the actions of things do not derive from any force within things themselves, but derive instead from the divine will. In his criticism of occasionalism and in his arguments for his own view of substances as inherently active beings, Leibniz frequently rests his argument on a certain view he has of how God creates the universe. For instance, consider how he elucidates his criticism of occasionalism to Arnauld: "God first created the soul in such a way that ordinarily he has no need of these changes; and what happens to the soul is born to it in its own depths, without its having to adapt itself subsequently to the body, any more than the body to the soul."<sup>4</sup> Against occasionalism, Leibniz claims that the activity of things arises 'in their own depths,' by which he means that the activity of things is inherent to them. Note, however, that this occurs in virtue of the fact that "God first created the soul in [a certain] way."

Other passages bear out this connection between God's creative act and the fact that substances are active beings. To Foucher, Leibniz remarks that "God, having at the outset created the soul in such a way," ensures that all its actions are born to it from its own depths.<sup>5</sup> In unpublished notes on Bayle's *Dictionary*, Leibniz further notes that "[i]t is necessary that he [i.e. God] gives [corporeal substances] the means" to obey the soul.<sup>6</sup> Replying more formally to Bayle he claims that "all that happens must also be explained through the natures which God gives to things."<sup>7</sup> In a letter to Basnage Leibniz speaks of "the natural laws which God has given to things at the outset,"<sup>8</sup> and he claims that "God

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<sup>3</sup> Malebranche was regarded as the chief occasionalist of Leibniz's day. It is worth noting that in his critique of occasionalism Leibniz seeks to undermine the system of the philosopher whom, on the central metaphysical issue of the source or cause of the actions of created beings, he regards as his chief if not only rival. Roughly midway through his career Leibniz puts it to the Cartesian Burcher de Volder (in undated reply from 1699) that the only real contenders, in terms of providing an account of the metaphysics of causation or the ontological basis of the laws of motion, are his [i.e. Leibniz's] own doctrine of the pre-established harmony on the one hand, and the Cartesian doctrine of occasionalism on the other: "the rules of force and action cannot be derived from these notions [of matter, motion and substance held by the Cartesians] and we must either take refuge in a *deus ex machina* or hold that there is something higher in bodies themselves" (L 323, G II 195). The point is made again five years later, in a letter dated June 30, 1704 (L 538, G II 271). It is not surprising that Leibniz chooses the discussion of occasionalism as his opportunity to argue for force in substance. He himself believes that the main difference between his own system and the system of occasional causes concerns the issue of substance. In a letter to l'Hospital (14/24 June 1695) he claims that his own system differs from Malebranche's "because of the notion I have of Substance" (OC XIX 625). Specifically, there is a force of action in Leibniz's substance, whereas there is no such force in Malebranche's substance.

<sup>4</sup> *Leibniz to Arnauld*, 4/14 July 1686 (Mason 65, G II 58).

<sup>5</sup> *Leibniz to Foucher*, 1686 @ 232, G I 382-83). In *On Nature Itself* Leibniz writes: "I consider it sufficient that the mechanism of the world is built *with such wisdom* that these wonderful things depend on the progression of the machine itself, organic things particularly, as I believe, evolving by a certain predetermined order" (L 499, G IV 505).

<sup>6</sup> Sketch of Leibniz's examination of Bayle's article "Rorarius", R 323, G IV 533.

<sup>7</sup> "Clarification of Bayle's Difficulties", L 494, G IV 520.

<sup>8</sup> R 313, G III 122.

gives to each one a nature whose laws themselves bear these changes "<sup>9</sup> That is, God creates things 'in such a way', i.e. he gives them a 'nature', 'means', 'natural law', etc. that renders them active substances. Clearly, then, all of these passages point to the idea that a certain vision of creation underlies Leibniz's doctrine of substances as active beings.

## I. Introduction

Leibniz's model of creation and its connection to his doctrine of active substance are both subjects which feature prominently in *On Nature Itself* (1698), and for this reason I shall focus mainly on that work.<sup>10</sup> One of Leibniz's special concerns there is to evaluate critically the view of those - the occasionalists in general but Johann Christoph Sturm in particular - who deny that substances possess their own causal power.<sup>11</sup> When it comes to the occasionalists, Leibniz's main point of disagreement concerns the notion of *force*. He believes that it is a force (*vis*) within created beings which primarily explains the activity of those beings.<sup>12</sup> That is, because created substances possess their own force of action, their actions can be distinguished from the actions of God.<sup>13</sup>

This view stands in stark contrast to the position of the occasionalists, who explain the activity of things ultimately with reference to supernatural or divine rather than natural power. The most well-known of the occasionalists, Malebranche, agrees with Leibniz that force serves a causal role in the activity of created things, but - and this is the vital difference - the cornerstone of his occasionalism is that causation is a divine prerogative. Therefore force or genuine efficacy is in God, not in nature. As he expresses this in respect of physical things, "the motive force of a body is but the efficacy of the will of God, who conserves it in successively different places."<sup>14</sup> Leibniz's position, by contrast, is expressed in the *Discourse on Metaphysics* in the dictum 'actions belong to things' [*actiones sunt suppositorum* ].<sup>15</sup> That is, the force behind a thing's action is in and

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent discussion of this work which raises many of the themes to be addressed below, cf. Wilson *op. cit.*, 165-73.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. R 310ff., and Loemker's "Introduction" (L 498). Malebranche and Sturm are mentioned throughout this work, and in Leibniz's private writings of the period the ideas of Malebranche and Sturm are often regarded as being of a piece. Consider, for example, *Leibniz to Schulenburg*, 17 May, 1698 @ 322). Cf. *Leibniz to de Volder*, 10 January 1703 (L 532, G II 257); and Leibniz's analysis of Lamy's *On Self-Knowledge*, 30 November 1702 @ 374, G IV 589). For a brief discussion of the relation of Leibniz's early philosophy to the philosophy of Sturm, cf. C. Mercer and R.C. Sleigh, 'Metaphysics: The Early Period to the *Discourse on Metaphysics*' (*The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, ed. N. Jolley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 69-70

<sup>12</sup> Leibniz writes (to Jaquelot, on 22 March 1703): "Motion is not the cause, but the effect or result of force " @ 359, G III 457); cf. *Discourse* §18 (G IV 444). Typical of Malebranche's position is the following in the *Search After Truth*: " since motion and its communication is a general effect on which all others depend, it is necessary in order to be a philosopher, to have recourse to God, who is the universal cause, because His will is the motor force of bodies " (LO 662, OC III 213).

<sup>13</sup> *Discourse on Metaphysics* §8 (G IV 432-33).

<sup>14</sup> DMR 117, OC XII 161.

<sup>15</sup> *Discourse on Metaphysics* §8 (G IV 432).

belongs to that thing. For Malebranche, on the contrary, actions belong not to things but to God. Where Leibniz affirms that a moving body's action belongs to that body (and thus that body possesses its own force of action), Malebranche responds: "But what is a moving body? It is a body transported by a divine action. The action which transports it can also transport that body which it meets, if it is extended to it. Who doubts this? However, this action - this motive force - does not in any way belong to body."<sup>16</sup> For Malebranche, a thing's actions belong to God rather than to the thing itself because the force behind a thing's action is nothing other than God's will: "By whatever effort of mind I make," he writes, "I can find force, efficacy, or power only in the will of the infinitely perfect Being."<sup>17</sup> Precisely for this reason Malebranche holds that to ascribe force to created substances is - theologically speaking - a form of paganism: it is ascribing divine qualities to finite, created things.<sup>18</sup> It is no surprise, therefore, that Leibniz begins his discussion of occasionalism in *On Nature Itself* with a consideration of the question whether ascribing force or nature to created beings 'reeks of paganism.'<sup>19</sup>

In many respects, Leibniz's debate with the occasionalists over the status of force in things is a debate about the ultimate adequacy of the emerging mechanical picture of nature. Leibniz contrasts his own world view, the pre-established harmony, with the purely mechanical view either of those who disregard as unimportant the question of dynamics, i.e. of nature's force or motor, or of those who place this force or motor outside of nature.<sup>20</sup> Against either position Leibniz is out to demonstrate the necessity that nature

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<sup>16</sup> DMR VII 119, OC XII 164.

<sup>17</sup> LO 658, OC III 204. Pierre Bayle is one of the first to appreciate this central occasionalist tenet, as can be seen in the *Nouvelles de la république des lettres*, art. III, 1389-90.

<sup>18</sup> "We therefore admit something divine in all the bodies around us when we posit forms, faculties, qualities, virtues, or real beings capable of producing certain effects through the force of their nature; and thus we insensibly adopt the opinions of the pagans because of our respect for their philosophy" (LO 446, OC II 309). The most notorious of the pagans is, of course, Aristotle, who "talks a lot and says nothing" (LO 440, OC II 300). For Malebranche the supposed force or nature of created substances, being nothing other than the divine will, is indeed best understood that way. Consider: "It is clearer to say that God created the world by His will than it is to say He did so by His power. The latter word is a term from logic; it evokes no distinct and particular idea in the mind" (LO 640, OC III 175). Metaphysically speaking, Malebranche is following Descartes' lead, when Descartes identifies God's volitions with the laws of nature, or, more generally, nature itself. Cf. Meditation III (AT VII 80). For Malebranche, force considered in these pagan terms is, in strict Cartesian terms, an obscure and confused idea, or a mere term of logic. To this group of obscure and confused ideas belong "these lovely words: genus, species, act, potency, nature, form, faculties, qualities, cause in itself, and accidental cause" (LO 443, OC II 305). Compare Descartes' use of 'nature' as "simply a label which depends on my thought" (AT VII 85, CSM II 59); and compare further especially Hume: "I begin by observing that the terms of efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, necessity, connexion, and productive quality, are all nearly synonymous" (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Part III, Book I, Sect. xiv [Selby-Bigge edition, 157]). Cf. L 519, G II 183, for Leibniz's response (of 23 June 1699) to de Volder's view that these terms are but terms of logic.

<sup>19</sup> L 498, G IV 504.

<sup>20</sup> Leibniz's opening statement of the pre-established harmony reads: "I consider it sufficient that the mechanism of the world is built with such wisdom that these wonderful things depend on the progression of the machine itself, organic things particularly, as I believe, evolving by a certain predetermined order" (L 499, G IV 505). There is more to this statement than a cursory reading might suggest. Leibniz is talking about the world's *mechanism*, and the way he puts it, the intelligence or wisdom behind the machine involves extra-mechanical considerations, so the mechanism here is much more than a mechanism. His

itself contain the force for or basis of the changes that go on within it. In the first instance he gives Robert Boyle's work of the same name only 'superficial approval', for if nature is regarded solely along mechanical lines (in the manner of Boyle's work), and if first or metaphysical principles are not distinguished from "derivative matters", then "mechanical explanations of natural things" are "carried to abuse."<sup>21</sup> The abuse which Leibniz considers Boyle to perpetrate is in respect of nature itself: nature is left dangling without any metaphysical support, and matters which are primary or substantial are rendered 'derivative' or merely phenomenal. Leibniz discerns the same abuse in the second instance, in "the opinion of those who deny a true and proper activity to created things." Those listed in this regard are Malebranche, Robert Fludd, and the early occasionalists Cordemoy and La Forge.<sup>22</sup>

This, then, is how Leibniz draws the line at the outset of *On Nature Itself* between his own position and that of the occasionalists on the issue of the ultimate status of nature. The dispute does not take place on the level of physics. Rather, the dispute is metaphysical; it has to do with the reality behind or the cause of motion, not motion itself.<sup>23</sup> Occasionalists agree with Leibniz that there is something involved in the actions of things which is beyond mere mechanism. They also agree that this 'something' is real, in the sense that it is a metaphysical source or origin. The disagreement between the two approaches is over the status and location of this source or origin, and consequently over the ultimate reality of the mechanism itself. Leibniz searches within nature for the basis of mechanical relations, while Malebranche looks to God. And where Leibniz finds the autonomy of nature in force, Malebranche finds nature's dependency on the divine will. Obviously, the most important philosophical questions concern the reasons we have for accepting one route (inward to nature) rather than the other (outward to God). Let us now see how Leibniz employs a certain doctrine of creation specifically to support the path inward to nature.

## II. Leibniz's 'Mechanical' Or 'Vestige' Model Of God's Creative Act

The path inward to nature is paved by Leibniz in part by the doctrine of creation which figures prominently in *On Nature Itself*. The essence of Leibniz's position is captured in the idea that God creates things in such a way that they are capable of carrying out his decrees. Leibniz's main argument is that if things were not capable of carrying out God's decrees, God would lack the wherewithal to effect his decrees.

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phrasing is paradoxical in that it indicates that mechanical genius or intelligence is *more* than mechanical genius.

<sup>21</sup> L 499, G IV 505.

<sup>22</sup> L 502, G IV 509. For the differences between the doctrines Cordemoy, La Forge, and Malebranche, cf. R. A. Watson's *The Downfall of Cartesianism 1673-1712*, ch. V.

<sup>23</sup> By the time Leibniz writes *On Nature Itself* in 1698, Malebranche (for example) has largely accepted Leibniz's laws of motion. Cf. *Malebranche to P. Berrand*, 23 December 1698 (OC XIX 653). For a useful recent discussion on the relation of physics to philosophy in Leibniz's thought, cf. D. Garber's 'Leibniz: Physics and Philosophy', in Jolley, ed., *op. cit.*, 270-352.

Therefore, the capacity for action on the part of created substances is a consequence of God's having to create in a certain way in order to realize his decrees:

[Sturm] admits that motions now taking place result by virtue of an eternal law once established by God, which law he then calls a volition and command, and that no new command or new volition of God is then necessary I ask whether this volition or command, this divine law once established, has bestowed upon things only an extrinsic denomination or whether it has truly conferred upon them some created impression which endures with them, an internal law from which their actions and passions follow The former view seems to be that of the authors of the system of occasional causes, especially of the ingenious Mr. Malebranche; the latter is the accepted view, and I believe the truest. For since this command in the past no longer exists at present, it can accomplish nothing unless it has left some subsistent effect behind which has lasted and operated until now, and whoever thinks otherwise renounces any distinct explanation of things, if I am any judge, for if that which is remote in time and space can operate here and now without any intermediary, anything can be said to follow from anything else with equal right.<sup>24</sup>

In this passage, Leibniz clearly distinguishes his own position on how God creates from the position of Sturm. Sturm's position is effectively the same as the occasionalist's, insofar as both regard motion simply as God's continual creation of things in differing spatio-temporal relations to one another.<sup>25</sup> For Sturm and, e.g. Malebranche, natural motion is the result or effect of the only true or real cause, namely God's will; thus Leibniz aptly characterizes the fundamental tenet of occasionalism when he claims that for Sturm the law governing nature's motion is a divine command or volition, and an eternal one at that.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, it is important to note that Leibniz's quarrel with occasionalism is not with there being a divine law or command "once established", but with the very nature of this law and its effects. The main contrast is between occasionalism's view of the divine law or command, which Leibniz says involves the 'extrinsic denomination' of nature, and Leibniz's view of the divine law or command, which involves a created 'enduring impression' upon nature. Leibniz's idea is that God bestows upon things an enduring impression, law, force or power. 'Law' and 'impression' are identified here, which is to say that Leibniz's laws of nature in some sense involve their own execution. In this manner they serve as the 'means' by which God realizes his plans.

In a sense, the model of creation we are dealing with here has 'mechanical' undertones of a sort. By this I mean simply that the relation which Leibniz conceives

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<sup>24</sup> L 500, G IV 506-07.

<sup>25</sup> *Supra* n. 14.

<sup>26</sup> For a useful discussion of the difference this may or may not make in interpreting occasionalism in its relation to the pre-established harmony, cf. S. Nadler's "The Occasionalism of Louis de la Forge", in Nadler, S. M. (ed.) *Causation in Early Modern Philosophy* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 57-73.

between God and God's decrees appears to involve a medium, intermediary, means or instrument, which serves to link the relata, i.e. God's decrees and the effects of those decrees. The mechanistic tone of Leibniz's account of creation here is especially clear from what he has to say about God's initial decree. As he sees it, God's "command in the past no longer exists at present." From there he moves to the idea that since the moment of divine creation all the world's actions are essentially the consequent effects of the initial divine act of will. The underlying image is that of the domino effect, a mechanistic image *par excellence*. Of course, Leibniz's monadology prevents him from believing that this is literally what happens within the created universe once it exists, but it is the image on which his account of God's creative act rests.<sup>27</sup> Clearly, in his talk of the necessity for an 'intermediary' between things remote in time and space Leibniz is envisioning a kind of mechanical means; he is positing the necessity for an intermediary between a past divine will and a present natural motion. Such an intermediary allows for the continued transmission of God's initial 'push' or act through the successive moments of creation's existence right down to the present. Only in this way, Leibniz reasons, can sense be made of the idea that a past cause has present effects; that is, only in this way can sense be made of the idea that God's past decrees continue to operate. This seems to be a mechanical view of 'sense', and thus we can speak of Leibniz's's mechanical model of divine creation.

Effectively, this view of how God creates explains how created substances come to possess a force of their own. On this model of creation, nature is what discharges the causative functions which God discharges, external to nature, on the occasionalist view. Leibniz's metaphysics of creation dictates that the execution of these causative functions by nature itself is the distinct effect of God's initial command, and nature's own independent discharge of this causal function is the result of God's literal transfer to nature or to things of an efficacious impression, law or force. The result is an independence for created things predicated upon their possession of force or power. In other words, the effect of God's creative act is to provide creation with autonomy. Elsewhere he expresses this by saying that "the effects of God have subsistence, not to say that even the modifications and effects of created beings have permanence in some way."<sup>28</sup> But in *On Nature Itself* Leibniz puts the matter so:

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 there is a certain efficacy in things, a form or force such as we usually designate by the name of nature.<sup>29</sup>

For Leibniz, the efficacy of God's command resides in the efficacy of those things created by that command, and in this sense Leibniz's God is like the general of an army whose soldiers carry out their general's orders. They can do this because they have been

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<sup>27</sup> On Leibniz's mature view, force is not 'passed on' from one being to another, but is permanently resident within each substance which acts spontaneously on its basis.

<sup>28</sup> *Reflections on the Doctrine of a Single Universal Spirit*, L 560, G VI 538.

<sup>29</sup> L 501, G IV 507.

"so formed" or so trained by their general that they are capable of fulfilling his orders. Leibniz's use of the expression "so formed" here is in fact better understood as 'so informed'; for by the verb 'to form' Leibniz does not mean anything less than 'bestow force or efficacy upon,' as is explicit in this passage. By the same token, 'form' and 'efficacy' are equated: they are what Leibniz understands by the word 'nature'. Nature is primarily force, and these terms are all merged in the text: "there is a certain efficacy in things, a form or force such as we usually designate by the name of nature " In the end, therefore, the forms in things are active and efficacious principles which ensure that created substances are adequate means to God's ends.

### III. Problems With The Leibnizian Model

On Leibniz's mechanical model of creation (which might equally well be termed his 'vestige' view of creation), if existing substances were not endowed with a force of action (as the impressed vestige or effect given at creation), God would not be able to carry out his decrees. This assumes that God needs instruments of some kind to effect his volitions, an assumption which cues the occasionalist response. Again we shall let Malebranche be the occasionalist spokesperson: "God needs no instruments to act; it suffices that He wills in order that a thing be, because it is a contradiction that He should will and that what He wills should not happen."<sup>30</sup> The contradiction Malebranche finds is in the idea of an all-powerful being willing something which does not then occur. Did God need the instruments which Leibniz claims he needs, he would contradict the omnipotence that defines his nature.<sup>31</sup> Another way of understanding the occasionalist's objection here is to consider that Leibniz's view of creation presupposes exactly what the occasionalist thinks that God, in the exercise of his volition, effects rather than requires for the exercise of his will. What Malebranche's God institutes are law-governed, finished mechanistic relations in nature, and these relations are the necessary effects of God's determination, not the independent conditions of it (as Leibniz would have it). To think otherwise, i.e. to make necessary connections between things in nature the conditions of the exercise of God's will rather than the result of divine volition is, again, to violate or contradict the omnipotent nature of the divine.

Other problems attend Leibniz's use of a quasi-mechanical account of creation to explain how substances come to be endowed with force. For instance, it seems to assume a kind of spatio-temporal contiguity between God and creation. That is to say, the

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<sup>30</sup> LO 450, OC II 316.

<sup>31</sup> Hume deals with this argument from omnipotence as follows: "As to what may be said, that the connection betwixt the idea of an infinitely powerful being, and that of any effect, which he wills, is necessary and unavoidable; I answer, that we have no idea of a being endow'd with any power, much less of one endow'd with infinite power. But if we will change expressions, we can only define power by connexion; and then in saying, that the idea of an infinitely powerful being is connected with that of every effect, which he wills, we really do no more than assert, that a being, whose volition is connected with every effect, is connected with every effect; which is an identical proposition and gives us no insight into the nature of this power or connection." *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Bk.I, Pt. IV, Sect.v, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. P.H.Nidditch, Oxford, 1978, 248-9.



account implies that God's past command is linked to the present activity of created substances through a series of intermediary links; again the domino effect comes to mind. On the other hand, despite what Leibniz says about God's command 'in the past', it is not clear that this should be taken literally to imply that God's creative act occurs at a certain moment in history. Time itself, on Leibniz's account, is a function of and hence consequent upon the existence of monads; therefore it cannot precede them by being something in which God creates.<sup>32</sup> To impugn Leibniz's theory of creation on that account, therefore, seems to involve an overly literal reading of the text.<sup>33</sup>

These issues notwithstanding, however, Leibniz's vestige view of creation seems to ignore an important point which Leibniz himself notes about occasionalism (and which should apply equally well to his own position). Initially he describes occasionalism as a doctrine according to which "motions now taking place result by virtue of an eternal law once established by God." Leibniz himself accepts that God's decrees are eternal, which means that this eternal law by definition continues to exist in the present. But if this is the case, then the need for substances to act as the means for the present execution of God's past decrees seems to be obviated. As a matter of fact, Bayle raises just this point against Leibniz's critique of occasionalism, and Arnauld raises the same point in defence of that doctrine.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, for the reasons just urged against the objection that Leibniz's vestige view may involve placing God in temporal (if not spatial) proximity to creation, Bayle's and Arnauld's objections may ultimately miss their mark.

Nonetheless, from the occasionalist's viewpoint perhaps the single most significant problem with Leibniz's vestige view is the theological one implied by the notion of a divine vestige in non-divine things. Taken literally, the vestige of which Leibniz speaks is a vestige of God, and for the occasionalist this fact dooms Leibniz's position on active substance to a paganism or an occultism. In the eyes of these Cartesians, Leibniz's attempt to provide nature with autonomy goes too far: it leads, effectively, to the divinization of nature. As Malebranche puts this point:

For were they to continue existing though God no longer continued willing them to be, they would be independent; and indeed, it should be

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<sup>32</sup> Cf., e.g. G VII 363-65.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Rescher (*Leibniz: An Introduction to his Philosophy*, Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1979, 73) indicates his agreement with Bertrand Russell (*A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900; second edition, London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1937], vi) "in holding that it is difficult to find a place in Leibniz' cosmology for an historical 'act' of creation; Leibniz' creation can in no sense be an historical event. There was no moment of time when the universe was not, for time itself is logically posterior to the existence of the universe. Further, an act of creation would seem to require a first instance in the history of the thing created, and Leibniz, though he inclines toward the view that there is a first moment in time, is by no means dogmatic on this point. [For Leibniz] [t]o speak of anything as *prior* to the existent universe is to use the term in a purely logical, not temporal sense." For Russell's doubts about Leibniz's non-literal understanding of God's act of creation, cf. *op. cit.*, 128.

<sup>34</sup> For Bayle's assessment, cr. "Clarification of Bayle's Difficulties", L 494, G IV 520. For Arnauld's criticism, cf. *Arnauld to Leibniz*, 4 March 1687 (G II 84ff.).

noted, they would be so independent that God could no longer destroy them.<sup>35</sup>

Recall that the divinization of nature is precisely the danger which at the outset of *On Nature Itself* Leibniz reports as the chief concern of the occasionalist. It now appears as if he himself may succumb to that danger, at least in respect of his account of God's act of creation of the world. If Leibniz's vestige view of creation holds and God creates things with the degree of autonomy which Leibniz wishes for his creatures, then for occasionalism this is *de facto* paganism.

#### IV. The Vestige View vs. Continual Creation

So far we have shown how Leibniz's vestige view of God's creative act is employed to support his view of substance as an inherently active being possessed of its own dynamic force. Let us now contrast the vestige view with the doctrine of creation espoused by Leibniz's chief metaphysical rivals on the issue of force-in-substance, the occasionalists. As I hope to show, seeing how ill-accommodated their view of creation is to Leibniz's doctrine of substance serves to reinforce how well suited the vestige view really is to Leibniz's position.

Underpinning Leibniz's metaphysics of active and autonomous substance is a view of creation as a singular or one-off event which, once complete or past, fades away in the explanation of the actions of things and is replaced by a resident force within substances. In stark contrast, Malebranche makes the denial of a one-off act of creation in the past the very cornerstone of his denial of force within substances. In effect he repudiates the position contained in Leibniz's vestige view that creation is a once-for-all event of which there are consequent inevitable effects: "Creation," Malebranche writes, "does not pass, because the conservation of creatures is - on God's part - simply a continuous creation, a single volition subsisting and operating continuously."<sup>36</sup> On the occasionalist doctrine, the moment of creation never passes; for since no being (other than the infinite God) can ever entail its own existence, any being (other than God) that continues in existence must be being continually re-created by another being. Thus, any 'new' moment of a thing's existence is tantamount to its creation anew or its re-creation by God.

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<sup>35</sup> DMR VII 114, OC XII 158.

<sup>36</sup> DMR VII 115, OC XII 160. Further: "'The moment of creation has passed!' But if this moment does not pass, then you are in a spot, and will have to yield. Therefore take note. God wills that a certain kind of world exist. His will is omnipotent, and this world is thus created. Let God no longer will there to be a world, and it is thereby annihilated. For the world assuredly depends on the will of the creator. If the world subsists, it is because God continues to will its existence. Thus, the conservation of creatures is, on the part of God, nothing but their continued creation. I say on the part of God who acts. For on the part of creatures there appears to be a difference, since by the act of creation they pass from nothingness to being, whereas by the act of conservation they continue to be. But in essence the act of creation does not cease, because in God creation and conservation are but a single volition which, consequently, is necessarily followed by the same effects" (DMR VII 112, OC XII 156-57). This is effectively Descartes' account of creation's relation to finite existence, cf. *Meditations on First Philosophy* III (AT VII 48-49).

How does Leibniz regard the doctrine of continual creation? Anyone familiar with his writings knows that he frequently talks about it. It certainly appears in *On Nature Itself*, where it is presented as follows:

Motion, [Sturm] says, is merely the successive existence of the thing moved in different places. However, it does not hereby exclude a moving force. For in the present moment of its motion, a body is not merely in a place of the same size as itself, but it also has a tendency or urge toward changing its place, so that its future state follows from its present one, *per se*, by the force of nature. Otherwise the body A which is in motion would be no different at the present moment from the body B which is at rest, and it would follow from the opinion of the distinguished man that there would be no way of distinguishing between bodies.<sup>37</sup>

At least as far as this passage goes, Leibniz does not in fact reject continual creation. Supposing it were true that motion is "merely the successive existence of the thing moved in different places," he writes, this would still not "exclude a moving force." To exclude the notion of a moving force in created things considerations beyond continual creation are needed. For whatever the merits of that doctrine, for Leibniz it leaves untouched the question of the very identity of the existing substances which are in motion and are continually being re-created. This argument against Sturm is based on the very impossibility of there being things on the Cartesian account of matter as the 'dead' or non-force-endowed continuum of extension. Leibniz argues that in the Cartesian notion of matter as a fundamentally undifferentiated continuum of extension there is no criterion of identity for things, and thus there are no things that could be capable of motion. As Leibniz sees the issue, force is what satisfies this identity requirement. It is not clear, however, how or that this argument works. Leibniz simply fails to spell out exactly how the possession by X of a force or tendency at any given moment helps identify or distinguish X from any other thing in the continuum. Rather, he simply states the location of force within nature automatically provides creation with an identity, form, nature, and thus with thinghood; but the logical connection between force and identity remains obscure.<sup>38</sup>

These considerations aside, however, the fact remains that on continual creation existence from one moment to the next is effected by God,<sup>39</sup> whereas on the vestige view future moments of a substance's existence follow from an initial 'state' of that substance which is 'big' with that future. This fundamental discrepancy seems to be ignored by

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<sup>37</sup> L 505, G IV 512-13.

<sup>38</sup> Loemker puts this point as follows: "Leibniz's argument that we have no criterion for individual differences and change without an intrinsic force seems to have full effect against all purely logical and mathematical analyses of the physical world. But it is not clear how it establishes an internal force in addition to motion" (L 508 n. 13).

<sup>39</sup> Descartes is Malebranche's source for this doctrine, cf. *Meditations* III, AT VII 49. For an important paper which argues that Malebranche and Descartes differ on this doctrine, cf. Daniel Garber, "How God Causes Motion: Descartes, Divine Substance, and Occasionalism" (in *Journal of Philosophy* 84 [1987], 567-580). Garber relies on M. Beyssade's discussion of Descartes' notion of time in Beyssade's *La philosophie première de Descartes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979), 129-143.

Leibniz in this (rather typical) attempt to accommodate his own vestige position to a position radically opposed to it.<sup>40</sup> Still, let us follow him in his endeavour to square his doctrine that substances contain their own principles of change with the doctrine of continual creation. In *On Nature Itself*, his next move is his claim that a thing's existence "here and now" is as much "due to God" as it is to that thing's existence prior to the here and now, though he adds the important qualifier that this existence is due to God "insofar as [a thing] involve[s] some degree of perfection:"

[Sturm] adds that the existence of matter through different moments of time is to be ascribed to the divine will; why not then, he asks, also ascribe to the same being the fact that it exists here and now? I reply that this is undoubtedly due to God, as are all other things insofar as they involve some degree of perfection. But just as that first and universal cause which conserves all things does not destroy but rather supports the natural permanence of a thing which comes into existence and the perseverance in existence once bestowed upon it, so this same cause will not destroy, but rather confirm, the natural efficacy of a thing which is set in motion, and the perseverance in action once impressed upon it.<sup>41</sup>

This further attempt at reconciling continual creation and the vestige view appears to fail, for this statement - especially if taken literally - lands Leibniz deeply in the occasionalist camp. After all, it is a fundamental Leibnizian tenet that the 'degree of perfection' of a thing is the extent to which that thing acts.<sup>42</sup> Thus, if a thing's perfection or action is "due to God" (as opposed to itself) then we have a *de facto* occasionalism in which God does all the work. The question here is what sense can be made of the idea that God's conservation is a "support" for the "natural permanence of a thing which comes into existence." On the one hand, it is clear that this "support" is not be identified with a thing's "natural permanence". On the other hand, does it make any sense to speak of a natural permanence requiring 'support'? The expression 'natural permanence' already implies the independence for nature which Leibniz believes he has already established; it is an expression designed, as it were, to keep God at a distance.<sup>43</sup> This we contrast with the occasionalist view, by which God's support, in the form of eternal volitions, is precisely what is 'natural' and permanent in nature.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Despite the fact that he embarks on a *de facto* treatment of continual creation, Leibniz actually claims to forestall discussion of that view in *On Nature Itself*. He writes: "Motion, [Sturm] says, is merely the successive existence of the thing moved in different places. Let us concede this for the present, though it is not entirely satisfactory " (L 505, G IV 512). Later we are told simply that "this is not the place to discuss [continual creation]" (L 506, G IV 515).

<sup>41</sup> L 506, G IV 514.

<sup>42</sup> Cf., e.g. *Discourse* §15, where Leibniz defines action as the exertion or exercise of power or virtue.

<sup>43</sup> This distancing of God from nature is definitive of Leibniz's deism. The Malebranchean response is as follows: "It is God Himself who is now in our midst, not as a mere onlooker or observer of our good and bad actions, but as the principle of our society, the bond of our friendship, the soul, as it were, of the exchanges and discussions we have with one another" (DMR VII 121).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. LO 662, OC III 212-13, where Malebranche says that the pagan's 'nature' or 'natural law' is in fact God's action. Cf. Descartes' similar use of 'nature' at AT VII 80.

Does Leibniz's apparent desire to accept the doctrine of continual creation jeopardize his attempts to keep divine incursions into nature at bay? I believe that the notion of God supporting the natural permanence of things is a contradiction in Leibnizian terms, resolvable only if a greater, occasionalist-like dependence of nature upon God is admitted. And to this Leibniz appears to be led. God, he continues, supports the continuation or "perseverance" of a thing once existence has been bestowed upon it. Next, "just as" God supports all this, so he "confirms" the "natural efficacy of a thing." In this passage, 'support' can, one assumes, be taken to mean "confirm", for God's operation either in the case of a thing's natural permanence, or in the case of that thing's natural efficacy, is said to be the same, given that a thing's natural permanence just *is* its natural efficacy. Earlier, Leibniz claims that both of these aspects of the 'thing', i.e. permanence and efficacy, are the very nature or substance of the thing which make that thing a conservable thing in the first place.<sup>45</sup> In other words, on the vestige view these 'aspects' (for want of a better word) are deemed by Leibniz to be the conditions of God's conserving act; for this reason alone they cannot now be stated to be what God conserves.

So much for Leibniz's treatment of continual creation in *On Nature Itself*. Casting our nets beyond that work, in order to obtain a more general sense of Leibniz's position on continual creation, we find that the problems attending his attempt to square his own view of substance with occasionalism's view of creation become even more pronounced. Consider two further encounters with occasionalism and its doctrine of continual creation. This first is with Malebranche's spokesperson Lelong:

By the force which I give to substances, I understand nothing else but a state from which another state follows, if nothing prevents it. But I admit that one state does not follow another, without God intervening through a continual production of perfections. And force is one of the principle perfections which, if removed, would leave almost nothing behind, or rather nothing at all. And I dare say that without force there would be no substance and one would fall into the opinion of Spinoza, according to whom creatures are but fleeting modifications.<sup>46</sup>

T.M. Lennon, in his "Philosophical Commentary" on Malebranche's *Search After Truth*, goes so far as to state that this passage "seems to add nothing beyond occasionalism."<sup>47</sup> In many respects, it is hard to avoid such a conclusion. Leibniz begins, characteristically, with the assertion that  $X_2$  follows from  $X_1$ , i.e. a substance's state '2' follows from that substance's state '1', "if nothing prevents it." But then comes the admission that  $X_2$  follows from  $X_1$  only if God intervenes! What is more, God does this continually, through the continual production of force! Now, this clearly places the burden of efficient causality on God's shoulders, not on X.  $X_1$ , in other words, lacks the productive agency which gives rise to  $X_2$ . This admission clearly contradicts the vestige view which affirms just the opposite, namely, the independence of force from God.

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<sup>45</sup> For Descartes' view of the 'natural permanence' of substances, cf. his "Synopsis of the Meditations" (AT VII 14); and his *Principles of Philosophy* II §37 (AT VIII A 62).

<sup>46</sup> *Leibniz to Lelong*, 5 February 1712 @ 421).

<sup>47</sup> LO 848, n.34.

Towards the end of his career Leibniz attempts once again to square his doctrine of pre-established harmony with occasionalism. Yet again, however, he grants too much:

When I speak of the force and the action of creatures, I understand that each creature is presently big with its future state, and that there follows naturally a certain train, if nothing prevents it; and that Monads, which are the true and unique substances, cannot be prevented naturally in their internal determination, since they contain the representation of everything external. But I do not say by this that a creature's future state follows from its preceding state without God's concurrence, and I am rather of the opinion that conservation is a continual creation, with changes conforming to order. Thus, Father Malebranche could perhaps approve the pre-established harmony without renouncing his hypothesis, which holds that God is the sole actor.<sup>48</sup>

Here, Leibniz claims that he and Malebranche find themselves on common metaphysical ground in virtue of his (Leibniz's) acceptance of continual creation. But close examination reveals the high price Leibniz must pay for this common ground. The presence of force in a substance, he says, is equivalent to that substance's being 'big' with its future, and it is in a substance's 'bigness' with its future that we best grasp Leibniz's idea that a substance possesses force. By a substance's or monad's being big with its future Leibniz means that the monad is fundamentally a vibrant and dynamic thing actively realizing its own existence, as it were; it is not a static or dead and dependent entity. We just saw this expressed in *On Nature Itself*: "in the present moment of its motion, a body is not merely in a place of the same size as itself, but it also has a tendency or urge toward changing its place, so that its future state follows from its present one, *per se*, by the force of nature." The parallel of this in the present context is Leibniz's claim that from any substance's present state "there follows naturally a certain train [of future states], if nothing prevents it." Therein lies its autonomy or force, and it is not difficult to grasp how easily all of this accords with the vestige view of creation. However, what Leibniz grants to substance in one breath, he concedes to occasionalism in the next. For he next tells us that something other than nature itself is required if a substance's future states are to follow from its present one. This additional element is God's concurrence or continual creation. Evidently, then, the activity of things requires divine activity. Leibniz goes on to define that activity:

I think that God is the sole substance who is the immediate external object of minds, and who is capable of acting on them, in metaphysical rigour. These modifications in our minds are always a natural consequence of those already in us, as the present modifications of matter are a natural consequence of the preceding modifications of matter. But the passage

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<sup>48</sup> *Leibniz to Bourguet*, 22 March 1714 @ 471-72, G III 566-67).

from one state to the other occurs always through the intervention of God, who produces all perfection in us.<sup>49</sup>

Once again, this talk of "the intervention of God" as a requisite for the activity of created substances seems to land Leibniz too much in the occasionalist camp. This passage, and most of the others just cited in this section, appear in Leibniz's later writings. Clearly they are all attempts to reconcile his view of substance with the view of continual creation underpinning occasionalism. But it does not appear as if these attempts ultimately succeed. Continual creation entails simply too great an incursion into nature by God. By contrast, despite the problems of the vestige view of creation, it seems far better suited to Leibniz's doctrine of active, autonomous substance.<sup>50</sup>

## V. Conclusion

I shall not attempt to unravel further Leibniz's 'real' creationist metaphysics as he attempts to define it in the face of the doctrine of continual creation. *On Nature Itself* does not really provide much further assistance in clarifying the precise nature of God's creative activity. At best, that and other works teach us that Leibniz has what we have called a 'vestige' view of creation, and that this model underpins a world of force-endowed substances. This model of creation clearly stands in an uneasy relation to the doctrine of continual creation underpinning occasionalism's world of force-deprived substances.<sup>51</sup> As for Leibniz's pronouncements on continual creation in other writings, they do little to clarify the issue and much to confuse it. In fact, were we to pursue the matter in greater detail, there is evidence to suggest that Leibniz does not have any consistent position on the relation of his own to the occasionalist account of creation.<sup>52</sup> Insofar as generalization on this subject is possible, then, what the foregoing considerations point to is the conclusion that continual creation is not a doctrine which Leibniz can easily accept, and that the vestige view which we have discerned in his writings is much more in concert with the general thrust of his philosophy. On the vestige model force-in-substance is an impressed vestige or effect of God that exists, endures,

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<sup>49</sup> Sketch of a letter by Leibniz on Malebranche's *Dialogue Between a Christian Philosopher and a Chinese Philosopher on the Existence and Nature of God*, 1715 [R 490, Bod. LHS 105-06].

<sup>50</sup> Catherine Wilson (*op. cit.* 4) puts this point in even stronger terms: "The scholastic doctrine of continual creation, which says that the world does not persist but is recreated from moment to moment in slightly different configuration, is the central prop of this doctrine [of theo-mechanism]; it constitutes as well one response to the continuum problem. And the entire apparatus of Leibniz's metaphysics, with its forms, forces, natures, and continuities, is directed against this artifice." To this we might add that, given that the doctrine of continual creation is central to occasionalism, therefore "the entire apparatus of Leibniz's metaphysics, with its forms, forces, natures, and continuities, is directed against" occasionalism.

<sup>51</sup> For a different view, which holds the doctrine of continual creation to be an essentially unproblematic point of convergence for Malebranche and Leibniz, cf. Jacques Jalabert's "Leibniz et Malebranche," in *Les études philosophique* 3 [1981], 285-86.

<sup>52</sup> Others have noted Leibniz's ambivalent relation to this doctrine. Loemker (L 104, n. 25), for instance, notes its favorable reception in Leibniz's early period (cf. Leibniz's letter to Jacob Thomasius, April 20/30 1669 [G IV 174]), and contrasts it with Leibniz's subsequent disdain in his correspondence with de Volder (cf. letter of March 24/April 3 1699 [G II 168-69]).

and operates outside the ambit of God's creative activity. This picture seems to accord too much with Leibniz's fundamental belief in the autonomy of nature not to qualify as the doctrine of creation which best supports his metaphysics of active substance.

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