From the Metaphysical Union of Mind and Body to the Real Union of Monads:
Leibniz on *Supposita* and *Vincula Substantialia*

Brandon Look
*University of Kentucky*

I. INTRODUCTION

Explaining the union of mind and body and the union of composite substances to other scholars of the day was a constant challenge for Leibniz. The most persistent and acute critic of Leibniz's views on composite substances in his later years was surely Bartholomew des Bosses, and one of the better-known, though perhaps less insightful, of Leibniz's critics on the relation of mind and body was René-Joseph de Tournemine. Both Des Bosses and Tournemine pressed Leibniz to clarify and expand upon his sometimes confused notions, and both ultimately were responsible for Leibniz's introduction of interesting and important concepts. To Tournemine, Leibniz tried to make clear that, while a unique relationship between mind and body was guaranteed by pre-established harmony, one might also allow for a metaphysical union of mind and body, making of them a *suppôt* or *suppositum*; and to Des Bosses, Leibniz famously suggested that, over and above the phenomenal unity of a composite substance and the unity guaranteed by the relations between monads, there could be a real union of monads within a composite substance provided by the *vinculum substantiale*, or substantial bond.

Scholars who have written on the subject of the substantial bond have often pointed to the similarity between the conceptions of the *suppositum* and the *vinculum substantiale*, arguing that the *vinculum* accounts for little more in the world of monads than the metaphysical union or *suppositum* does in explaining the relation between mind and body. Yet these scholars miss a crucial feature of Leibniz's doctrine and fail to expose the more interesting evolution of the concept of the

---

Brandon Look received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and is Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Kentucky. He is author of Leibniz and the 'Vinculum Substantiale' (a Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft, forthcoming) and is editing and translating, with Donald Rutherford, the correspondence of Leibniz and Des Bosses for the Yale Leibniz Series.
substantial bond. While it is true that in the beginning of his correspondence with Des Bosses Leibniz used the concept of the substantial bond in a way similar to the concept of the suppositum, it is also the case that later in this correspondence Leibniz moved from holding that between the mind and body there might be said to exist a metaphysical union to holding that between monads there might be a real union made possible by the addition of a vinculum substantiale. The move from metaphysical unions to real unions is more than a mere change in vocabulary; it shows, I should like to argue, that the union of monads must be, for Leibniz, a different kind of thing than the union of mind and body.

In this paper, then, I plan to examine the debate between Tournemine and Leibniz on the nature of the union of mind and body and show how the issues of this debate evolved in the course of the Des Bosses correspondence. I want to show that there is a difference between a “metaphysical union” of mind and body and a “real union” of monads as well as a difference between a suppositum and a vinculum substantiale and that these differences relate ultimately to very distinct metaphysical schemes.  

II. TOURNEMINE ATTACKS

Leibniz’s debate with Tournemine centered around the issue of the doctrine of pre-established harmony. In articles written in the Mémoires pour l’histoire des Sciences et des beaux Arts in May and June of 1703, Tournemine strongly criticized the doctrine of pre-established harmony for failing to account for the true union of mind and body. Tournemine was, in many respects, a radical cartesian dualist; he held that the mind and body were genuinely united and that each exercised a real, physical influence on the other in the processes of perception and volition. And the real force of his criticism of Leibniz and of other modern philosophers was that, in explaining the interaction of mind and body, many thinkers could no longer satisfactorily explain the union of mind and body; in short, for Tournemine, a successful account of the relation of mind and body must consist not only of an account of the interaction of mind and body but also of the union of mind and body.

In his first article, Tournemine attacks not only the view of Leibniz but also the views of the scholastics and of the occasionalists. As Boehm has pointed out in his work on the vinculum substantiale, the scholastic view at which Tournemine rails bears an interesting resemblance to Leibniz’s later view of the vinculum substantiale.  

The majority of the philosophers of the School would respond to our question that the soul and the body are united because a
certain thing unites them. If you ask them what this thing is they will say to you gravely that it is an entity whose nature it is to unite, that it is neither body nor mind, and that, although it is indivisible, it is part corporal and part spiritual. If you do not understand that, too bad for you: you do not have the mind for speculative sciences.⁶

In other words, Tournemine finds it far from satisfactory to suggest, as he claims the scholastics do, that there is some kind of entity beyond the body and soul that unites them and that has a unique ontological status. Moreover, Tournemine takes the occasionalists to task for attempting to establish the mind-body union by means of the continual concurrence of God and of the “law” created by God to regulate the actions of the mind and the body, and he holds both the law to be arbitrary and the notion of occasional causes to be terribly vague. Ultimately, Tournemine seems to believe, if God is the sole cause of the actions and passions of the mind and body, then naturally one cannot be the cause of a particular action or passion of the other, and hence the mind and body cannot truly interact. According to Tournemine, the union of mind and body is to be explained primarily by virtue of the character of the mind and body themselves and of their direct action and influence on each other.

After having considered the scholastic and occasionalist accounts of the union of mind and body, Tournemine turns to Leibniz's account of pre-established harmony. He does not like what he finds. Just as with the occasionalist view, Tournemine claims that, if the mind and body are to be like two perfectly harmonious clocks, there will be, strictly speaking, neither a true union of mind and body, nor true interaction between mind and body, only the correspondence of mind and body. Against the system of pre-established harmony, Tournemine replies quite simply:

For, in the end, correspondence, harmony are neither union nor essential relation [liaison]. Whatever resemblance one supposes between two clocks, even if the integrity of their relations [rappports] were perfect, one could never say that these two clocks were united, because the movements of the one correspond to those of the other with a perfect symmetry.⁷

Since, after all, what Tournemine desires to have explained is the real union of mind and body, he is not at all impressed by Leibniz's view that the unity of mind and body consists solely in their harmony or correspondence.

Tournemine argues primarily against Leibniz's clock analogy and has very little to say against the logical and metaphysical foundations of Leibniz's position—namely, his
Brandon Look

c onception of the nature of an individual substance. Indeed, in his treatment of Leibniz's position, Tournemine seemingly fails to understand what Leibniz actually took the nature of a substance to be. It is not simply that individual substances are in pre-established harmony with each other, like perfectly coordinated clocks; it is that an individual substance by its very essence is an active being that derives no modifications from communication or interaction with other substances. On Leibniz's view, of course, two substances simply could not be united in the way that Tournemine wishes. Yet Tournemine never argues against Leibniz's conception of the nature of substance.8

For his part, Tournemine believes that to explain the union of mind and body we need not only a harmony or correspondence between mind and body but “a relation [liaison] and an essential dependence: not only a moral and conceptual union, dependent on an arbitrary law, but real and effective: not an external union but intimate: a union of possession and of property...”9 In Tournemine's view, Leibniz presents only a moral union, or an ideal union, between mind and body, failing to account for the intimate connection between the two substances. Similarly, Tournemine faults Leibniz for failing to present an account of the possession or property of mind and body—of how exactly a particular body belongs to a particular mind.10 As he says, it is necessary to have “a principle that makes us see that there is between this body and this soul a relation [rapport] so natural, so essential and so necessary that no other soul, other than my own, could animate my body; and that no other body but my own could be animated by my soul.”11

III. LEIBNIZ AND THE METAPHYSICAL UNION OF MIND AND BODY

Despite Tournemine's poor understanding of the subtleties of his position and, in particular, of the metaphysical foundations of his view of pre-established harmony, Leibniz did seem to take seriously the criticism concerning the union of the mind and body. In the March 1708 issue of the Mémoires de Trévoux, Leibniz published a brief rejoinder to the objections of Tournemine in which he claimed that, since his goal had been to explain the relation of mind and body solely in terms of the phenomena, he could not give an account of the union of mind and body.12 The “metaphysical union” of mind and body, as Leibniz termed it, is not among the phenomena and hence cannot be described naturally in his philosophy. As Leibniz says, “But since the metaphysical union one adds is not a phenomenon, and since no one has ever given an intelligible notion of it, I did not take it upon myself to seek a reason for
Metaphysical and Real Unions in Leibniz

it.” On the other hand, Leibniz claimed that he did not deny that there was something like a metaphysical union existing between the mind and body. Unfortunately, our knowledge of this entity is very confused, and our notion of the union of mind and body comes to us only by analogy. Indeed, Leibniz makes the interesting claim that not only do we conceive of the union of mind and body in terms of analogy, but we also conceive of the divine or spiritual presence in material things in terms of analogy. In this way, Leibniz draws a very strong parallel between his account of the metaphysical union of mind and body and of the presence of the Divine in material things, that is, transubstantiation.

Tournemine and Leibniz differ indeed on the very nature of the union of mind and body. Tournemine’s original criticism, both of the occasionalists and of Leibniz, was that, “there is, if you like, a perfect relation; but there is no real relation.” In his response to Tournemine’s criticism, however, Leibniz alters the nature of the union that Tournemine wants to have established between mind and body, calling it the “metaphysical union between mind and body.” But Tournemine is far from convinced by Leibniz’s apparent legerdemain and, in his response to Leibniz, states firmly, “This union is not, as he says, a metaphysical idea. The body is really and physically united to the soul, more than two watches perfectly alike are united.” The only way, then, for Leibniz to satisfy Tournemine is to explain how exactly the body is “really and physically” united to the soul—something that Leibniz was, at the time, not at all prepared to do. We can see here the distinction drawn in the debate between Tournemine and Leibniz, a distinction that framed much of the discussion of the nature of the relation between mind and body: the mind and body together form either a metaphysical union or a real union. On Tournemine’s view, of course, the mind and body ought to form a real union; on Leibniz’s view, as expressed here, while the union between mind and body does exist, it is at best merely a metaphysical union.

Now, while Leibniz is reluctant to discuss the nature of this metaphysical union, believing that we cannot actually understand it adequately, we still ought to try to understand what he meant by calling the union between mind and body “metaphysical.” And here we ought to look at one of Leibniz’s eighteenth-century commentators, Bilfinger, who presents an interesting argument for the “metaphysical” union of mind and body in his book on Leibniz’s theory of pre-established harmony. Indeed, his explication of Leibniz’s doctrine sheds perhaps a little more light on Leibniz’s thinking on the subject. Bilfinger says in a footnote to his discussion of Tournemine’s objections,
Brandon Look

Incidentally, just to check the scoffing of others I shall point out to our readers: those who discuss the metaphysical union as if it were something insignificant or ridiculous do not know what they apprehend. It is impossible for a true physical relation or union to exist between the soul and our body, unless the soul is a body; the physical does not pertain to anything except to bodies. Say, what is physical? Moreover, what is common to the soul and the body is, by this very fact, metaphysical: therefore, the union too which is common to the soul and body is metaphysical. Naturally, the metaphysical is only that which extends beyond the spiritual and corporeal.17

Bilfinger’s explicit argument, and indeed Leibniz’s tacit view, is that, for the mind and body to form a real, physical union, the mind would have to be corporeal. Since it is not, the mind and body can have at most a metaphysical relation between them. And the relation is metaphysical, Bilfinger claims, because it extends beyond the spiritual and corporeal realms.

In other published works of the same period, Leibniz mentions his disagreement with Father Tournemine and elaborates on his view concerning the “metaphysical union” of mind and body. But when Leibniz recalls the nature of the metaphysical union of mind and body, he characterizes it in a slightly altered version, a version more detailed than his earlier picture from the Nouveaux Essais, in which the metaphysical union of mind and body or their dependency upon each other “consists in God’s taking account of one of them in regulating the other.”18 In the Preface to his Theodicy, for example, Leibniz puts in an interesting caveat at the end of his description of pre-established harmony:

It will perhaps be good to remark once again, before finishing this preface, that in denying the physical influence of the soul on the body or of the body on the soul, that is, an influence that makes one disturb the laws of the other, I do not deny at all the union of the one with the other that makes of them a support; but this union is something metaphysical that changes nothing among the phenomena. This is what I said before in response to what the Reverend Father de Tournemine, whose mind and understanding are far from ordinary, had objected to in my philosophy....19

According to Leibniz, the mind and body, and all individual substances for that matter, must follow only their own laws; that is, an individual substance, by definition, is an entity that has its own principle of activity. But, on Leibniz’s view here, any physical influence between individual substances entails the disturbance by one substance of the laws of another substance. And, according to Leibniz, the laws of each individual
substance are given to that substance by God when he creates the world or that particular substance, and they cannot be infringed upon by other substances. Nevertheless, Leibniz does not deny “the union of the one with the other that makes of them a suppôt;” he wants to assure Tournemine and others that he believes the mind and body do constitute some kind of union. And this is part of a subtler strategy against Tournemine’s view of the nature of the mind-body relation. He seems to hold that this union, although metaphysical, makes of the mind and body a suppôt and that whenever a mind and a body form a metaphysical union, we can say that they constitute a suppôt. In Part One, §59 of the Theodicy, Leibniz adds a further detail of his picture of the metaphysical union and the resulting suppôt: “many modern thinkers have recognized that there is no physical communication between the soul and the body, although the metaphysical communication always exists, which brings it about that the soul and body compose one self-same suppôt, or what is called a person.”

In this passage we both find the earlier view that the union of mind and body is metaphysical because it changes nothing among the phenomena and are presented with added details of Leibniz’s picture of the world. The metaphysical union of mind and body, on Leibniz’s view, provides for or creates a suppôt or a suppositum, which is in turn equivalent to the person.

But how committed is Leibniz to this metaphysical union? While he claims that he does not deny it, does he actually accept it? We might be tempted to conclude that Leibniz does not in fact want to have anything to do with this notion of the metaphysical union, happy simply with his doctrine of pre-established harmony. That, at least, is what seems to follow from this passage from his January 1706 letter to De Volder:

> The Scholastics commonly sought things which were not only ultramundane but utopian. The brilliant French Jesuit, Tournemine, recently gave me an excellent example of this. He gave general approval to my pre-established harmony, which seemed to him to supply a reason for the agreement which we perceive between the soul and body, but said that he still desired one thing—to know the reason for the union between the two, which he held to differ from their agreement. I replied that this metaphysical ‘union’—I know not what—which the School assumes in addition to their agreement is not a phenomenon and that there is no concept of it and therefore no knowledge of it. So neither could I think of a reason that might be given for it.

We again see that Leibniz defends himself from the criticism of Tournemine chiefly by claiming that, since the union of
mind and body is not among the phenomena, he could not offer an explanation of it. And we ought also to notice the way in which Leibniz rather sarcastically speaks of this metaphysical union, attributing the notion to the Scholastics, who often seek utopian things. Leibniz's language here suggests that he invokes the metaphysical union primarily in order to assuage Tournemine's fears of the lack of a true union between mind and body.22

Both Donald Rutherford and Robert Merrihew Adams address this seemingly cynical passage from Leibniz in their recent books, and both ultimately come to similar conclusions about the nature of the metaphysical union. Rutherford says, "In effect, [Leibniz] tells De Volder: Assume such a union if you want to engage in pointless speculation; I who am interested in founding my metaphysics on intelligible concepts alone will have no truck with it."23 Adams points to the many passages in which Leibniz seems to allow for the metaphysical union of mind and body and concludes his discussion thus:

Leibniz's belief in the irreducible metaphysical union is not, in my opinion, established by his writings of the years 1706-1710, among which we must not forget to include the sarcastic comments to De Volder. But he did say repeatedly, in public and private, that he did not deny such a union. He could offer no theory of it, as he stated to Tournemine, but he at least granted its admissibility for those who saw a religious or other need for it.24

According to both Adams and Rutherford, the metaphysical union is not to be taken to be part of Leibniz's mature view: he admits its possibility with reluctance, but he does not wholeheartedly endorse it as a key concept in a satisfactory metaphysics.

While Adams and Rutherford are right in saying that Leibniz is not enthusiastic about the idea of a metaphysical union of mind and body, I believe that they miss an important feature of the debate with Tournemine and the subsequent correspondence with Des Bosses.25 They treat the metaphysical union of mind and body as being equivalent to the real union that Tournemine had demanded, when, in my opinion, the metaphysical union and the real union are distinct ideas. Put simply, the distinction is this: there is a kind of union that Leibniz refuses to deny, although without claiming to understand its nature, and this is the metaphysical union of mind and body and consists principally in the harmony of mind and body and in the resulting suppositum of mind and body; there is a kind of union that Leibniz denies and that Tournemine demands, and this is the real union of mind and body and consists of the real and physical unification of mind and body.
Thus the distinction between real and metaphysical union is at this stage simply the distinction between the kind of union that Tournemine wants and the kind of union that Leibniz is willing to concede.26

In the *Theodicy*, Leibniz also comments on the limits of our knowledge of the union of mind and body and of mysteries of faith in general. In §§55–56 of the “Preliminary Discourse,” Leibniz admits “a true union between the mind and body, which makes of them a suppositum”27 and claims that our understanding of this union by means of analogy ought to serve as a paradigm, in some sense, for our understanding of the mysteries of the Christian religion. Presumably, the analogy that Leibniz thinks allows us to understand the union of the mind and body is his well-known clock analogy, with which Tournemine seems to have exclusively concerned himself. And Leibniz goes on to say, “It suffices for us [to know] a certain *that it is* (τι εστι); but the *how* (ποις) is beyond us, and is not at all necessary for us.”28 One might be tempted to say that much of Leibniz’s discussion of the union of mind and body does indeed follow along these lines: Leibniz rarely explains *how* the mind and body form a union; he merely claims *that* they do form such a union. When we turn to the relation between mind and body, Leibniz seems to think, the best way for us to understand this relation is through a certain analogy to the harmony of perfectly well-constructed clocks.

Yet Leibniz’s appeal to the notion of a *suppositum* does suggest that he is trying to explain the *comment* of the relationship of mind and body in a way that might prove satisfactory for Tournemine and any other critics who might come along. What, then, does Leibniz mean by *suppositum* or *suppositum*? The scholastic view that Leibniz invokes most often is that “actions pertain to *supposita*.” In other words, in the view of scholastics and of Leibniz as well, all actions are actions of *supposita*. Not only does Leibniz appeal to this notion in §8 of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, but he also uses it in his essay *On Nature Itself*.29 There Leibniz claims that the notion of action is itself grounded in the view that “actions pertain to *supposita*,” and consequently that anything that acts is an individual substance and all individual substances act without interruption.30 In claiming therefore that the metaphysical union makes a *suppositum* or a person, Leibniz is making the rather important claim that the metaphysical union between mind and body brings it about that the mind and body act together as if they were an individual substance. In other words, when we have the mind and body together, each acting according to its own laws, a *suppositum* arises from the harmony between mind and body that makes it possible for us to treat the actions of the mind and body as if they belonged to one individual substance—a person.
Brandon Look

There is, however, another scholastic conception of a
suppositum that we need to consider. In the Summa
Theologica, for example, Thomas uses the term “suppositum”
in a number of different ways; yet, in the end, the notion of a
suppositum is clearly that of an individual substance, arising
from the combination of matter and form. He claims (i) that
in composite entities the nature of the composite differs from
the suppositum, (ii) that in the case of God His nature and
suppositum are the same thing, and (iii) that the person of
Christ is the suppositum of human nature.31 But, according
to Thomas, the nature and suppositum differ only in those enti-
ties that are a combination of matter and form because the na-
ture of an individual substance will somehow belong to its
form, while a suppositum exists as the combination of matter
and form. And since God is not such a composite, His nature
or essence will be equivalent to His suppositum. Similarly,
Suárez conceives of a suppositum as being the complete indi-
nual substance composed of a certain mind and a certain
body.32

I should like to argue that this is what Leibniz has in
mind as well. He seems actually to think of the relation be-
tween mind and body in terms of the scholastic view of matter
and form. Indeed, Leibniz seems to regard the mind and body
as almost two aspects or modes (to use a spinozistic term) of
an individual substance. A suppositum arises from the meta-
physical union of mind and body, therefore, because it is the
mind and the body, just as an individual substance or suppositum is matter and form. This interpretation is sup-
ported in part by the fact that Leibniz seems earlier to have
adopted a similar strategy in explaining his account of the re-
lation of mind and body. In his correspondence with Arnauld,
for example, Leibniz is asked how the soul can be the substan-
tial form of the body when the soul and the body are distinct
substances, and he responds by suggesting quite simply that
the mind and body are not in fact distinct substances, rather
the body, which is technically not a substance at all, is com-
pleted by the substantial form.33 But this interpretation is
also supported by a letter Leibniz wrote to Des Bosses in 1706,
roughly contemporaneous with his response to Tournemine,
in which he responds to a previous request to comment on cer-
tain Scholastic positions and on the nature of the relation of
mind and body in particular. He says, “Since the soul is the
primitive entelechy of the body, surely in this consists the
union; but the consensus between perceptions and bodily mo-
tions is explained intelligibly by pre-established harmony.”34
In other words, in Leibniz’s own gloss of his response to
Tournemine, the phenomena of the consensus of perceptions
and motions are explained by pre-established harmony, while
the union of mind and body consists in the fact that the mind
is the form of the body. Therefore, the view that comes out in Leibniz's writings is that a suppositum is the result of the combination of matter and form (or, for Leibniz, mind and body) and is an individual substance unto itself.

Let us return for a moment to the issue of whether or not Leibniz, in invoking the scholastic notion of a suppositum, actually explains the union of mind and body. On one level, it would seem that the notion of a suppositum does not, in fact, explain the union of mind and body; rather, it is another way of stating that the mind and body are a union. In other words, it may be argued that, on Leibniz's view, “suppositum” simply is a word applied to the union of the mind and body and that it explains nothing about the actual union of mind and body. This view is true—up to a point. I should like to suggest that, in his debate with Tournemine, Leibniz recognized that the mind and body together formed a suppositum similar or even identical to the scholastic notion of a suppositum. The explanatory force of the notion of a suppositum is only this: the mind and the body must together constitute a single, individual substance. This point is perhaps not stunning in itself. But, just as Tournemine himself was wont to do, it is possible to interpret Leibniz's popular explications of the pre-established harmony of mind and body and of their union through their consensus in terms of substance dualism, that is, as two distinct substances unified solely by the harmony that exists between them. Leibniz, by invoking the account of a suppositum and by equating mind and body with form and matter, denies this possibility. That is, in the debate with Tournemine, Leibniz argues that the mind and body together constitute, not two things in harmony, but one thing, a suppositum, a person, which has, as it were, an aspect associated with the mind and one associated with the body. Thus, I believe that Leibniz's explicit claim that the mind and body form a suppositum does represent a small step towards providing an explanation of their union.35

IV. DES BOSSES AND THE “REAL METAPHYSICAL UNION”

While the general subject of the first letters between Des Bosses and Leibniz remains the same as the subject of the debate between Leibniz and Tournemine, Leibniz both alters his language slightly and paints a more detailed picture of the world of substances. In fact, in his first letter to Des Bosses, written in early February 1706, Leibniz complains briefly about Tournemine's objection and gives a response similar to the one he published in the Mémoires de Trévoux: the union of the mind and body is not among the phenomena, so it was not treated in the discussion of the theory of pre-established har-
mony. In his response to this letter, Des Bosses shows a clearer understanding of Leibniz’s position on the nature of the relation of mind and body, claiming, “A real relation between mind and body should not be established, but it is only said to be a relation, as they say, which first arises from the mental separation of the mind and the body, the one from the other.”36 Des Bosses, in other words, understands that the mind and body are to be related as the matter and form of an individual substance and not, as Tournemine would have wanted, as two distinct substances.

A few years later, in a letter from April 1709, Leibniz discusses his theory of pre-established harmony, returning to the issue of his debate with Tournemine. Here Leibniz adds a new phrase to his philosophical lexicon: “real metaphysical union.” His explanation, however, recalls precisely his earlier view concerning the relation between mind and body: “I do not deny a certain real metaphysical union [unionem quandam realem metaphysicam] between the soul and the organic body (as I likewise responded to Tournemine), according to which it can be said that the soul is truly in the body.”37 But Leibniz wishes to make it clear to Des Bosses that this union is not the metaphysical union of mind and body or of substantial form and matter, but rather the union of diverse simple substances. About this “real metaphysical union” Leibniz says, “You see that I am so far speaking not of the union of an entelechy or of an active principle with prime matter or passive power, but of the union of the soul, or of the monad itself (which results from both of these principles), with mass or with other monads.”38 The union therefore exists not between a substantial form and primary matter, but between the mind and body, conceived of now as being monads; that is, it is a union not of active and passive powers forming a simple substance, but rather a union of two (or more) substances, forming something else—a composite substance, a suppositum, or a person.

While it might seem that Leibniz’s “real metaphysical union” is identical to his idea of the metaphysical union of mind and body, I should like to suggest that, at the very least, Leibniz is adding an important clarification to his view of the relation between mind and body, and probably making a subtle change in his position as well. We ought to note that Leibniz’s explanation of the constituents of the real metaphysical union is, in these passages, more complex, for he attempts to synthesize it with his more elaborate world of monads. Leibniz describes the union on one level as being between the mind and the body, and on another level as being between the mind, or dominant monad,39 and other monads. Although Leibniz might not have wanted to introduce such a subtlety in his discussion with Tournemine, it is important to see the distinction drawn
Metaphysical and Real Unions in Leibniz

here because it adumbrates the discussion of the unity of the person in terms of the relations between dominant and subordinate monads. Whereas in the picture given to Tournemine the metaphysical union was of the mind and body, in the picture presented to Des Bosses the real metaphysical union can be described as being a union of monads—that is, a union of diverse simple substances. In either picture, it is the individual or the person that results from such a union. But as we shall see, it will become the role of the vinculum substantiale to act as, or provide for, the real union of monads.

V. VINCULUM SUBSTANTIALE AND SUPPOSITUM

In later letters, Leibniz discusses the nature of a metaphysical union in the same breath as his initial work on the notion of the vinculum substantiale. Writing on 8 September 1709, Leibniz says the following:

Concerning what you ask about my way of explaining the Eucharist, I respond that, in our [i.e. Protestant] view, there is no place for the transsubstantiation or consubstantiation of the bread, and that when one takes the bread, the body of Christ is perceived at the same time, so that only the presence of Christ needs to be explained. And I responded to Tournemine recently that presence is something metaphysical, like a union: which is not explained through the phenomena.40

To the best of my knowledge, Leibniz was never engaged with Tournemine in a discussion of the nature of transsubstantiation, and so, when he claims that the “presence is something metaphysical, like a union,” he must surely be referring to his earlier account of the relation between mind and body. Because Leibniz can move so easily from the nature of transsubstantiation to the relation of mind and body and because both are to be understood in terms of a metaphysical presence or union, the notions of the suppositum and vinculum substantiale seem to be, if not identical, at least similar and somehow linked in Leibniz’s mind. Responding to Des Bosses’s continued queries about the nature of transsubstantiation in a world of monads, Leibniz adds in a letter from January 1710, “Since bread is not a true substance, but a being by aggregation [ens per aggregationem] or a substantiatum resulting from innumerable monads through some superadded union [superadditam quandam Unionem], the substantiality of the bread consists in this union....”41 Here a certain union superadded to the monads of the bread constitutes the unity or the individuality of the bread; it is this union that guarantees that the object, existing otherwise as an “ens per
aggregationem,” is substantial at all. And two paragraphs later, Leibniz returns to the issue of the union of mind and body, expressing some concern about the status of animals: “Whether they [σῶμα, animals] constitute a person with its body depends on the nature of the union, which is something metaphysical [μεταφυσικόν], nor can it always be satisfactorily explained by us.” Insofar as the union superadded to the monads of the bread is not included among the phenomena and is similarly difficult to explain, it might be considered by Leibniz to be a metaphysical union. Thus, the roles that the vinculum and suppositum play in the philosophy of Leibniz, as well as Leibniz’s descriptions of these two concepts, seem to be essentially the same.

In the notes to his letter to Des Bosses of 5 February 1712, Leibniz seems to admit exactly this—that the vinculum substantiale of monads is equivalent to a suppositum. At least, that is how some have interpreted his remarks. But when we look carefully, we can actually see the shift in Leibniz’s position regarding the nature of the union of mind and body and of monads, a shift hinted at in the letter from April of 1709. Leibniz says,

This thing added to monads does not come about in just any way, otherwise some scattered monads might be united in a new substance, nor does anything determinate arise in contiguous bodies; but it suffices that it unites these monads which are under the domination of one monad or which make an organic body one thing or one machine of nature. And in this consists the metaphysical bond [vinculum metaphysicum] of the soul and the body, which constitute one suppositum, and to this the union of natures in Christ is analogous. And these are what make an unum per se or an unum suppositum.  

While this passage might suggest that Leibniz is making a case for the equivalency of the notions of the suppositum and the vinculum substantiale, I should like to argue that such a reading is false. In my view, Leibniz is actually making a slight contrast between a vinculum substantiale, on the one hand, and a vinculum metaphysicum, on the other hand. The vinculum substantiale is superadded to a group of monads and forms of them an unum per se or a suppositum; a vinculum metaphysicum, on the other hand, arises between the body and soul and may be said to form of them an unum per se or a suppositum.

To see the distinction between the vinculum substantiale and vinculum metaphysicum better, we need to look at the two sentences that immediately precede the passage quoted above. After having spoken of the relations of time and space, Leibniz says,
Metaphysical and Real Unions in Leibniz

But in addition to these real relations, one more perfect relation can be conceived through which a new substance arises from many substances. And this will not be a simple result, that is, it will not be established by true and real relations alone, but it will add some new substantiability [aliquam novam substantialitatem], that is, a substantial bond [vinculum substantiale], nor will it be only an effect of the divine intellect, but of the divine will as well.45

Several things are worth noting here. First, the vinculum substantiale is to be considered a new substance-like thing beyond the original group of substances, while a supposition does not add some new substantiability, but arises from its constituents—matter and form, entelechy and matter, or mind and body, depending upon Leibniz’s way of expressing himself at the time. Second, as was mentioned above, the vinculum substantiale is superadded to a group of substances in order to form of them a real union; the vinculum is logically prior to the existence of a real union. On the other hand, Leibniz characterizes a supposition, in his debate with Tournemine and in the Theodicy, as following the existence of a metaphysical union of mind and body; that is, the metaphysical union of mind and body, or the pre-established harmony of mind and body, serves as a condition for the presence of a supposition. Indeed, throughout the correspondence with Des Bosses, Leibniz never claims that the vinculum substantiale “arises” from the monads; but he does say that a new thing will arise or come into existence when a vinculum substantiale is superadded to the monads. In short, the vinculum substantiale is characterized as an additional substance-like thing superadded to a group of monads, while a supposition, or vinculum metaphysicum, on the other hand, arises from the aggregate of monads or from the mind and body. Thus, while it seems that the vinculum substantiale can bring it about that a group of monads forms a supposition, it is wrong to conclude from this that the vinculum substantiale is itself equivalent to a supposition. A supposition will be, for Leibniz, merely a result of a unifying force and a way to speak about the aggregate of substances as a true unity; the vinculum substantiale will act as that which unifies this group of substances.

One might object to this interpretation of the vinculum substantiale, saying that the vinculum is not itself a new substance but rather is merely that which bonds various substances into a new substance. In other words, one might wish to argue that Leibniz’s point is that the vinculum substantiale adds a “new substantiability” to the monads and is not a distinct and new substance added to a group of monads. Yet given Leibniz’s explanation of transubstantiation in his correspondence with Des Bosses, which is a crucial theme in the corre-
Brandon Look

spondence, Leibniz must mean that the vinculum substantiale is indeed a substance added to the aggregate of monads. For example, in his letter dated 20 September 1712, Leibniz gives perhaps his clearest explanation of the role of the vinculum substantiale in transubstantiation. He says that transubstantiation can be explained “by retaining monads,..., but with the vinculum substantiale of the body of Christ added by God to unite substantially the monads of the bread and wine, and the prior vinculum substantiale destroyed, and with it its modifications and accidents.” In Leibniz’s view, then, there will be a vinculum substantiale existing between the monads of the bread and wine that will be destroyed during the service of the Eucharist and replaced by the vinculum substantiale of the body and blood of Christ. And in the course of the correspondence, Leibniz makes it clear that the change involved here is a change of substances. Indeed, in later letters to Des Bosses, when the subject of the correspondence is primarily the nature of composite substance, Leibniz makes it clear that the vinculum of monads is indeed something substantial. Again, unlike a suppositum which arose from the harmony of mind and body, the vinculum substantiale is clearly to be something beyond the simple substances, or monads, which it unites into a composite substance.

VI. LEIBNIZ AND THE REAL UNION OF MONADS

Just as there is a distinction to be drawn between Leibniz’s conception of a suppositum and his conception of a vinculum substantiale, so there is also a distinction to be drawn between what Leibniz had termed in his debate with Tournemine a “metaphysical union” and what he now refers to as a “real union.” When we turn to Leibniz’s letters to Des Bosses composed in 1715 and 1716, we see the idea of a “real union” playing a large role in how Leibniz explains the nature of bodies and composite substances in general and individuals and persons in particular. In a letter from March 1715, Leibniz concedes that bodies are real in some sense, at least insofar as any phenomenon is real, but adds that, if we wish to take bodies as substances, there will have to be some new principle of real union. In other words, one criterion for a true substance is whether or not it possesses or constitutes a real unity. While simple bodies like bowling balls and bread presumably fail this test, they may be raised to the level of substances by adding some principle of real union. Des Bosses quickly seizes upon this idea of a real union and asks Leibniz whether this thing that “realizes” the phenomena alters the phenomena in any way.

Responding to this query one month later concerning the “real union, realizing or rather substantializing phe-
nomena,” Leibniz states that, if a body is taken to be a substance, the body can be nothing other than the result of a “real union” of monads, and, further, that any modifications of the body will correspond to modifications of the monads. While one might have assumed that the union of monads effected by the vinculum substantiale would be the same as the “metaphysical union” of mind and body, it seems clear that Leibniz intends this union of monads not only to represent the union of diverse simple substances in a composite substance but also to account for the real—that is, non-phenomenal—existence of composite substances.

Later in the same paragraph Leibniz returns to the notion of the vinculum substantiale but here calls it a “vinculum Reale,” echoing his phrase “real union.” And concerning this “vinculum Reale,” Leibniz says, “Still, it will not be necessary for it [the vinculum substantiale] to be posited except in bodies that have a dominant monad, or are unities per se like organic beings, and to this monad the bond [vinculum] will always adhere.” Leibniz considered the vinculum ultimately as something that is to exist between the dominant monad (mind) and the rest of the monads (or the subordinate monads from which result the body) of an organism. The vinculum will, after all, always adhere to the dominant monad (“huic Monadi”) and provide the real union of the dominant monad and its subordinate monads. Leibniz advances the notion of the vinculum in order to establish a “realistic” explanation of the union of a dominant monad and its subordinate monads, where before Leibniz had only an account of the relation between dominant and subordinate monads in terms of their perceptions and volitions.

The similarity between Leibniz’s conceptions of the metaphysical union and the resulting suppositum, on the one hand, and the real union and the vinculum substantiale, on the other hand, should not be surprising because these concepts all revolve around the same central problem—how to explain the unity of a composite substance (or rather how to explain the nature of a person) when it is guaranteed only by pre-established harmony. Both when Leibniz explained the world in terms of mind and body and when he explained the world in terms of monads, he depended upon a form of pre-established harmony to explain the nature of a person. In one picture, the mind and body are in perfect harmony with each other; the mind acts according to its laws; and the body acts according to its laws. On the monadological picture, all the monads express the world from their own points of view; the monads of an individual are likewise in some form of pre-established harmony; and the unity of an individual is determined by the particular relations between dominant and subordinate monads. Yet, beyond the explanations of personhood by means of pre-
established harmony, Leibniz was also compelled primarily by Tournemine and Des Bosses to provide additional explanations of the unity of a person. Thus, over and above the consensus of mind and body, Leibniz is forced by Tournemine to admit that the mind and body together constitute a suppositum, a “person,” that allows us to speak of a suppositum as a genuine individual; and over and above the relations between dominant and subordinate monads that constitute an animal, Leibniz is led by Des Bosses to provide a realistic account of the union of a composite substance by means of a vinculum substantiale.

VII. THE PROBLEM OF UNITY AND THE INDETERMINACY OF TRANSLATION

While several scholars have pointed to the role of the metaphysical union of mind and body, or suppositum, in the origin of Leibniz’s conception of the vinculum substantiale, they have not concentrated on how Leibniz’s conceptions of the metaphysical union and of the vinculum develop and have therefore failed to notice some of the important differences between these two notions. The most significant difference between Leibniz’s picture of the union of mind and body and his picture of the union of monads has already been mentioned and relates to the phrases “metaphysical union” and “real union.” Here we need to recall the subtle change in Leibniz’s thought that was suggested above: namely, Leibniz’s move away from discussing the “metaphysical union” of mind and body and towards the “real metaphysical union” of mind and body that explains how the mind “really” is in the body. From this point, Leibniz moved to his conception of the “real union” of monads, provided by the vinculum substantiale. And, in the course of his correspondence with Des Bosses, Leibniz himself reified that union or vinculum which was in turn to reify or substantiate the phenomena. And this fact points to another overlooked feature of the nature of the vinculum substantiale; namely, unlike a suppositum of mind and body that arises from the metaphysical union of mind and body, the vinculum substantiale is a distinct and new substance-like thing superadded to the monads.

Ultimately, as was suggested above, the difference between Leibniz’s “real union” and “metaphysical union” lies in the nature of the entities being unified. It was Leibniz’s virtue as a philosopher to see that, in a world of Cartesian dualism, the mind, as one kind of substance, and the body, as another kind of substance, could not form a “real” union, and he sought only to explain their consensus. But, of course, when Leibniz came to explain his own view of the ultimate constituents of the world, he had really only one “kind” of substance—monads.
Metaphysical and Real Unions in Leibniz

And I take it that he thought that there was a way or perhaps even a need to explain how these simple substances could form a “real union.” Thus, when Leibniz had to explain the world of mind and body, he could do no better than to explain the “metaphysical” union of mind and body in an individual. When he wished to explain the world in terms of monads, however, there was the pressure—immediately from Des Bosses, and indirectly from Tournemine, who had set the mark for the kind of union that one should want—to explain the “real” union of monads in an individual. And Leibniz’s response to this pressure was the creation of the vinculum substantiale.

The view that I have been arguing for faces two obvious criticisms. First, one might point out that there is very good reason to think that Leibniz’s doctrine of the vinculum substantiale in no way represents his definitive view on the nature of substance.55 While this is most likely so, it does not seriously undermine my argument. For my claim is that Leibniz, in the correspondence with Des Bosses, began to conceive of the relations between monads in such a way that their real union became a conceptual possibility, something that the real union of mind and body never was. Second, one might object to the view that I am suggesting—that there is a difference between the metaphysical union of mind and body and the real union of monads—by saying that there really should be no difference in the kind of union between mind and body, on the one hand, and monads, on the other, because the relation of mind and body and the relation between monads in a composite are simply two different ways of talking about the same thing. Indeed, it is typically suggested that Leibniz’s talk of the relation of mind and body or form and matter can always be translated simply into talk of the relation of monads. On this view, the mind or the form is the dominant monad and the body or matter is the aggregate of subordinate monads. But, as mentioned immediately above, there is one crucial difference between the mind/body or form/matter accounts, on the one hand, and the dominant monad/subordinate monad account, on the other hand: in the latter, the things to be united are all of the same kind, differing only in the clarity of their perceptions, whereas, in the former, the things to be united are of different kinds.56 Insofar as the monads of a composite are all the same kind of thing, there is no longer the difficulty that allows for only a metaphysical union of the monads.57

If I am right about the distinction between the metaphysical union of mind and body, on the one hand, and the real union of monads, on the other, then I think we are in a position to reassess one of the dogmas of Leibnizian scholarship. It ought no longer to be suggested that the language of mind and body union is so easily translatable into the language of

Brandon Look

Leibniz’s monadology. Certainly the union of mind and body can be explained by their harmony and by the fact that mind and body together constitute a suppositum; certainly there is pre-established harmony between the dominant monad and its subordinates, a harmony that partially explains their union. But, in the former case, it is impossible for there to be a real union, since the mind and body exist in different realms, while, in the latter case, it is possible for there to be a real union between monads. And the vinculum substantiale simply represents Leibniz’s attempt to really unify the monads in a composite and to give them the kind of unity that Tournemine had demanded of the mind and body.

Moreover, in the correspondence with Des Bosses, Leibniz is no longer content with merely claiming that there is a union of monads in the case of a composite substance, he tries, with the vinculum substantiale, to explain how composite substances might really be united. No longer does Leibniz say, as he did to Tournemine, that there is a metaphysical union of mind and body, but that he does not wish to consider it because its existence lies outside the phenomenal realm; rather Leibniz now says to Des Bosses that the monads of a composite substance may form a real union by virtue of the superaddition of the vinculum substantiale and further that this vinculum depends upon the presence of a dominant monad to which it is affixed. It is clear that Leibniz considers it possible to give an explanation of the relation of monads in a composite substance in a way that he seemed to think impossible for the relation between mind and body. And, while Leibniz still uses analogy to bring out the details of the relation between the vinculum substantiale and the monads of a composite substance, saying that the vinculum acts as an echo to the dominant monad, he does seem to be attempting to rely more and more on a rigorous philosophical analysis of the nature of this problematic relation. For Leibniz gives us a much fuller account of the nature of the real union of monads, by means of a vinculum substantiale, than he did of the metaphysical union of mind and body, or suppositum, trying to show how it is so and not simply claiming that it is so.

Leibniz’s correspondence with Des Bosses is linked to his debate with Tournemine over the relation between mind and body. Tournemine had demanded that Leibniz explain the real union of mind and body, and Leibniz could only concede that they constitute a metaphysical union which makes of them a suppositum. Des Bosses had sought to know how the innumerable monads of an organism could constitute a genuine unity, and Leibniz claimed that, if the monads are to constitute a real union, then there must be a vinculum substantiale that unites them and renders them a suppositum. This marks an interesting transition in Leibniz’s philosophical concerns: no
Metaphysical and Real Unions in Leibniz

longer does Leibniz seek to account for the metaphysical union of a person’s mind and body, in the end Leibniz wishes to provide for the real union of monads. And the vinculum substantiale comes to serve as the ultimate tie that binds a being together.

NOTES


1 Des Bosses (1668-1738) was a Jesuit theologian and philosopher who lived for several years in Hildesheim, a short distance from Leibniz’s home in Hanover. In addition to corresponding with Leibniz, Des Bosses also translated Leibniz’s Theodicy into Latin.

2 Tournemine (1661-1739) was an active contributor to the Mémoires pour l’histoire des sciences et des beaux arts (usually called the Mémoires de Trévoux) and later a teacher of Voltaire at the Collège Louis-le-Grand. That Tournemine was not as brilliant as Leibniz sometimes claims him to be in his letters can be seen from the following couplet, popular among Voltaire’s fellow students: “C’est notre Père Tournemine / Qui croit tout ce qu’il imagine.” (Quoted in Gustave Dumas, Histoire du Journal de Trévoux depuis 1701 jusqu’en 1762 (Paris, 1936), 80.)


4 While it was not my intention in writing this paper to involve myself in the debate between Daniel Garber and Robert Merrihew.
Adams regarding the nature of substance in Leibniz’s “middle years,” the reader will no doubt see that certain features of my interpretation of Leibniz’s response to Tournemine are “in harmony” with features of Garber’s view and that, more important, my interpretation works against Adams’s view insofar as it calls into question the possibility of easily translating the language of the mind-body relation into the language of monads. For the views of Garber and Adams, see Daniel Garber, “Leibniz and the Foundations of Physics: The Middle Years,” in The Natural Philosophy of Leibniz, ed. K. Okruhlik and J. R. Brown (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985), 27–130, and Adams, op. cit., ch. 11.

5 Boehm, op. cit., 85.
6 M 865.
7 M 869–870.
8 As a regular contributor to the Mémoires de Trévoux, Tournemine was keenly aware of the scientific, literary and philosophical work of his time; it is unlikely that he was not acquainted with Leibniz’s more detailed views on the nature of substance, published in, for example, “A New System of Nature and Communication of Substances, and of the Union of Soul and Body” (1695).
9 M 869–870.
10 This criticism faintly echoes a criticism Leibniz faced from Arnauld some 15 years earlier. Taking aim at Leibniz’s account of “expression” and at Leibniz’s claim that the soul expresses most clearly the body that belongs to it, Arnauld suggests that one’s soul can in fact express more clearly the motions of the satelites of Saturn than the motions in one’s lymph nodes; thus, the satellites of Saturn belong as much to me as do the micro-organisms of my body. (See GP II 105.)
11 M 871.
12 Although this short piece was not published until 1708, it is clear that Leibniz had actually answered Tournemine some two years earlier. In his letter to Des Bosses of 2 February 1706, Leibniz says, for example, that he “responded” to the arguments of Tournemine. (GP II 296)
13 GP VI 595/AG 197.
14 GP VI 595/AG 197; GP VI 81.
15 M 869.
16 GP VI 597.
18 A VI, vi, 177/RB 177.
19 GP VI 45.
20 GP VI 135.
21 GP II 281/L 538–539. That Leibniz can say that Tournemine generally approves of his theory is one of the surest signs of his philosophical optimism.
22 On this line of argument, Leibniz would be guilty of having introduced into his philosophical system an unnecessary entity, the metaphysical union, in order to avoid controversy between himself
and a prominent Jesuit theologian. And many commentators, following Russell, have charged precisely this with regard to Leibniz’s introduction of the vinculum substantiale into his discussion with Des Bosses.

23 Rutherford, op. cit., 275.
24 Adams, op. cit., 299.
25 Marleen Rozemond also, I believe, makes the mistake of equating the metaphysical union with the real union. See the first part of her recent essay, cited in n. 3.
26 Still, it seems that in the De Volder letter Leibniz himself treats the kind of union that Tournemine demands as being a metaphysical union. Does this not mean that there is no distinction in Leibniz’s mind? Not necessarily. In a passage from the Nouveaux Essais Leibniz is quite explicit about the distinction between a metaphysical dependence (or, in this case, the harmony of mind and body, arranged by God), on the one hand, and a real dependence, on the other. There he says the following: “... the soul keeps its perfections while representing the body; and although in involuntary actions the mind depends on the body (to put the matter accurately), in other actions the mind is independent and even makes the body depend upon it. But this dependence is only a metaphysical one, which consists in God’s taking account of one of them in regulating the other, or taking more account of one than of the other according to the inherent perfections of each; whereas real dependence would consist in an immediate influence which the dependent one would receive from the other.” (A VI, vi, 177/RB 177) And the Nouveaux Essais were composed between 1704 and 1706, precisely the time in which Leibniz was engaged in his debate with Tournemine. But, more important, we need to imagine what Tournemine would say (and, in fact, did say) in response to Leibniz’s account of the union of mind and body: “No! The union is not simply something metaphysical; it is real; it is more than the harmony of mind and body and their existence as a suppositum.” While it is admittedly speculation on my part, I think that Leibniz came to take seriously the demand for this kind of real union.
27 GP VI 81
28 Ibid.
29 I do not want to imply that the idea of a metaphysical union of mind and body was present in the Discourse on Metaphysics or On Nature Itself, only that Leibniz similarly appealed to the notion of a suppositum, which was defined as being the seat of activity.
30 GP IV 509/AG 160.
31 (i) See, for example, I.q.3.3 and III.q.16.5; (ii) see I.q.3.3.0 and III.q.2.2.c; and (iii) see III.q.16.1.2.3.
32 Disputationes Metaphysicae, XXXIV, § 1, 9, § 2, 4 and §§9 & 12 passim. Suárez’s full view is actually more complicated than I sketch it here, though the principle remains the same: the person, the suppositum, is a per se unity consisting of form and matter. For a sensitive treatment of the views of Suárez with respect to Descartes’s conception of the nature of a human being, see Gilles Olivo, “L’homme en personne,” in Descartes et Regius: Autour de l’Explication de l’esprit humain, ed. Theo Verbeek (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), 69–91. For a general account of Leibniz’s relation to Suárez, see André Robinet, “Suárez im Werk von Leibniz,” Studia
Brandon Look


33 GP II 75/AG 78.
34 GP II 314.
35 It is true that this will not necessarily be a deep or unproblematic explanation of the union of the mind and body, nor will it certainly provide an answer to the comment. But, at the very least, it would be a less mysterious account of mind-body union than what Tournemine would have wanted Leibniz to provide.
36 GP II 299.
37 GP II 371/L 598.
38 GP II 371/L 598.
39 I take it that Leibniz’s “the soul, or the monad itself” ought to be read as a reference to the dominant monad of an organism.
40 GP II 390.
41 GP II 399.
42 Leibniz does mention at the end of this paragraph that, as he denies transubstantiation, he does not need this explanation. Nevertheless, I think it important that he phrases the discussion in the terms he does, for in the later letters to Des Bosses the vinculum, applying almost exclusively to complex organisms, like persons, is still described as that union which is superadded to the monads and which guarantees the unity of the individual.
43 GP II 399–400.
45 GP II 438/AG 199.
46 I argue for this view in my Leibniz and the ‘Vinculum Substantiale’ (Stuttgart: Steiner (= Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft), forthcoming), ch. 5, §2.
47 GP II 459/L 607.
48 See, e.g., GP II 503/L 613.
49 GP II 492.
50 GP II 493.
51 GP II 495/L 610.
52 GP II 496/L 611. This passage suggests an interesting, yet often overlooked, feature of Leibniz’s view of the vinculum substantiale. It is often suggested that the doctrine of the vinculum substantiale is advanced solely in order for Leibniz to explain the nature of transubstantiation to his Jesuit friend, Des Bosses. But, because Leibniz here claims that the vinculum will not be necessary except in bodies that have dominant monads and because bread and wine do not have dominant monads, it would seem that Leibniz was ultimately not interested in the notion of the vinculum as something that would guarantee the substantiality of the bread and wine and hence help to explain transubstantiation. (Leibniz’s view of transubstantiation by means of the vinculum substantiale could, of course, be modified along the following lines: the bread and wine are filled with smaller-scale dominant monads that are destroyed and replaced with smaller-scale vincula substantialia of the body and blood of Christ.)
53 See, for example, Leibniz’s letter to De Volder from 30 June 1704 (GP II 268/AG 179).
54 Explaining the relation between the dominant monad and the subordinate monads of an organism (or explaining how the dominant monad unites or is dominant over subordinate monads) is tricky business. Indeed, Adams has gone so far as to call this issue “the center of the gravest difficulties and instabilities in Leibniz’s theory of the world.” (See his “Phenomenalism and Corporeal Substance in
Metaphysical and Real Unions in Leibniz

Leibniz,” Midwest Studies in Philosophy 8 (1983), 230.) We might be able to reconstruct a simplified version of the relation between dominant and subordinate monads based on the following claims of Leibniz: a dominant monad makes a corporeal substance one machine (GP II 252/AG 177); domination and subordination consist in degrees of perfection (GP II 451/L 604-5); and one creature is more perfect than another when one finds in it a priori reasons for what will happen in the other (GP VI 615/AG 219). We might imagine then that the dominant monad brings about the unity of a composite entity when it contains a priori reasons (presumably the appropriate perceptions and volitions) for what happens to the other members of the composite. But this is simply a more elaborate account of pre-established harmony.

Adams and Rutherford make this point in their books. (See Adams, op. cit., 299–303, and Rutherford, op. cit., 276–281.) See also my Leibniz and the ‘Vinculum Substantiale’ (Stuttgart: Steiner (= Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft), forthcoming), chs. 4–6.

One can also see that, at least during the correspondence with Des Bosses, Leibniz considered the relation between form and matter to be unlike the relation between dominant monad and subordinate monads. For example, Leibniz says to Des Bosses, “Primary matter, namely, that which is required for extension and antitypy, that is, for diffusion and resistance, arises from the union of the passive power of the monads, and from the union of monadic entelechies arises substantial form.” (GP II 435/AG 198) In other words, the form of the composite is not the dominant monad but the union of all the entelechies, and the matter is not the aggregate of subordinate monads but the union of the passive powers of the monads of a composite.

Here we ought to recall Bilfinger’s explication of the metaphysical union of mind and body (quoted above, 6). There would be no reason why monads could not form a real union, on Bilfinger’s view.

The extent to which Leibniz is committed to the real existence of composite substances (versus the view that there are only monads and mere aggregates) is subject to debate.

Recall the passage from the Theodicy where Leibniz makes explicit the distinction between knowing that and knowing how (quoted above, 9).

See, for example, GP II 482, and GP II 496/L 611 (quoted above, 17).

See, for example, GP II 517/AG 203.

This is a slight exaggeration, for Leibniz’s account of the nature of the vinculum substantiale is far from clear. Nevertheless, my point is simply that, in the Des Bosses correspondence, Leibniz makes more of an attempt to explain how the monads can constitute a real union than he did to explain how the mind and body can constitute a metaphysical union. Moreover, the reader should not think that the vinculum substantiale—even if it were Leibniz’s considered view on the subject—represents a good solution to the problem of the union of composite substances. After all, Leibniz may be able to explain how the monads are bound together—by the vinculum substantiale—but certainly not how the vinculum substantiale is bound to the monads. A “Third Man”-like argument seems quickly to follow. For more on this point, see my Leibniz and the ‘Vinculum Substantiale’ (Stuttgart: Steiner (= Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft), forthcoming), ch. 6.