ON MONADIC DOMINATION IN LEIBNIZ'S METAPHYSICS

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I

Historians of philosophy are familiar with Leibniz's claim that, in organisms or machines of nature, there is a special relation between monads, whereby one monad may be said to be dominant over another. The dominant monad is usually said to occupy the role of the soul, and the innumerable subordinate monads are said to result (somehow) in the body of the organism in the phenomenal world. And Leibniz often appeals to this relation of domination and subordination in explaining the unity of a composite substance; that is, a dominant monad is described as serving to unify monads into a composite substance. Yet, explaining exactly how Leibniz understands one monad to be dominant over another or how a dominant monad can unify a group of monads is generally a tricky business. And once we come to some understanding of how this relation might work, we quickly see weaknesses and problems in Leibniz's metaphysics. This should not be surprising, for it is based on two problematic elements in Leibniz's metaphysics – his notion of expression and his doctrine of relations – and it in turn underlies a third difficult aspect of his mature thought: the nature of the unity and reality of bodies. Indeed, one of the most acute scholars of Leibniz's thought has claimed that the doctrine of the unity and reality of bodies based on the relation of domination and subordination rests at 'the center of the gravest difficulties and instabilities in Leibniz's theory of the world.'

Despite the importance of the relation of domination and subordination in Leibniz's mature metaphysics, it is still relatively infrequently discussed and not at all well understood. And when the relation of domination and subordination is discussed, it is explained principally by reducing or translating it to the relation between the soul and the body; an interpretative move that perhaps begs the question of exactly how we are to understand this relation. The goal of this paper will be, therefore, to analyze anew the nature of monadic domination in Leibniz's metaphysics.

I shall proceed in the following way. In parts II and III of this paper, I shall discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the interpretation put forward by Robert Merrihew Adams in his recent book, and I shall expand upon this account, discussing a crucial but hitherto unexamined aspect of the relation between dominant and subordinate monads, reconstructed from Leibniz’s letters to Des Bosses and his essays of 1714, Principles of Nature and Grace and Monadology. In part IV of this paper, I shall examine various difficulties that arise both for my interpretation and, more generally, for Leibniz’s account of the relation of domination and subordination. For example, is Leibniz’s account of the relation of domination and subordination sufficient to account for the unity of a composite substance? Can the concepts used in this account successfully explain the relation of domination and subordination? The answer, as we shall see, is that Leibniz’s full account of monadic domination cannot be explicated purely with reference to monads, their perceptions and appetites.

II

Leibniz’s first reference to a ‘dominant monad’ occurs in his letter to De Volder of June 1703. There he gives his well-known ontological classification, saying that he makes the following distinctions:

(1) the primitive entelechy or soul; (2) the matter, namely, the primary matter or primitive passive power; (3) the monad made up of these two things; (4) the mass or secondary passive power, or the organic machine in which innumerable subordinate monads concur \[concurrent\]; and (5) the animal, that is, the corporeal substance, which the dominating monad makes into one machine.

\[(GP\ II\ 252/AG\ 177^*)^{3}\]

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2 Robert Merrihew Adams, Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist (Oxford 1994): 285–91. Despite the importance of the relation between dominant and subordinate monads in Leibniz’s mature metaphysics, relatively little scholarly attention has been focused on the ‘mechanism’, so to speak, of domination. Aside from Adams’s work, scholars working on Leibniz’s late metaphysics in recent years – Robinet and Rutherford, for example – have simply glossed over the issue, assuming that the relation between dominant and subordinate monads is explicable in the same terms as the relation between the soul and the body. (Cf. André Robinet, Architectonica Disjoinctive Automates Systématiques et Idéalité Transcendante dans l’Œuvre de G. W. Leibniz (Paris 1986); and Donald Rutherford, Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature (Cambridge 1995).)

3 The following abbreviations will be used in this paper: AG = G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis 1989); C = Leibniz, Opuscules et fragments inédits de Leibniz, ed. Louis Couturat (Paris 1903; reprint Hildesheim 1965); GP = Die philosophischen Schriften von G. W. Leibniz, 7 vols., ed. C. I. Gerhardt (Berlin 1875–90; reprint Hildesheim 1965), followed by volume and page number; L = Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters, ed. and trans. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht 1969, 2nd edn). When there is no reference to AG or L, the translation is my own; when the citation is followed by an asterisk, I have modified the translation.
As with many of Leibniz’s explanations, this one raises perhaps as many difficulties or questions as it answers. The most compelling issues for my purposes are first, how exactly one monad may be said to be dominant over another, and second, how a dominant monad can make a corporeal substance or an aggregate of monads one machine. Naturally, these issues are interrelated and may, practically speaking, amount to the same thing, but, for the moment at least, it will be helpful to distinguish between the issue of domination and the issue of unification.

The most natural way of dealing with these questions is to assume that the relation between the dominant monad and its subordinate monads is like the relation between the mind or soul and its body. In so far as Leibniz seems to equate the concurring subordinate monads with mass and the dominant monad as the unifying principle of the corporeal substance, this would seem to make perfectly good sense. Consider the following two statements from Leibniz’s best-known late works, *Principles of Nature and Grace* and the *Monadology*:

(i) [E]ach distinct simple substance or monad, which makes up the center of a composite substance (an animal, for example) and is the principle of its unity, is surrounded by a mass composed of an infinity of other monads, which constitute the body belonging to this central monad, through whose affections the monad represents the things outside it, similarly to the way a center does.

(GP VI 598–99/AG 207*)

(ii) [E]ach living body has a dominant entelechy, which in the animal is the soul; but the members of this living body are full of other living beings, plants, animals, each of which also has its entelechy, or its dominant soul.

(GP VI 619/AG 222*)

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In other words, every organic body has a dominant monad, which in
total monads divided by the soul. Leaving aside for the moment the
issue of the extension of this relation all the way down to the infinitely small,
it seems clear that the relation between a dominant monad and its sub-
ordinates ought to be like the relation between soul and body in human
beings. But, of course, now we need to flesh this picture out.

According to Adams, one monad may be said to be dominant over
another (that is, one monad may be said to dominate its body) (1) when
there is a direct and mutual expression of the one by the other and (2) when
the one monad has a clear perception, or relatively clearer perceptions, of
the organic functions of its body. The first aspect of monadic domination
may be seen throughout much of Leibniz's writings. For evidence, Adams
points to a passage from a preliminary draft to the 'New System', in which
Leibniz says that the perceptions of a monad correspond "to the rest of
the universe, but particularly to the organs of the body that constitutes its point
of view in the world, and it is in this that their union consists." Adams
explains this passage as follows:

A monad and its organic body both contain expressions of an infinity of things,
but each is, as a whole, an expression of the other, and this relationship of
mutual expression is peculiarly direct. An organic body stands in this relation
to its dominant monad alone, not to the subordinate monads in it – though they
do of course contain expressions of it.

The second component of monadic domination centres around the notion
of the function of an organic body. According to Adams, a particular monad
is dominant when it 'perceives more distinctly than any other monad in its
body... an appetite or tendency for perceptions of the normal organic
functioning of the body'. The issue of the 'function' of an organism is
important, for it allows us to get at the notion of the 'domination' or
'control' of one monad over its body. As Adams explains this functional
model, the dominant monad is 'conscious of an appetite for a perception of
a certain event' and is therefore 'active in producing the event'.

This interpretation is also supported if we examine Leibniz's quarrel with
Arnauld over the relation between mind and body, a source that Adams
does not consider. In the correspondence with Arnauld, Leibniz routinely
explained the union of the mind and body in terms of the clear expression

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6 Ibid.: 286. (GP IV 477) In the passage in question, Leibniz explicitly says 'soul (âme)' and
not 'dominant monad.'
7 Ibid.: 286. I shall explore a particular feature of this claim in some detail below.
8 Ibid.: 289. The sentence quoted from Adams is not used to give a condition or criterion for a
dominant monad; my use of the passage is, however, perfectly consistent with Adams's
general view.
9 Ibid.: 289.
of the body by the mind. Leibniz's claim was that the mind expresses most clearly that body that belongs to it. In other words, although my mind may mirror the entire world, it expresses most clearly its own body; and it is because of the clear expression of the body that the body may be said to belong to that particular mind.

But against this view, Arnauld raised a very obvious but nonetheless powerful objection that, I think, troubled Leibniz for much of the rest of his career. Arnauld asked quite simply and incredulously, 'Do you mean that my mind expresses the motions of the lymph in my lymph nodes [mouvement de la lymphe dans les vaisseaux lymphatiques] more clearly than the motions of the satellites of Saturn?' (GP II 105). In order to satisfy Arnauld, Leibniz developed a two-part strategy. First, he (re-)defined the notion of 'expression' so that it was trivially true that the mind would express most clearly its own body: 'One thing expresses another', Leibniz says, 'when there is a constant and ordered relation between what can be said of one thing and the other' (GP II 112). If this sounds a little like pre-established harmony, it should. Second, he (re-)developed his account of perception so that, as all perception takes place through the sense organs, one bears a closer cognitive relation to one's own body (GP II 113). In other words, according to Leibniz, I do not simply perceive the moons of Saturn, I am aware of the effects of the moons of Saturn on my eyes. Though I may perceive the motions in my lymph nodes only confusedly, I perceive the motions of the moons of Saturn through my body. The point here is, of course, that I have a privileged relation to my body, a relation known because of my perceptions of the external world; or, to return to Adams's way of speaking, my soul is dominant over my body because it perceives clearly the organic functions of my body.

III

I believe that Adams is essentially on the right track. Nevertheless, I should like to suggest that more work needs to be done to explicate clearly the relation of domination and subordination. In particular, I think that Adams's interpretation is insufficiently detailed in three ways. First and foremost, Adams does not clearly distinguish the relation between an organic body and the dominant monad from the relation between subordinate monads and the dominant monad. Second, Adams suggests that a dominant monad's consciousness of an appetite is responsible for producing an event. Yet, one is left wondering exactly how this is to be understood in Leibniz's philosophy. Third, Adams claims that the dominant monad and its body contain expressions of an infinity of things in the universe but that each is also somehow a unique expression of the other. But here we need to analyze further the notion of expression. In what sense does a dominant monad contain an expression of x? In what sense can one say that a body
contains an expression of \( x \)? Or that one thing is an expression of another? Is this the same notion of expression? Indeed, can we speak at all of the mutual expression of monads?

What is interesting in the explication thus far of the relation of domination and subordination is that it appeals to texts that do not explicitly mention ‘dominant’ and ‘subordinate’ monads; that is, the relation of domination and subordination has been explained principally by elaborating upon Leibniz’s account of the mind and body. While this is a fairly satisfactory answer to the question of the relation between the dominant monad, qua soul, and its organic body, the particular question that is left unanswered is this: what is the relation between the dominant monad and its subordinate monads? Or, what is the relation among monads in a composite? Put differently, we have discussed the relation between the dominant monad and its body (the aggregate of subordinate monads); essentially what Leibniz will call the kingdoms of efficient causes and final causes.\(^\text{10}\) So, what is the relation among monads, all of which operate within the kingdom of final causes? This question is interesting and important because, of course, in Leibniz’s mature view the world is made up purely of monads, and bodies are somehow ‘results’ of these monads.\(^\text{11}\) Therefore, though Leibniz speaks in the Monadology and Principles of Nature and Grace of the dominant monad and its body, which is in turn composed of an infinity of (subordinate) monads, it is probably more correct to say that the body results from all of the monads. To get to the core of Leibniz’s metaphysics and his account of the substructure of the phenomenal world, then, we need to come to grips with the question of the relation among monads, as monads.

We know that, for Leibniz, monads are characterized or constituted by apperception and perception. As he says in §2 of the Principles of Nature and Grace,

[A] monad, in itself and at a moment, can be distinguished from another only by its internal qualities and actions, which can be nothing but its perceptions (that is, the representation of the composite, or what is external, in the simple) and its apperceptions (that is, its tendencies to go from one perception to another) which are the principles of change.

(GP VI 598/AG 207)

That is, monads, or windowless substances, contain only apperceptions and perceptions. Further, Leibniz denies the existence of extrinsic denominations generally and holds instead that all relations between substances are reducible to non-relational properties or accidents of the individual

\(^{10}\) See, for example, GP VI 599/AG: 207–08.

\(^{11}\) See, for example, GP II: 306.
substances or monads. The result is that Leibniz replaces all purely extrinsic denominations of substances with particular intrinsic denominations of individual substances. If we consider the relation between Paris and Helen, ‘Paris loves Helen’ will ultimately be reducible to certain definite properties of Paris and Helen: ‘Paris is x’ and ‘Helen is y.’ As Leibniz says in a set of writings on grammar from 1676–79, ‘Paris is the lover of Helen, that is: Paris loves and by virtue of this fact Helen is loved. Two propositions are therefore conveniently combined in one. Or rather, Paris is a lover, and by virtue of this fact Helen is a loved one’ (C 287). This would suggest that we ought to be able to understand – and perhaps to reduce – relations between dominant and subordinate monads to non-relational claims of particular monads, presumably also representable by perceptions and appetitions. In other words, our strategy in explicating the monad–monad relation within a composite substance will be to find characteristics of perceptions and appetitions of the monads themselves that make them either dominant or subordinate with respect to other monads.

When we look to Leibniz’s later pronouncements concerning the nature of monadic domination, we see a picture slightly different from and more refined than the picture that we saw in his letter to De Volder and in Adams’s explication of the dominant monad–body relation. To Des Bosses, Leibniz writes that ‘domination and subordination considered in the monads themselves consist in nothing but degrees of perfection’ (GP II 451). At first glance this might strike us as a rather odd, and indeed false, claim. If domination and subordination consist only in degrees of perfection, then, for example, I could dominate the entire universe of gross matter in so far as I am (or my dominant monad is) more perfect than the monads constituting the matter of the universe. And this view would seem to open the doors for a social structure right out of Brave New World, in which Alphas with superior intelligence (i.e. more perfect minds) would dominate Betas, and so on; in short, I could dominate another person merely by having a more perfect mind. It is crucial to see here, however, that Leibniz is qualifying his statement about perfection. He says after all, ‘domination and subordination considered in the monads themselves consist in nothing but degrees of perfection’, and by this qualification I take it that he means

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13 And, given Leibniz’s view that the organization of an organism extends downwards to infinity, all monads aside from the dominant monad of a composite will be both dominant and subordinate.
that considered only with respect to those monads already within a distinct composite substance, domination is a matter of the degrees of perfection of monads. In other words, it will be a necessary, but by no means sufficient, condition of domination that one monad be more perfect than the others.

What, then, does Leibniz mean when he talks about degrees of perfection? On a first pass, we might think that, in so far as the fundamental activity of a monad is to perceive its world, a monad is dominant over other monads when its perceptions are somehow better, or clearer and less confused, than those of the other monads in a composite. And this explanation is certainly in accord with what we have seen thus far. Consider Leibniz’s claim in the Principles of Nature and Grace:

[S]ince each distinct perception of the soul includes an infinity of confused perceptions which embrace the whole universe, the soul itself knows the things it perceives only so far as it has distinct and heightened perceptions; and it has perfection to the extent that it has distinct perceptions.

(GP VI 604/AG 211)

But, on the monadic level, we are confronted with a question that seems less problematic on the level of the mind–body relation; namely, what is the object of these perceptions? Adams claims that the dominant monad perceives the functioning of its organic body. What does this mean? In fact, if we combine the view that monads differ only in the clarity of their perceptions of their body or of the external world, then we do not really have an explication of the way in which one dominant monad unifies its subordinate monads. Are we to say that the dominant monad will simply have perceptions of its subordinate monads? Or does the dominant monad have perceptions of the perceptions of its subordinate monads? Or is it very close to what Adams claims – namely, that the dominant monad has perceptions of its subordinate monads as its body?

Though we shall return later to the issue of the objects of perception of monads, I should like to take another tack for the moment on the question of Leibniz’s conception of perfection, for it is this notion that we will help us come to a better understanding of what Leibniz understands to be the relation between dominant and subordinate monads. While nowhere terribly explicit about the precise meaning of ‘perfection’, Leibniz does equate perfection with essence or the degree of reality of a thing, saying in the Monadology that perfection is ‘nothing but the quantity of positive reality considered precisely, setting aside the limits or bounds in the things which have it’\(^\text{14}\) (GP VI 613/AG 218\(^\text{a}\)). In this view, God is the most perfect

\(^{14}\) In a little-known piece from the 1690s written in German, for example, Leibniz says, ‘I call perfection any increase in being’, and somewhat later, ‘one sees now how happiness, desire, love, perfection, being, power, freedom, harmony, order and beauty are bound together — something that is rightly viewed only by a few’ (GP VII 87).
being in the world, the *ens realissimum*. As Leibniz puts it in §16 of the *Principles of Nature and Grace*, ‘God is most perfect and happiest, and consequently, the substance most worthy of love’ (GP VI 605/AG 212). But now consider the opening of Leibniz’s 1697 essay, ‘On the Ultimate Origination of Things’:

Besides the world or aggregate of finite things, there is a certain One which is dominant, not only as the soul is dominant in me or rather, as I myself am dominant in my body, but also by a much higher reason. For the dominant One of the universe not only rules the world but fabricates or makes it; it is superior to the world and, so to speak, extramundane, and hence is the ultimate reason for things.

*(GP VII 302/L 486*)

Leibniz is clear here that God, the most perfect being, dominates the entire universe because He makes the universe; and he will go on to argue that because the world is a series of contingent events, each one with an antecedent cause in the realm of nature, there must be one extramundane cause or reason for the existence of the world. As such, God brings metaphysical necessity to the physical necessity known to exist in the world and is the source of being of all finite things, the source of their perfection.\(^{15}\)

In this passage, however, Leibniz also draws a comparison between God’s domination of the world and a soul’s or self’s domination within a composite substance, and this comparison will lead us to a new conception of the nature of monadic domination. God clearly differs from a dominant monad because He creates those things which He dominates, whereas a monad cannot have any active influence in the creation, destruction or alteration of another monad. But Leibniz does claim that the reasons for the world are to reside ultimately in God, and he expresses a similar view regarding monads. Starting with §48 of the *Monadology*, Leibniz takes up the relation between God and monads and the nature of causation:

God has *power*, which is the source of everything, *knowledge*, which contains the diversity of ideas, and finally *will*, which brings about changes or products in accordance with the principle of the best. And these correspond to what, in created monads, is the subject or the basis, the perceptive faculty and the appetitive faculty. But in God these attributes are absolutely infinite and perfect, while in the created monads or in entelechies ... they are only imitations of it, in proportion to the perfection that they have.

*(GP VI 615/AG 219)*

In §49, Leibniz gives an account of activity and passivity, claiming that a monad acts in so far as it has distinct perceptions. And, finally, in §50 of the *Monadology* Leibniz says, ‘one creature is more perfect than another in so

\(^{15}\) See *Monadology* §42: ‘It also follows that creatures receive their perfections from the influence of God’ (GP VI 613/AG 218).
far as one finds in it that which provides an a priori reason for what happens in the other’ (GP VI 615/AG 219). If we return to Leibniz’s claim in his correspondence with Des Bosses, in which domination and subordination considered among the monads themselves are to consist in the degrees of perfection of the monads, we might naturally conclude that a monad is dominant over another when one finds a priori reasons for what happens in the other. This conception of monadic domination I shall call the ‘causal containment model’.

But even here the story is more difficult. One might be tempted to think that, given Leibniz’s doctrine of marks and traces, in which the entire history of the universe is contained within each created substance, one can find reasons for everything that happens in every created substance. Leibniz’s account of reasons, however, subtly rules out this possibility, for he holds that action and passion, domination and subordination, bear a special relation to each other, and the reasons for why something happens are remarkably direct. As he says in §66 of Part One of the Theodicy,

Action and passion are always mutual in creatures, because one part of the reasons which serve to explain distinctly what happens and which served to bring about its existence is in one of these substances, and the other part of the reasons is in the other, perfections and imperfections being always mingled and shared.

(GP VI 139)

In other words, one monad may dominate another because one finds reasons for what happens in the other, but there will also be reasons in the subordinated monad as well. And God’s domination of the world is in this respect similar: God has chosen to create a world with certain substances; each created substance acts from its own internal sources; and the reasons for why something happens to that substance are located in both God and the created substance.

But what does it mean to say that one monad contains reasons for what happens in another? As previously mentioned, one of Leibniz’s best-known views is that there are only monads and within them appetitions and perceptions. Are, then, reasons perceptions? If so, of what? It seems to me that there are two ways in which we can understand Leibniz’s view here. One possible answer to these questions is that, when Leibniz suggests that a dominant monad contains reasons for what happens in its subordinate monads, these reasons ought to be understood as perceptions of the subordinate monads’ perceptions and appetitions. Again, for Leibniz, ‘a is a cause of event e in b’ simply means that within the complete individual concept of a, there must be something that explains the genesis of e in b. Therefore, we might say that any of the ‘events’ in b are really only the perceptions and appetitions of b. For example, we might think of a dominant monad as having a series of perceptions within it, including perceptions corresponding to the actions – that is, the perceptions – of its
subordinate monads. This relation is one-sided, however, for the subordinate monad cannot be said to have similar perceptions of its dominant monad. Nevertheless, it may be said to have perceptions of other monads in its composite, but these other monads will then simply be subordinate to it – all of this in keeping with Leibniz’s view that there is organization and hierarchy within organisms extending downwards to infinity.

On the other hand, there might be a simple reason to deny this kind of reading; namely, that perceptions are essentially of *external* things, and monads cannot have perceptions of their subordinate monads, nor can they contain the very same perceptions of their subordinate monads.\(^{16}\) Yet one consequence of this objection would seem to be that a dominant monad can stand in a relation to its subordinate monads *only* as they constitute a body in the phenomenal world. In other words, the question that drives my entire inquiry – What is the relation between the dominant monad in a composite and its subordinate monads? – would seem to be rendered moot, for such a relation is not conceivable in Leibniz’s metaphysics. But surely that cannot be right! If, after all, one central aspect is that all relations are reducible to certain (non-relational) aspects of simple substances, then it must be the case that the relation between mind and body or dominant monad and its body is reducible to some kind of story concerning the relation between monads. It certainly seems to be true that, for Leibniz, perceptions are of things external to a (dominant) monad and are given to the dominant monad as images of that external world. But it is also the case that the dominant monad perceives its body and its actions. Are the subordinate monads within the composite to be considered external or internal, outer or inner? On one level, any monad is external to another monad; on another level, there ought to be a sense in which it is appropriate to talk of a certain group of (subordinate) monads as being internal (with respect to the composite substance).

Yet if we deny that reasons can be perceptions, then we will have to say that monads contain perceptions, appetitions and *reasons*. Or maybe not. Perhaps the proper way to understand this issue is as follows. Leibniz says clearly that the appetitions of a monad are the tendencies to go from one perception to another, and in his correspondence with De Volder he equates this with primitive force: ‘primitive forces manifestly cannot be anything but internal tendencies of simple substances, by which according to a certain law of their nature they pass from perception to perception’ (GP II 275/AG 181). Perhaps what Leibniz really means is that these appetitions are in some cases better understood as resulting from another monad, and thus the dominant monad will be the seat of all primitive forces in an organism. When we say ‘a has reasons for what happens in b’, we mean

that \( a \) has the reasons for the series of perceptions in \( b \) or the actual 'tendency' to go from perception to perception is actually contained within \( a \). In other words, the appetitive part of any composite substance is located in the dominant monad of the composite. This way of conceiving the issue is surely in keeping with a long tradition in philosophy, and it may not be far from what Leibniz had in mind in his mature work. Indeed, while it might seem to violate Leibniz's view that each monad is a world in itself and that each monad is causally self-sufficient, I should like to suggest that we need not see the issue this way. My claim is simply that the law of unfolding of perceptions in all the subordinate monads can somehow be understood as being at least partially within the dominant monad. Just as perfections and imperfections are always mingled and shared within a composite substance, and part of the reasons for what happens in a subordinate monad are contained in the dominant monad and part of the reasons are contained in the subordinate monad itself, so the appetitions of the subordinate monads are in part within the subordinate monad and in part within the dominant monad.

Now I take it that the idea of one monad's containing reasons for what happens in others is similar to the functional component of Adams's explanation.\(^{17} \) It is essentially a way to explain the mind's perceptions of the body's functions at the monadic level. In my view, a monad is able to perceive the functioning of its body precisely because it has within it the reasons for what happens in its subordinate monads. Moreover, given the claims of the Monadology, we can better understand the way in which the dominant monad may be said to act on its subordinate monads: by being more perfect and by therefore having the reasons of the latter's actions contained within it. With this interpretation we can also avoid the rather confusing claim on Adams's part that a dominant monad's consciousness of an appetite somehow acts as a cause of that event;\(^ {18} \) for the dominant monad will now be said to cause the events in its subordinate monads in so far as it contains the reasons for those events.

The conception of monadic domination for which I am arguing in this paper also has the virtue of explaining another feature of Leibniz's conception of composite substance: the order and hierarchy present in an organism. But before elaborating on this point, let us consider one confusing aspect of Leibniz's doctrine that we saw in passing earlier. Leibniz claims in the letter to De Volder and the Principles of Nature and Grace that the dominant monad has subordinate monads which are its body. And we saw this as supporting the traditional approach of reducing the monad–monad relation to the relation of mind and body. On another level, however, there is organization all the way down in Leibniz's picture of an organism. We can account for this by saying that an animal has smaller

\(^{17} \) Adams does not appeal to this explanation in his book, however.

\(^{18} \) Adams, Leibniz, 289; cited above, p. 4.
animals or organisms within it all the way down to the infinitely small. Yet this would seem to conflict with the idea that there is one dominant monad and all other monads constitute its body, for the ‘smaller’ organisms similarly have a dominant monad and subordinate monads. How are we to conceive of this? Does the dominant monad contain both the minds of its lesser organisms and their bodies? I think that all of this points again to the difficulty in conceiving of the dominant monad as having a relation to its subordinate monads when these subordinate monads alone constitute the body of the organism. (Again, all monads – dominant and subordinate – together result in a body in the phenomenal world.)

Returning then to the causal containment model, we see that we can avoid this problem in the following way. Within any organism there is one absolutely dominant monad which contains the reasons for what happens in its subordinates. But these subordinate monads are themselves dominant over other monads which are dominant over still other monads, and so on. For example, we could imagine the dominant monad as the brain, which somehow directs the functioning of its subordinates, the liver, the heart, the lungs and so on; the liver will similarly direct the functioning of its components, which will direct the functioning of its components. This model still allows us to retain the mind–body picture, so long as we are clear that the body is the result in the phenomenal world of all the monads. Further, it allows us to account for the monadic hierarchy of organisms without falling into the trap of (a) taking all monads subordinate to the one absolutely dominant monad as on an equal footing and (b) conceiving of the dominant monad as the mind and all other monads as the body. Perhaps most importantly it allows us to retain the sense in which the dominant monad could have perceptions of varying quality of the functioning of its body; that is, the dominant monad will have reasons for what happens in some section of the body that is associated with it, and it will perhaps more dimly have perceptions of what is happening in a section of that section. It is after all giving orders to its subordinates which are in turn giving (other?) orders to their subordinates. Moving from a biological example to a military example, we can imagine that a general, surrounded by senior officers, gives orders to his or her colonels, who interpret these orders and pass orders on to majors, captains, and lieutenants. Does the general ever clearly know what the corporals and privates are doing? Probably not directly; but he or she may know what his or her colonels are doing at any time; and knowledge of what the soldiers are doing would only come through his or her perception of the general progress of the battle. Yet it is still correct to say that the general’s orders contain the reasons for the actions of all

In fact, to carry this metaphor one step farther, we can say that the ‘army’ results from all the individual officers and soldiers, and that the general is aware of the functioning – sometimes clearly, sometimes confusedly – of ‘his’ or ‘her’ army. Of course, the general is also part of this army.
officers and soldiers down the chain of command, just as a sergeant’s orders, based on the orders of a lieutenant, contain the reasons for the actions of a corporal.

This military metaphor helps us to see the way in which domination, or ‘chain of command’, can be explicated in terms of the dominant monad’s containing reasons for what happens in its subordinates. It also allows us to examine an important aspect of the relation between monads that I have not been concerned with to this point: the nature of perception. It is usually understood that the act of willing is one in which the mind exercises causal influence on the body, whereas the act of perceiving is one in which the body exercises causal influence on the body. When it comes to our battle, we might imagine soldiers offering individual ‘field reports’ that are synthesized and passed back up the ‘chain of command’ to the general, who will perform the last act of synthesis. In synthesizing and coming to understand the reports, the general also achieves a clearer perception of his or her army’s performance in the entire battle than any individual soldier could. So far, so good. But the general is also in a sense ‘acted upon’ by his subordinates, in so far as he or she ‘receives’ their reports. And, if we translate this account back into the monadic realm, there seems to arise a problem in terms of the relative perfections of the monads in a composite. Is the dominant monad now less perfect than its subordinates when it receives their perceptions? On the one hand, if we are to speak with Leibniz of ‘ideal influence’, then it would seem that the perfection of the dominant monad has decreased. (Indeed, it would seem to decrease whenever the dominant monad ‘receives’ perceptions via its body or its subordinate monads.) On the other hand, we know, of course, that this is a case of harmony par excellence, in which the dominant monad is not really affected from without. But a better solution to this difficulty is to say that the dominant monad remains dominant over and more perfect than its subordinates because it is the sole recipient of all perceptions of the set of monads constituting its body and because it can synthesize these perceptions in such a way as to make possible judgements regarding its present and future states as part of an organism.²⁰

²⁰ It should be acknowledged that this reconstruction of Leibniz’s philosophy is very kind. I do not believe that Leibniz really gave a thought to the need for this kind of ‘synthesis’, let alone the mechanism that would make this synthesis possible. Indeed, his account of pre-established harmony and the spontaneity of perceptions makes such an account unnecessary, and ensures only that some kind of synthesis in the dominant monad is made. The reader should realize, however, that pre-established harmony is a double-edged sword: for while it may save us from the problem of the interaction of substances, it also makes nearly unintelligible the notion of a monad’s ‘dominating’ its subordinates. If we can make sense of domination in terms of the dominant monad’s exercising ‘ideal influence’ on its subordinates in the case of willing (and I believe I have shown that we can), then we should try to make sense of the notion of the dominant monad’s relations to its subordinates in the case of perceiving.
To this point we have been concerned chiefly with the problem of how one monad may be said to be dominant over another. But recall that Leibniz's fundamental claim in the passage to De Volder with which we started was that a dominant monad makes one machine out of the innumerable subordinate monads. How does this happen? I think the answer to this question is to be found in the idea of one monad's containing the reasons for what happens to some other monad or group of monads. An animal, for example, is one machine of nature because the functions of the entire composite are 'caused' by one central monad; this central monad contains within it the reasons for what is to happen within the composite substance. And, in a certain sense, the very fact that one central or dominant monad contains reasons for everything that happens within its subordinates is all that there is to the claim that a monad 'unifies' its subordinates into one machine of nature.

While we have arrived at a better understanding of monadic domination by appealing to the idea of the dominant monad's containing reasons for what happens in its subordinates, this account is not sufficient to explain the relation between dominant and subordinate monads. Indeed, if we were content with this explanation alone, we would face the following difficulty: a dominant monad will contain reasons for what happens in its subordinate monads; but it will also contain reasons for what happens in other things, in so far as it is involved in causal relations with them – in Leibniz's attenuated notion of 'causal relation'. What differentiates these kinds of reasons? This question is perhaps more difficult to answer than the analogous question concerning perceptions and expression. After all, Adams, in a passage cited above, claims simply that, while the dominant monad and its body contain expressions of an infinity of things, ultimately each is the expression of the other. But when we are talking of the relation of dominant and subordinate monads in terms of the former's containing reasons for what happens in the latter, the notion of containment is not so easily reduced to equivalence. When we were speaking solely in terms of perceptions, we found that Leibniz could talk of the relatively clear or obscure perceptions of substances. When it comes to 'reasons' this seems not so obviously to be the case.

There is, however, a way out of this difficulty. Leibniz claims that the expression of the body by the mind is clearer than the expression of the rest of the universe. This is so, ultimately (after his dispute with Arnauld), because the mind expresses the rest of the world through its body. In other words, the expression of the body is more immediate and direct; the expression – though now we should label it 'perception' – of the 'external world' is mediated by the body to which the mind belongs. Is such an explanation available at the monadic level? That is, can we claim that each monad 'acts on' all others but on some set of monads – constituting its body – in a more

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21 Cf. p. 4.
direct way? I think so. Consider Monadology §62: ‘[A]lthough each created monad represents the whole universe, it more distinctly represents the body which is particularly affected by it, and whose entelechy it constitutes’ (GP VI 617/AG 221). While I have argued that it would be wrong to consider the relation of domination and subordination as one in which the dominant monad contains the perceptions of its subordinates, clearly there is a sense in which ‘knowledge’ of what is happening within its body is more immediate than knowledge of what is happening without its body. Not only do the appetitions of the dominant monad extend all the way down to its subordinates, but the perceptions of the subordinates as its body are unique and immediate. To return to our military metaphor, we can say that the general will be directly responsible for what happens to the private of his or army and indirectly responsible for what happens to the private of the opposing army in so far as that private is interacting with the private of our general’s army. In other words, while the general will contain reasons for everything that happens on the battlefield, the relation to his or her private is more immediate and privileged. Further, the general will perceive this relation to his or her privates as something direct, as a result of their membership in the army. One thing should be clear, however: it is necessary to appeal to the discourse of ‘mind and body’ (or ‘dominant monad and its body’) to get Leibniz out of this difficulty; for Leibniz lacks the conceptual apparatus to discuss the privileged nature of some monads over others, purely on the monadic level.

There is another issue at stake here: the way in which we are to understand ‘expression’. It is common for Leibniz and his interpreters to talk of the mutual expression of mind and body. But can one monad express another? To the best of my knowledge, Leibniz only claims that a monad expresses its relations to other monads, not that it expresses other monads simpliciter\(^{22}\) (GP II 457). I should like to suggest that the relation of expression in this metaphysical sense is only possible among things that differ in kind. When it is a question of the relation of monads solely, the only kinds of relation possible are (1) harmony – which is presumably the sense in which a monad expresses its relations to other monads– and (2) a’s containing reasons for what happens in b.

We are left in the following position: Adams account of expression and functionality does not really give us what we need to explain how one monad can unify a group of monads. On the other hand, the idea of a monad’s having reasons for what happens in its subordinates does not give us the full picture of the nature of domination; for it does not tell us the relation between the dominant monad and its body (nor is it supposed to do so). As a result, I think that we need to combine Adams’s account with

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\(^{22}\) Mark Kulstad, for example, does not include in his rather exhaustive list of Leibniz’s uses of ‘expression’ any instances where a monad expresses another monad. See Kulstad, ‘Leibniz’s Conception of Expression’, Studia Leibnitiana, 9 (1977): 57.
the causal containment idea in order to achieve the proper picture of monadic domination. Let us say that a monad is dominant and unifies its subordinates when the following conditions are met:

1. it bears an ordered and regular relation to a particular body or set of monads;
2. it contains reasons for the activities — that is, perceptions and appetitions — of this set of monads; that is, the laws of unfolding of perceptions of some group of monads can be attributed to one monad; and
3. it perceives the affections of its body, or rather, it perceives the operations of some group of monads as operations of a body.

Though, to the best of my knowledge, this point has received no scholarly attention and Leibniz himself does not clearly indicate that this is so, it should be clear that (1) is itself a condition for the possibility of (2) and (3). Also, this account echoes the two-part strategy in Leibniz’s response to Arnauld discussed above: (1) responds to the problem of the union of monads in a composite, and (2) and (3) respond to the problem of their interaction — (2), accounting for mind–body causation, (3), for body–mind causation. Moreover, it should be clear that the relation of expression can properly be said to exist only between the dominant monad and its body, not between the dominant monad and its subordinate monads qua monads. In other words, one monad can contain reasons for what happens in other monads if and only if the monads constitute a body that stands in a relation of mutual expression with the dominant monad.

It might seem that there is a fundamental conflict between the expression component, on the one hand, and the functional and containment components, on the other hand. The relation of expression is in some sense symmetric. There is, after all, a relation of ‘mutual’ expression between the mind and body; the mind or dominant monad expresses the body or subordinate monads, and vice versa. Yet, the relation of domination and subordination in terms of one monad’s containing reasons for what happens in another would seem to lack this symmetry. Indeed, to say that a monad is dominant when it contains reasons a priori for what happens in its subordinates would seem to imply an asymmetry between dominant and subordinate monads. On the other hand, this is simply a natural consequence of the very issue at hand. As suggested immediately above, the problem of the mind–body relation is composed of two distinct issues: the union of mind and body or of dominant and subordinate monads in a composite substance, and the interaction of mind and body or the ‘domination’ of one monad over others in an organism.23 The expression component responds only to the

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23 It has only been in some recent work, I think, that the two parts of this issue have been brought out. See, for example, Marleen Rozemond, ‘Leibniz and the Union of Body and Soul’, Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie, 79 (1997): 150–78.
first issue, that of the union of mind and body; the containment component can be seen to respond to both issues, though it is principally designed to account for the interaction of the mind and body given their union.

I mentioned above that a consequence of one kind of objection to the interpretation I am urging here is that a dominant monad could only bear a relation to its subordinate monads in so far as they constitute its body. Perhaps, however, a modified version of this claim has some truth to it: a dominant monad bears a relation to its subordinate monads principally in so far as they constitute its body. Again, it is certainly the case that for Leibniz the dominant monad qua mind expresses its body, and it is unclear how expression can hold among monads, other than as being synonymous with their harmony. It is also true that for Leibniz – as we learned from his exchange with Arnauld – the dominant monad expresses its body because its perceptions of what is external arise through its body. When we look solely at the monadic level, we have few ways to conceive the relations within a composite substance other than as the dominant monad’s containing reasons within it of what happens in the monads subordinate to it that constitute its body.

IV

This interpretation of the relation of domination and subordination, however, does suggest some tensions within Leibniz’s metaphysics, and we ought to ask whether this is merely a problem for the interpretation or a genuine problem for Leibniz’s monadology. The first relates principally to the expression component of the relation between dominant and subordinate monads. Again, the clearest account of expression we see is to be found in Leibniz’s dispute with Arnauld. But there Leibniz no longer appeals to the cognitive sense of expression most naturally inferred from the claim that ‘my body is expressed by my mind’ but to a relational sense of expression that in fact carries no explanatory force. After all, if (1) the mind and the body or the monads of a composite substance are to form a union and are to interact and (2) we say that the soul expresses most clearly its own body and (3) expression is simply the ordered and regular relation between two things, then we have done no more than to say that the mind and the body form a union because there is an ordered relation between them. In Leibniz’s view, however, there is an ordered relation between all substances in the world – the consequence of universal harmony – and we have now lost the sense in which a mind could have relatively clearer or more confused perceptions of its body.

A second problem arises directly for the containment component. As Leibniz himself admits, all things are in a state of flux, and monads flow in and out of composites. The consequence for Leibniz’s theory of composite substances is that the dominant monad – a nominally ‘simple substance’ –
is required to have within it the reasons for everything that is ever to happen within any of its subordinate monads. The kind of containment entailed here is dizzyingly complex; even Leibniz, the lover of infinite complexity, might have found this somewhat hard to take.

Third, we might wonder whether domination is to be considered absolute.\(^{24}\) In so far as domination and subordination are to be considered in terms of the containment of a priori reasons, it would seem so: a monad either contains the reasons for what happens in another monad or it does not; there is no middle ground. But, if this is so, then we have lost one of the appealing features of Leibniz's thought; namely, his affirmation that monads perceive things with varying degrees of clarity and that domination and subordination consist in degrees of perfection, that is, in degrees of clarity.

These difficulties, however, are not fatal to the interpretation that I am offering here. The first is actually a problem for Leibniz's general account of mind and body. And, while I believe it is serious, I have argued elsewhere that this difficulty may have been in part responsible for pushing Leibniz towards his more sophisticated account of the world.\(^{25}\) As a result, it does not bear directly on the interpretation that I am offering here. Similarly, the second difficulty may simply be something that a Leibnizian has to accept: along with the infinite complexity of the world comes the problem of sorting out the infinite relations of the components of the world. The third difficulty I believe can be answered by appealing to the hierarchy of domination and subordination; that is, we will indeed be able to retain Leibniz's doctrine of the relative clarity and distinctness of perceptions within an organism if we consider that the dominant monad will directly contain reasons for what happens in its subordinates and will perhaps indirectly contain reasons for what is happening in its subordinate's subordinate monads.

While the problems suggested above are either general difficulties for Leibniz's theory of mind and body or, when attending my interpretation, can be answered, there is a final difficulty that I should like to mention. On the reading I offered above, 'a has reasons for what happens in b' means roughly that the law of unfolding of perceptions of b is better understood as being located in a. But, of course, this notion of domination and subordination was originally gleaned from Leibniz's general account of 'causation'. And, now, returning to the general causal order of the world, my gloss on Leibniz's idea seems to face a fourth difficulty; namely, it would seem wrong to say that, when one individual (composite) substance 'interacts' with another, the reason for the changing perceptions of one are found in another. Another way to put this problem is that my interpretation would

\(^{24}\) I should like to thank Donald Ainslie for pointing this out to me.

\(^{25}\) See my Leibniz and the 'vinculum substantiale' (Stuttgart: Steiner 1999).
now seem to be adequate to explain the relations within a composite substance but not to explain the relations between composite substances.  

A version of this criticism was considered above and led to the conclusion (a) that the causal containment account of monadic domination was not sufficient to explain the relation between a dominant monad and its subordinates and (b) that we need to combine this account with a discussion of the dominant monad’s relation to its body. It should be noted, however, that this kind of difficulty is one that Leibniz is bound to face under any interpretation of the nature of monadic domination, for Leibniz holds several doctrines that seem to involve a contradiction: first, that some monads can ‘dominate’ others; second, that there is no real causal interaction between substances; third, that all substances express each other and act on each other. As I hope to have shown in the previous section, we can rescue Leibniz (barely) by claiming that the ‘ideal influence’ of a dominant monad on its subordinates is more direct and immediate than its ideal influence on composite substances under the domination of another monad; the immediacy of the influence or expression and the scope of the containment of causes, however, arises when the dominant monad perceives or reflects on its body.

While the first difficulty indicated above can also be applied to Leibniz’s account of the mind-body relation, the other difficulties are peculiar to Leibniz’s account of the domination and subordination of monads. And though Leibniz never directly faced the kind of acute criticism on the details of this view that he faced with respect to his more popular account of the relation of mind and body, it would be wrong to think that Leibniz’s sophisticated and mature metaphysics – his monadology – was on surer ground. Indeed, the converse may in fact be true: that Leibniz’s mature metaphysical views, properly understood, are much more vulnerable to serious attack.

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26 This difficulty can also be expressed as being about the inner and outer states and conditions of organisms. It is not so much a problem for my interpretation but, in my view, a genuinely deep problem for Leibniz’s theory of the world – a problem seen by Kant in the Amphiboly section of the Critique of Pure Reason.

27 This leads to an apparent problem: either all monads, including the dominant monad, are on equal footing and together result in a body in the phenomenal world or all monads subordinate to the one dominant monad of the organism result in the body. I have been operating throughout under the assumption that the former is the case, but the way I have just formulated the issue might lead one to think that the latter is the case. I think the way out of this difficulty is simply to say that the act of considering itself as ‘having’ or ‘belonging to’ a body sufficiently locates the dominant monad in the phenomenal world; in other words, the dominant monad, like its subordinates, similarly grounds the phenomenon of a particular body. That this must be so can also be seen when one considers the order and hierarchy (the relation of dominant, subdominant and subordinate monads) of any composite substance.

28 In other works (Leibniz and the ‘vinculum substantialia’ (see n. 24) and ‘From the Metaphysical Union of Mind and Body to the Real Union of Monads: Leibniz on Supposita and Vincula Substantialia’, Southern Journal of Philosophy 1998, 505–29), I have argued that in fact Leibniz realized that his monadology had different conceptual problems and attempted to resolve these problems by an appeal to the vinculum substantialia or substantial bond, as seen in his correspondence with Des Bosses.
My claim from the beginning of this paper has been that other Leibniz scholars, when they discussed the nature of monadic domination at all, treated the relation of domination and subordination as synonymous with the relation between mind and body. No one, it seemed, had tried to give an account of monadic domination purely at the monadic level. In the course of this paper, however, we have seen that no such ‘pure’ account can be given. In fact, an account of monadic domination must eventually appeal to the relation of the dominant monad to a set of monads perceived as its body. In other words, while Leibniz will often employ the rhetorical device of ‘speaking with the vulgar’ and ‘speaking in metaphysical rigor’, in the end he cannot give an account of the nature of composite substances purely on the metaphysical level of monads. Monads are dominated not simply qua monads but principally in so far as they are perceived by another monad as its body; and the body of a particular dominant monad becomes itself essentially an intentional object of that dominant monad.29

The results of this essay have not, of course, been entirely negative. In the process of examining the nature of monadic domination, we have seen how one feature of monadic domination has been ignored: the dominant monad’s containing reasons for what happens in its subordinates. This feature explains on the monadic level the harmony, unity and ‘interaction’ of the mind and body, without being a simple translation of the domination–subordination scheme into the language of the mind–body relation. More important, this feature has allowed us to have a better understanding of the central Leibnizian doctrines concerning the nature of composite substance. It helps to explain in what sense a composite substance can be unified by a dominant monad, how the relation of domination and subordination can continue on down to the infinitely small, and in what sense a dominant monad can in fact exercise its ideal influence on its subordinate monads.30

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29 The term ‘intentional object’ I borrow from Adams (cf. pp. 219–20)
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