

# Well-founded Phenomenon and the Reality of Bodies in the Later Philosophy of Leibniz

Shohei Edamura

## Introduction

This paper aims to explore the concept of “well-foundedness” in the later philosophy of Leibniz, and in particular, the relationship between foundation, perception and existence. As one of the post-Cartesians, Leibniz felt that it was necessary to explain and codify the ontological status of extended things (*res extensa*). Well-foundedness is an extremely important concept in Leibniz’s determination of the ontological status of extended bodies.

I shall begin by discussing the problem with terminology in Section 1 before examining the conceptual argument. The way Leibniz uses the term “well-founded” is ambiguous and vague, and has to be addressed before meaningful discussion can take place. Then in Section 2, I shall consider the existence of as many as six degrees of reality in the philosophy of Leibniz. It is discussed how the foundation of increasingly complex phenomena allows us to make inferences about the reality of those phenomena. Further, from this all, it is possible to conclude that well-foundedness, in its purest form, entails the sense of reality which I term level five reality.

## Section One: The Ambiguity of “Well-foundedness”

In this section, I will show that we can actually understand the term “well-founded phenomena” in two quite different ways: as phenomena founded by monads, or as only well-regulated phenomena.

Leibniz uses the term “well-founded” (*bene fundata*, *bien fondee*) to describe phenomena in several of his works describing how phenomena can be founded by monads (e.g. G2 276,306, G3 636, G7 467 etc). Clearly the idea of well-foundedness is closely connected to Leibniz’s understanding of the foundation of phenomena.

First let us consider phenomena generally. Leibniz states that in fact only simple substances, that is to say monads, and their perceptions (*perceptio*) and appetitions (*appetitus*)<sup>1</sup> exist (G2 270). A phenomenon (*phenomène*) is regarded as an experience (G1 370) or appearance (G2 118, cf. G4 484),<sup>2</sup> and is categorized as a perception. Matter and motion are considered not as substances, but as phenomena.

R.M Adams states that Leibniz was an idealist or phenomenalist. But on the other hand Adams

considers the distinction between "phenomena" and "perceptions": "perceptions" are mere states or modifications of the mind, phenomena are inner intentional objects constructed by the mind from its perceptions.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, although Leibniz described phenomena in various ways,<sup>4</sup> it is difficult to accept that he simply decided that bodies were phenomena and therefore equivalent to perceptions or aggregates of perceptions without pursuing a more critical chain of reasoning.

Now let us investigate the term "well-founded phenomenon". Rescher, Rutherford and Ishiguro understand this term to mean that the phenomenon is founded by monads.<sup>5</sup> As they state, according to Leibniz matter is a phenomenon which results from monads and which is well-founded by them (G3 636). The passage below, from a letter to De Volder in 1706, also shows that any body that results from multiple monads is also a well-founded phenomenon, in much the same way that a rainbow is real and visible for everyone, yet an intangible thing that results from droplets of water in the air.

...[F]rom plural monads results secondary matter, with active and passive derivative forces, which are nothing but entities by aggregation, and therefore semi-mental, like a rainbow and other well-founded phenomena. (G2 306)

Also, that monads found phenomena, that is to say that they found bodies, is attested by another paragraph in a letter to De Volder in 1703.

Accurately speaking, however, matter is not composed of these constitutive unities but results from them, since matter or extended mass is nothing but a phenomenon grounded in things, like the rainbow or the mock-sun, and all reality belongs only to unities. ... Substantial unities are not parts but foundations of phenomena. (G2 268)

A "substantial unity" is nothing but a monad.<sup>6</sup> Therefore the text above indicates that the way a body results from monads is similar to the way a rainbow results from droplets of water: the droplets are not pieces of the rainbow, but cause it to be seen; the monads are not parts of the body, but the foundations of it.

The passage below also suggests that a phenomenon is well-founded when it results from monads.

As for the inertia of matter, since matter itself is nothing but a phenomenon - though well- founded - which results from monads, this is also true of inertia, which is a property of this phenomenon. (G3 636 = L 659)

Considering the above, there don't seem to be any problems if we interpret well-foundedness as nothing but the foundation of phenomena by monads.

However, there are other passages that might imply that the term 'well-founded phenomena' means congruent phenomena. And actually Makoto Yamamoto interprets "well-founded phenomena" as meaning just well regulated phenomena, phenomena which do not entail the existence of any monads<sup>7</sup>. He has pointed out that Leibniz used the opposite term "mal fondée" to mean 'confused' or 'in disorder' (G2 16, G3 67, G4 346, G6 108, 110, 143, G7 391, 394, etc.). If the meaning of "bien fondée" (well founded) is just the opposite of "mal fondée" (badly founded), and the intended sense of "mal fondée" is 'confused' or 'in disorder', then obviously the meaning of "bien fondée" may just be 'well organized'. So there is some evidence to suggest that Leibniz may have used 'well-founded' only to mean 'well regulated'.

There are other texts which seem to support the idea that the essence of well-foundedness is merely regularity.

We can therefore conclude that a mass of matter is not a true substance, that its unity is nothing but an idealization, and that (apart from how it is understood) this is nothing but an aggregate, a mass, a multitude of an infinity of veritable substances, a well-founded phenomenon, never contradicts the rules of pure mathematics. (G7 564).

It is sufficient that the phenomena make it appear so, and this appearance is authentic so long as these phenomena are founded, that is to say consistent... (G3 623)

Real or well-founded phenomena which do not fail to meet the expectations of those who are proceeding with reason... (G2 276)

Provided they are not deceptive, well-founded phenomena have only the same objective reality by which we can distinguish a dream from our woken lives, the extent to which they correspond to each other...(G7 467-8)

All bodies along with all their qualities would be nothing but well-founded phenomena, like the rainbow or an image in a mirror - so to speak, continued dreams in perfect agreement with each other - and the reality of these phenomena would consist of nothing but this one fact.(G2 435-6 = L 600)

From the above texts it is natural to understand well-founded phenomena to be those that are

well ordered, though Leibniz never wrote explicitly that well-founded phenomena are by definition nothing but regulated phenomena.

And, in some other texts it is hard to determine whether the term refers to foundation by monads, or merely to regularity. Leibniz juxtaposed the term “well-founded” and other terms which mean 'regular' or 'consistent' several times. In these texts, “well-founded” and other terms are connected by “and (et)”.

An appearance, but an appearance that is well founded and not contradictory, like an exact and constant dream. (G3 622)

This led me back to entelechies, and from the material to the formal, and at last brought me to understand, after many corrections and forward steps in my thinking, that monads or simple substances are the only true substances and that material things are only phenomena, though well founded and well connected. (G3 606 = L 655)

But in appearances composed of aggregates, which are certainly nothing but phenomena (though well founded and regulated), no one will deny collision and impact. (G2 251 = L530)

Two interpretations are possible here: Leibniz may have thought that being well founded and being well regulated were quite different, and may have been simply stating two different ideas at the same time. Or, Leibniz may have thought that being well founded and being well regulated were the same, and he juxtaposed the two terms only to clarify the sense in which they were intended.

Yamamoto claims that Leibniz was not thinking of two different properties when he wrote these texts. However, I think it is natural to read these passages as referring to two different aspects of phenomena. Then, is it appropriate to always understand Leibniz to mean phenomena founded by monads when he says “well-founded phenomena”? Unfortunately not: because as I have stated, we have texts from which it is natural for us to understand “well-founded phenomena” only to be well-regulated ones. In all, I do not think there is one conclusive reading of these texts.

Then how should we cope with this ambiguity concerning “well-foundedness”? I would like to confirm the following: according to Leibniz, phenomena **are** founded by monads. Even if Leibniz might have used the term 'well-founded phenomena' to describe phenomena as well regulated, we know enough about his opinions on how phenomena are founded by monads to infer that he was simply using the term ambiguously.

Consequently, I consider it worthwhile to develop the argument based on the premise that well-foundedness is the state of being founded by monads.

## **Section Two: Six Levels of Reality**

In this section, I would like to discuss several different kinds of reality that are necessary for phenomena as understood by Leibniz. It is possible to identify at least six degrees of reality that were discussed by Leibniz while exploring the properties of phenomena. I will refer to these as 'levels of reality', such that level one reality is the least degree of reality, and level six reality is the most real. I would not dare to say that Leibniz changed his position five times. Nor do I suppose that his position is so ambiguous that we can interpret his ideas in 6 fundamentally different ways (though admittedly Leibniz's position in later life *can* be interpreted in two quite different ways). I present these simply as components, grades or aspects of Leibniz's underlying sense of the real.

My understanding of well-founded phenomena, including organic bodies, would require level 5 reality.

Let me summarize the levels of reality:

Level One Reality: Phenomena that are vivid, varied and congruent exist in one's mind.

Level Two Reality: Phenomena exist as an inter-subjective correspondence between the perceptions of many people.

Level Three Reality: Phenomena exist as perceptions of God.

Level Four Reality: Phenomena exist in that they are founded by monads.

Level Five Reality: Phenomena exist as organic bodies.

Level Six Reality: Phenomena exist as the corporeal substances described in the correspondence with Des Bosses.

### **Level One Reality**

Reality of the first degree, does not require or imply any reality beyond the existence of the mind that perceives. Phenomena are most often discussed in terms of this form of reality in the text "On the Method of Distinguishing Real from Imaginary Phenomena"(1690 L363-7), (even though it was written once Leibniz was well into middle age). In this paper Leibniz picks up on three aspects of "real phenomena" when we cannot know if external things really exist or not.

We conclude it from the phenomenon itself if it is vivid, complex, and internally coherent. It will be vivid if its qualities, such as light, color, and warmth, appear intense enough. It will be complex if these qualities are varied and support us in undertaking many experiments and new observations; for example, if we experience

in a phenomenon not merely colors but also sounds, odors, and qualities of taste and touch, and this both in the phenomenon as a whole and in its various parts which we can further treat according to causes.....A phenomenon will be coherent when it consists of many phenomena, for which a reason can be given either within themselves or by some sufficiently simple hypothesis common to them; next, it is coherent if it conforms to the customary nature of other phenomena which have repeatedly occurred to us, so that its parts have the same position, order, and outcome in relation to the phenomenon which similar phenomena have had. (G7 319 = L 363-4)

Here, Leibniz wanted to demonstrate his ideas about the degree of reality which a mere phenomenon can entail. This level of reality is also called 'the reality of orderly phenomena', in line with the texts describing consistent (regular) phenomena in Section 1. Only well-regulated phenomena do not require the existence of real substances other than the perceiving mind.

Vividness (or liveliness), however, is excluded from the criteria for reality. Leibniz wrote in the New Essays that "although sensations are usually more than imaginings, one knows still that there are cases where an imaginative person is struck by their imagination as much as, or perhaps more than, someone else is struck by the truth of things" (NE 374).<sup>8</sup>

## Level Two Reality

Level two reality is the kind of reality referred to by Leibniz in the following statement.

...[T]hey are not borne of perceptions, and they get their reality from the correspondence that exists between the perceptions of those substances that see. (G3 622-3)

The word "correspondence" seems to be ambiguous because it is not clear whether this "correspondence" is only inter-subjective or inclusive of the connection between the perceiving subject and perceived object. The level two reality I would like to propose here is just intersubjective, and does not imply the existence of monads as the objects of perception at all.

In this degree of reality, a person's perception is founded by others'. Any individual's perceptions are founded by the collective perceptions of all. In other words, foundation does not rely upon some absolute being whose reality does not require foundation. This scheme may be regarded as somewhat modern, indeed it probably would have been unconvincing to the philosophers of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Level Three Reality**

In some texts, Leibniz states that the phenomena in the mind of God form the basis of our perceptions. Any individual's perception or conception of a phenomenon will be different from any other individual's. In this sense, there seems to be no valid, consistent base that could be described as reality. But if God has a conception of a phenomenon, His conception would certainly have a higher degree of reality than ours.

If bodies are phenomena and derived from our appearances, they are not real, because they appear differently to others. Therefore the reality of bodies, space, motion and time comes from them being phenomena of God, or aspects of the visible truth. (G2 438)

Indeed, we may be able to find a regular and constant correspondence between perceiving minds. But then it would seem that one and only one basis (ie. the basis of the correspondence) should be required.

Leibniz thought along these lines and explained that our perceptions are founded by the perceptions of God. Our perceptions are only valid and objective in so far as they reflect God's ideas.

Adams states that the simplest and starkest version of phenomenalism to be found in Leibniz's writings belongs not to his mature philosophy, but to the years 1675-79. His later phenomenalism grows out of it much more by addition than by subtraction, and it provides an illuminating background to the complexities of his later thought.<sup>9</sup>

Incidentally, we should take note of the fact that Leibniz's phenomenalism is clearly different from that of Berkeley, even if we disregard Leibniz's ideas about phenomena being founded by monads. Adams summarized the difference between Leibniz and Berkeley as follows:

1. Leibniz was strongly against the perceptual atomism of Berkeley.<sup>10</sup>
2. Leibniz's insistence on "the infinite division of the extended" is based on the intellectual demands of his geometry and metaphysics, not on the phenomenology of sensation.<sup>11</sup>

In the later period of his life, Leibniz continued to use the term "God's apparition", comparing the abilities of the human mind to perceive with those of God in the letter to Des Bosses. According to Leibniz, the relationship between our apparition of body and God's apparition is like the relationship between scenography and iconography (G2 438).

### **Level Four Reality**

Let us move on now to the next level of reality, that entailed when phenomena are known to be

founded by monads. When we have this degree of reality, we can say that the objects of our perception exist and are monads. Though Adams regards Leibniz as idealist, Adams agrees that phenomena can necessitate this level of reality. According to Adams, in the more mature philosophy of Leibniz, all bodies have substances "within" them, and therefore they can be regarded as the appearances of substances (monads) as well as appearances to substances (monads)<sup>12</sup>.

But how can a monad really and surely perceive anything other than itself? Doesn't the definition of the monad preclude this? It is not possible to think that a monad acts immediately on other monads and therefore causes changes in the contents of the other monads' perceptions.

Leibniz had thought of this apparent obstacle to reality (of course), and it is overcome by the pre-established harmony. This harmony, is a universal realization of God, established beyond the realms of time and space. While monads cannot act on each other, it is quite possible that each contains an expression of universe. If this expression is choreographed by God, it can dictate the perceptions and actions of each monad such that the universe will be harmonious (ie. behave consistently) even in the absence of direct interaction between its constituent monads.

From the detailed definition that Leibniz gives of the pre-established harmony, we can at least infer the following: when a monad perceives, its perception has its subjects, which are other monads. A monad always has some representation of other monads. So a perception of things outside is (solid, yet indirect) evidence that things outside exist.

However, from this alone we cannot even conclude that a particular perception is an expression of a certain monad. For example, even if a body appears in the perception of person A, we cannot assert that this body is an expression of person B. (More precisely, we cannot assert that the idea of the body in A's mind is proof of the existence of the monads of B's mind and body and their togetherness.) And even if a body is both a phenomenon and an aggregate of simple substances, how can we begin to assign a specific group of monads to a specific part of a body?

## Level Five Reality

Level five reality is built upon the answer to that question. Leibniz states that an organism (organisme) (G6 553) is formed by a group of monads, in which many plural monads are subordinate to a single dominant monad.

Leibniz has also written that all monads have a fundamental *primitive passive aspect*. This passive aspect, that is, the primitive passive force (vis primitiva passiva), is itself beyond the realm of phenomena and non-extended. In 1694, Leibniz had already declared that forces are the essence of substance in "Reflections on the Advancement of True Metaphysics and particularly on the Nature of Substance Explained by Force" (G4 469). Supposing this, Leibniz wrote in the New

System in 1695 (G4 449) that the prime entelechies of Aristotle are primitive forces, and in “An Essay in Dynamics” (GM6 236-7) that the primitive passive force consists of primary matter in scholastic philosophy. And in 1698, Leibniz wrote that primary matter is not a complete substance (a monad), and described a monad as requiring both active and passive aspects due to “nature itself” (G4 512).

However, though this primitive passive force is a purely metaphysical property of a monad, and therefore beyond the realm of phenomena, it requires (if not absolutely) that the monad have some sort of extended body. Monads cannot be acted upon by other monads, so they need to have an extended body for their passivity to be realized in the world of nature. In “Addition to the explanation of the New System” in 1702, primary matter is distinguished from secondary matter, which is composed of many organic substances. This secondary matter (mass of organized substances) is what makes up our bodies (G4 573-4). A soul never “naturally (naturellement)” lacks a body of secondary matter, and God lets (Dieu laisse) souls remain together with their bodies “in the course of nature (au cours de la nature)” (G4 573). This means that a monad does not necessarily have an extended body, but by virtue of the Will of God, many monads are subordinate to one pre-eminent monad, a typical example of which would be a mind. And all of these monads together form an organism. Every monad subordinate to a mind has lesser monads which are further subordinate to it. And these lesser monads have their own monads which are still further subordinate to them, and this series continues infinitely. Thus exists a group of infinite monads which is united by one dominant monad. In the letter to De Folder of 1699, Leibniz wrote that there is a soul (anima) which dominates the whole body, and other (lesser) souls dominate partial organs (G2 194). The monads whose bodies are organs are subordinate monads, and all those monads subordinate to the dominant monad correspond to the whole body. In this way, the passivity of monads can be realized.

Adams also thinks that the unity of a body does not completely depend upon the perceiving mind. For example, if some logs form a pile, the nature of their grouping is different from that of a random selection of the world's logs. In the same way, spatial togetherness is a necessary condition for any corporeal aggregation. The spatial position of the simple substance will surely be the spatial position of its organic body.<sup>13</sup> Through this observation Adams recognizes the importance of the organic body. But it is not clear whether he considers an organic body to be a continuous (extended) whole or not, having once written that phenomena are discrete and actually not continuous.<sup>14</sup>

## **Level Six Reality**

Finally, I would like to introduce the highest reality that can be inferred from the existence of

phenomena. Level six reality is the reality of the corporeal substances discussed in the letter to Des Bosses. Unlike the other degrees of reality, however, we can't be confident of the extent to which Leibniz's philosophy admits this one.

Without substantiating, Leibniz claims once that the organic body is a phenomenon (G3 657). Leibniz wrote in the letter to Des Bosses that *if* there is a substantial bond and a dominant monad and subordinate monads are united by that bond, then this group of monads forms one composite or corporeal substance, *unum per se*. This substantial bond does not have an influence on the content of the phenomenon. However, it changes the ontological status of extended bodies. By virtue of the substantial bond, a phenomenal body is realized, and its extension becomes a real extension.

Whether or not Leibniz himself really believed that there was a connection between the perceived extension of the phenomenal body and the existence of an extended corporeal substance is controversial. Adams and Rutherford think that in fact his description of ideas about substantial bonds and corporeal substances was just a diplomatic concession to Catholic philosophers such as Des Bosses. As Catholicism includes a belief in transubstantiation, which presupposes the existence of corporeal substances, Leibniz may have felt that it was expedient to openly explore how corporeal substances could fit into his philosophy.

## Conclusion

I have described the levels of reality that Leibniz discussed in his later life, which the concept of “well-foundedness” requires in its purest form. Leibniz is often said to be an idealist. In addition, some people, for example A. Robinet, claim that we can also see evidence of a second philosophy in the writings of Leibniz: realism, a position admitting substantial bonds. However, even if we do not accept that substantial bonds are a key notion in the later philosophy of Leibniz, we can see how a relatively high level of reality can be consistent with the philosophy of Leibniz. Extended bodies exist. They may not be corporeal substances whose essence is extension, but their extension is definitely based on the real happenings to the ultimate objects of reality, dominant and subordinate monads.

## Abbreviations

- A: Akademie der Wissenschaften(ed.) Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe.  
G: Gerhardt(ed.) Die Philosophischen Schriften  
GM: Gerhardt(ed.) Mathematische Schriften  
Grua: Gaston Grua (ed.)Textes inédits.  
C: Couturat(ed.) Opuscules et fragments inédits  
Jag. : Jagodinski(ed.), Leibnitiana elementa philosophiae arcanae de summa rerum  
NE: Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain

M: Monadologie  
DM: Discours de Métaphysique  
PNG: Principe de la Nature et la Grâce  
T: Theodicée  
S: Système nouveau  
L : Loemker (Trans.) Philosophical papers and letters

<sup>1</sup> In this case, an appetition is the will (conatus) of something that acts to have new perceptions (G7 330 cf. M15), that is to say, the aspect of a monad responsible for generating new perceptions.

<sup>2</sup> The term well-founded appearance (apparence bien fondée) is used in the letter to Remond just once (G3 623).

<sup>3</sup> Adams, *ibid*, p.220

<sup>4</sup> In 1670s, when he was young, Leibniz described phenomena in many ways: "...what are certain by virtue of sensation" (A 6,3,3), "...propositions that are proved by experience" (C33)

<sup>5</sup> According to Rescher, there are two aspects of a well-founded phenomenon, the subjective and the objective. The subjective aspect is that the phenomenon is a unit since it is a mental entity (*ens mentalis*) for its perceiver. The objective aspect is that what is perceived is some feature of an actual aggregation of monads that has grounds to be perceived because of certain similarities among the constituent monads. Both of these states of affairs prevail in virtue of the pre-established harmony.

N. Rescher, *Leibniz An Introduction to his Philosophy*, Basil Blackwell 1979, p.76 pp.81-82

D.Rutherford, *Leibniz and the rational order of nature*, Cambridge University Press 1995, p.222

石黒ひで 『増補改訂版 ライプニッツの哲学』 岩波書店 2003 p.170

(H. Ishiguro, *Leibniz's Philosophy*, Iwanami 2003, p.170)

<sup>6</sup> Leibniz often used the terms *monad*, *simple substance* and *unity* (unité) interchangeably. (G3 622, G5 359, G6 598)

<sup>7</sup> 山本信 『ライプニッツ哲学研究』 東京大学出版会 1953 p.306 (Makoto Yamamoto, *A study on the philosophy of Leibniz*, University of Tokyo Press)

<sup>8</sup> Adams, *ibid*, p.256

<sup>9</sup> For example in 1672 Leibniz writes: I seem to myself to have discovered that to Exist is nothing other than to be Sensed - to be sensed however, if not by us, then at least by the Author of things, whom to be sensed by is nothing other than to please, or to be Harmonious for (A 6,3,56; Adams, *ibid*, p.235).

<sup>10</sup> According to Adams minute and insensible phenomena constitute sensible phenomena (Adams, *ibid*, p.229).

<sup>11</sup> Adams, *ibid*, pp.220-1

<sup>12</sup> Adams, *ibid*, p.240

<sup>13</sup> Adams, *ibid*, p.250

<sup>14</sup> Adams, *ibid*, p.234