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Activity and Final Causes

On *Principles of Nature and Grace* §3

ABSTRACT: This paper analyses how the notion of final causation is related to the complex of Leibniz's account of activity of substances. In doing so I will focus on the 3rd paragraph of the *Principles of Nature and Grace* and on other texts where a similar thesis is proposed. I aim at showing that final causes are better intended as model of explanation rather than a distinct type of causes. I will first analyse two points raised by the PNG thesis: that it applies to all simple substances and its opposition with causation as it occurs in bodies, with the aim of highlighting some of the features of final causation in substances, to then focus on two questions. Is final causation, being situated at the level of simple substances, the most fundamental causal process in Leibniz's metaphysics? How should the causal role of goals be understood?

SUNTO: L'articolo analizza il rapporto tra la nozione di causalità finale e la concezione leibniziana dell'attività delle sostanze nel suo complesso. Mi concentrerò su una tesi formulata nel terzo paragrafo dei *Principi della natura e della grazia*, insieme con altri testi in cui si propongono tesi analoghe. Intendo mostrare che le cause finali possono essere intese più appropriatamente come un modello esplicativo che come un particolare tipo di cause. Analizzerò innanzitutto due punti sollevati nella tesi dei PNG (che la causalità finale concerne tutte le sostanze semplici, e che è contrapposta alla causalità che ha luogo nei corpi) allo scopo di evidenziare alcuni caratteri della causalità finale nelle sostanze. Affronterò poi due questioni: la causalità finale, in quanto si colloca al livello delle sostanze semplici, può essere considerata il processo causale fondamentale nella metafisica di Leibniz? Come va inteso il ruolo causale dei fini?

KEYWORDS: Leibniz; *Principles of Nature and Grace*; Simple Substances; Causality; Final Causes

1. SIMPLE SUBSTANCES AND FINAL CAUSES

In the 3rd paragraph of the *Principles of Nature and Grace* (hereafter PNG), Leibniz explains the raise of a perceptual state as happening in accordance with the law of final causes, or of good and bad, while the connection of two subsequent states of bodies is given by the law of efficient causes:

- 1) Et la perception dans la Monade naissent les unes des autres par les loix des Appetits, ou des causes finales du bien et du mal, qui consistent dans le perceptions remarquables, réglées ou deréglées, comme les changements des corps et le phenomènes au dehors naissent les unes des autres par les loix des causes efficientes, c'est à dire du mouvemens.



Ainsi il y a une harmonie parfaite entre les perceptions de la Monade, et les mouvemens des corps, préétablie d'abord entre les systeme des causes efficientes et celuy des causes finales.¹

A similar thesis is held repeatedly in texts of the late period, yet, a selection of texts allows to highlight some differences:

2) Tout se peut expliquer par les efficientes et par les finales. Mais ce qui touche les substances raisonnables s'explique plus naturellement par la consideration des fins, comme ce qui regarde les autres substances s'explique mieux par les efficiens.²

3) dum status praesens corporis ex statu praecedente nascitur per leges causarum efficientium, et status praesens animae ex statu praecedente nascitur per leges causarum finalium. Illic series motuum, hic seriem appetitum locum habet: illic transitur a causa ad effectum; hic a fine ad medium.³

4) Il y a une infinité de figures et de mouvemens presens et passés, qui entrent dans la cause efficiente de mon ecriture presente, et il y a une infinité de petit dispositions et inclinations présentes et passés de mon âme, qui entrent dans la cause finale.⁴

5) Les ames agissent selon les loix des causes finales par appetitions, fins et moyens. Les corps agissent selon les loix des causes efficientes ou des mouvemens. Et les deux regnes, celuy des causes efficientes et celuy des causes finales, sont harmoniques entre eux.⁵

6) tout agent qui agit avec choix suivant les causes finales, est libre, quoyqu'il arrive qu'il s'accorde avec celuy qui n'agit que par des causes efficientes sans connoissance, ou par Machine, parce Dieu prevoyant ce que la cause libre feroit, a réglé d'abord sa machine, en sorte qu'elle ne puisse manquer de s'y accorder.⁶

While 2), the earliest passage I could find, uses an epistemological language, referring to explanation, the PNG passage ends with a statement on two different and autonomous causal systems; (5) and (6) are about an action made by final causes or by ends and means. Apparently, then, in these last texts a stronger thesis is at stake: perceptual states have final causes, (corresponding) states of bodies have efficient causes. Since the two are not at the same ontological level, perceptual states laying at a more fundamental level, final causes seem to be the most fundamental type of causation in Leibniz's system.

Besides this difference there emerges one point that appears in most of the texts (1-3-5-6): Leibniz describes the distinction efficient/final causes as a distinction of types of law that rules some activity: laws of final causation, namely the law of appetitions (tendencies toward new perceptions), and the laws of movements. I will later discuss if and how from the distinction of laws derive a distinction of types of causes.

By now, I want to stress that the existence of a law of final causation that rules

1. PNG, §3, GP VI, 599. For abbreviation, see bibliography.

2. *Des causes efficientes et finales*, 1690?, A VI, 4, 1665.

3. AGS, 32.

4. *Monadologie*, §36, GP VI, 613.

5. *Monadologie*, §79, GP VI, 620.

6. *Leibniz to Clarke*, GP VII, 412.

the appetition raises a serious problem for the extension of the thesis. This law is in fact defined as law of good and evil. It then seems that substances act according to a judgment of value or at least according to the perception of something as good, while laws of motions are value-free. This raises the first problematic point. Can the “law of good and evil” be applied to non-self-conscious or non-rational substances? After all good and evil can be recognized as such only by the intellect, which is a faculty that can distinguish human beings (and angels) from other created beings. For similar reasons, some scholars have argued that the answer is or at least should be no. In a pivotal paper, Mark Kulstad, referring to a doubt first raised by Robert McRae, has argued that either final causes are equal to efficient causes or there are final causes for rational substances and efficient for the rest.⁷ Other scholars had suggested, in order to apply the thesis to all substances, that the extension to non-rational substances might be intended by means of analogy: non-rational substances act as if they perceive a future state as good.⁸

The 3rd paragraph of PNG is explicit in speaking of final causes for every simple substance. Yet, other texts seem to restrict their realm to rational substances only. A main example is 2), where the epistemological thesis is held. Here not only they are applied only to rational substances, but are opposed to what happens in other substances, not in bodies. In the controversy with Stahl (n. 3), Leibniz uses the expression “final causes” referring to souls (*animae*). However, this does not prove much, for in this case Leibniz explicitly allows the use of “souls” for all substances, adopting the extension of the somehow Aristotelic notion of soul used by his opponent.⁹ The example taken from the *Monadology* seems more relevant. In §19 one finds the well-known statement that the world ‘soul’ is better used for rational substances only, while the others should be better called simple substances or monads. All occurrences of ‘final causes’ in the *Monadology* are related with *souls*, though never explicitly denied for all simple substance. Nonetheless, even here the law of final causation is referred to appetition, something that characterizes all simple substances. The most explicit text allowing for a restricted reading is then a letter to Clarke (6), where Leibniz speaks of agents acting with choice. Even in this last case, however, final causes are distinguished only from the action of bodies. As this last text confirms, a restricted reading of this statement on final causes is based on the fact that final causation should apply to voluntary actions, where goals are chosen. No doubt, voluntary actions are the place where one can more easily acknowledge the law of good and bad, just considering that Leibniz here intends ‘good’ and ‘bad’

7. See Kulstad 1990 and Mc Rae 1976: 67.

8. See the cautious suggestion in Adams 1994: 317-318. The defense of the extension of the PNG thesis to all substances is the key argument for the defense of “neutral teleology”, where teleology is considered without reference to goodness of goal or to God’s ends, developed in Jorati 2013. This reading identifies spontaneity of monads and activity by means of final causes, while here the two concepts are distinguished (see *infra*) to maintain a meaning for the specification made in the PNG, where final causes regard *remarkable* perceptions.

9. A distinction between a wide and a restricted notion of ‘soul’ can be found in a letter to Wagner, GP VII, 529, where the restricted notion applies also to animals and in general to creatures where “non nuda est facultas percipiendi”, in oppositions to monads without sensation.

as ‘believed to be good/bad’ and not necessarily good or bad in an absolute sense. With this restriction, the representation of something as good or bad resulting from a deliberative process is what determine the will to orient the action toward that thing. The identification of something as good or bad is the final cause of the action and our law states that the action will always follow such a recognition, that may come after a deliberative process, where partial ‘believed to be good in this situation’ are considered.

Then, a restricted notion of final causation, that applies only to souls is not only (partially) legitimated by texts but deals with one of Leibniz’s primary concerns. The concept of voluntary action is built on notions that are the basis of moral responsibility of human beings: they can deliberate with the help of the intellect and choose what to do. This restricted notion that defines a subset of created agents, by implying what makes them moral agents, deserving rewards and punishments, should then probably be allowed. Nonetheless, there are some reasons to believe that Leibniz is willing to establish a broader notion of activity by means of final causes. First: volitions, defined as apperceived tendencies or, sometimes, tendencies that follows by apperception,¹⁰ do not explain every human activity, while the texts previously mentioned seem to apply to every action. This holds not only for what in the mind correspond to the activity of vital functions of our organs, or for some rather unnoticed reaction: for instance, there are thoughts we are conscious of (apperceived parts of a perceptual state), that raises from unnoticed internal tendencies as Leibniz explains in a passage of the *Nouveaux essais*.¹¹ Moreover, an explicit judgement on good and bad made by the intellect is not a necessary condition for a volition. The deliberative process is not just a calculus made by the intellect (that can go wrong) on what is the best thing to do. It is rather a process where the will is determined by the outcome of noticed and unnoticed tendencies coming from our passions as well as from our intellect:

[n]ous ne suivons pas aussi tousjours le dernier jugement de l’entendement pratique, en nous determinant a vouloir; mais nous suivons tousjours, en voulant le resultat de toutes les inclinations qui viennent tant du coté de raisons, que des passions, ce qui se fait souvent sans un jugement exprès de l’entendement.¹²

10. “la *Volition* est l’effort ou la tendence (*conatus*) d’aller vers ce qu’on trouve bon et loin de ce qu’on trouve mauvais, en sorte que cette tendence resulte immediatement de l’apperception qu’on en a. (...) Il y a encore des efforts qui resultent des perceptions insensibles, dont on ne s’apperçoit pas, qui j’aime mieux appeler *appetitions* que volitions (quoyqu’il y ait aussi des appetitions apperceptibles), car on n’appelle actions volontaires que celles dont on peut s’appercevoir, et sur les quelles nostre reflexion peut tomber lors qu’elles suivent de la consideration du bien et du mal” (*Nouveaux essais*, A VI, 6, 172-173).

11. “Au reste il nous vient des pensées involontaires, en partie de dehors (...), et en partie au dedans, à cause des impressions (souvent insensibles) qui restent des perceptions précédentes, (...) La langue allemande les appelle *Fliegende gedancken*, comme qui diroit des pensées volantes, qui ne sont pas en nostre pouvoir” (*Nouveaux essais*, A VI, 6, 177).

12. *Essais de théodicée*, GP VI, 130; a similar thesis appears also in a letter to Coste: “Dans les autres substances intelligentes les passions souvent tiendront lieu de raison, et on pourra tousjours dire à l’égard de la volonté en general: que le choix suit la plus grande inclination, sous laquelle je comprends tant passions que raisons vrayes ou apparentes” (*Leibniz to Coste*, December 1707, GP III, 401-402).

The intellect may be too weak, a passion or a habit (even a good one) too strong to let us explicitly rely on a consideration of what is good, yet the action is voluntary, as long as it had been produced by an apperceived tendency. This may be one of the main reasons why in discussing the nature of the will and of deliberation Leibniz relies on a very utilitarian notion of good and bad, sometimes defining them as pleasure and pain,¹³ even if he surely had an inter-subjective notion of what is good that is used in the field of ethics. Indeed, even from the point of view of human moral responsibility, what is important is not that ultimately the will is determined by a judgement made by the intellect, but the awareness of a tendency. In various occasions Leibniz gives great importance to the fact that humans have the faculties that allow rational choices and judgements of value that can lead to a further deliberation, albeit if and to what extent these faculties will be used in any single case depend on the circumstances and on the whole history of an individual. From this point of view, the difference between appetite as (usually) unnoticed tendencies and volition as apperceived tendencies is relevant, since it is from the apperception of a tendency that a process of further deliberation may (under proper conditions) start.

In sum, the claim that since final causation requires a judgement of good and bad, it is a prerogative of souls seems too strong and would lead to a complete dismissal not only of the PNG passage, but of all the texts where it is used referring to action of souls in general. The main characteristic underlined in the analysis of the process of human deliberation is in fact the apperception of the tendency toward something or rather that the action follows and is produced by the apperception of the tendency, which underlines that a self-attribution of a goal can be considered as a sufficient requisite for activity. While it seems reasonable to interpret voluntary actions as the basis for a restricted way of intending final causation, implying moral responsibility, they might also be a model to figure out how appetite works in non-conscious monads. There is indeed at least one text that explicitly states that appetite, albeit distinguished from volitions, exactly thanks to the consciousness of the end, work by ends and means too:

Interim non inepte motus voluntarii appellantur, qui appetitibus distinctius cognitis connectuntur, ubi media finibus ab anima nostra adaptari animadvertimus ipsi; tametsi in motibus etiam caeteris appetitus ad suos fines per media procedat, quanquam non animadvertimus nobis. Voluntariae enim eae demum actiones proprie appellantur, quas deliberato facimus, et quarum consci sumus.¹⁴

It might be suggested that Leibniz is defining appetite in a way similar to the one used with the notion of perception. To have a grasp on what a perceptual state in non-conscious substances may be, we cannot but start from our own internal expe-

13. “Le Bien est ce qui sert ou confere au plaisir; comme le Mal ce qui confere à la douleur. Mais dans le conflict avec un plus grand bien, le bien qui nous en priveroit pourroit devenir veritablement un mal, entant qu’il confereroit à la douleur, qui en deuvroit naistre” (*Nouveaux essais*, A VI, 6, 195). The utilitarian notion of good and bad allows to talk about final causes in a more literal way for animals, which can perceive pleasure. Still it seems it hardly fits the nature of lower monads (see GP VII, 529).

14. AGS, 38.

rience and abstract from anything we can attribute to rational beings only, such as apperception of the self, and intellect. We are then left with a general definition of what all types of perception have in common: they express multiplicity in the unity of the subject. In a similar way, from the consideration of our own voluntary actions we can reach a definition of appetite as a tendency towards something that is analogous to the one we experience when we orient ourselves toward some desirable new state, abstracting from every explicit judgement on goodness as well as from the apperception of the tendency. This process of abstraction from our peculiar faculties leads to a general definition of what all substances have in common: perception as multiplicity in unity and appetite as tendencies toward a new perceptual state. Leibniz draws thus an explicit parallelism between volition and appetite: “Porro ut in nobis intellectioni respondet voluntas, ita in omni Entelechia primitiva perceptioni respondet appetitus, seu agendi conatus ad novam perceptionem tendens”.¹⁵ The strictest notion of final causes allows then to grasp a specific character of the activity of substances, namely its self-directedness toward a specific state. If so, directedness should be regarded as a cause or at least a full explanation of action in the same way in which the apperception of the resulting strongest tendency is a sufficient condition for volition.

2. FINAL CAUSES AND BODIES

I will return on this issue and on the causal role of goals in the following paragraphs. By now, another problem opened by the partially analogical extension of final causation to non-rational substances has to be considered, namely why they are excluded from bodies.¹⁶ For, having in mind all the Leibnizian thesis on final causes and on their use in science, they seem to regard bodies too – and if one cannot appeal to the higher cognitive functions, their exclusion from the realm of bodies has to be justified somehow. In other words, the PNG thesis seems to contradict the scientific use of final causes.

For a long part of his philosophical career, at least starting from 1678-79 Leibniz had defended the use of final causes in science and philosophy arguing against those thinkers, mainly Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza, who had in different ways tried to discard them. In Leibniz’s writings, various statements on their use can be found. First, final causes play a heuristic role in science since there are laws that can be discovered only (or in some texts more easily) by considering God’s ends in making this world. Final causes are also important for the spreading of piety since they help us in recognizing the goodness of the Author of things by means of the recognizing of order and harmony of his creation. Moreover, albeit anything in nature happens mechanically,

15. GP VII, 330. See also GP III, 581.

16. Here I take the PNG thesis as a statement about causality in causally closed systems, independent from considerations on their ontological status. The underlying conviction is that any argument against final causes in bodies based on their lack of ontological consistence will equally affect efficient causation. In other words, I take the PNG thesis as meaning that insofar as it is legitimate to say that bodies act, they do so in accordance with laws of efficient causation.

the physical laws cannot be derived by the basic notions of mechanics alone, since they depend on God's ends. Finally, final causes and efficient causes constitute (this is the most relevant point) two different, and both complete, models of explanation of natural phenomena. In principle, all natural phenomena can be derived either by a consideration of God's ends alone or only from the way bodies realize those ends.

The problem at stake in these theses is quite different from the one raised by the PNG and to some extent it is no surprise. Here Leibniz is facing the arguments developed by those who had refused final causes, especially the Cartesian Argument on their being useless in science. He uses ways of reasoning and proves of their usefulness that aim at being at a first glance independent by the complex of his metaphysics. In some sense, they are rather intended to show a path that should lead to the notion of substances, force, harmony and so on, but does not presuppose them. Another difference, more important here, regards which part of the process of final causation is relevant: in the arguments listed above, the use of final causes is based on the fact that something (the physical world or its laws) had been a goal for an intelligent being, while the PNG focuses on the fact that there are things in the world that have goals and this explains why or how they act. Though final causes one may be able to explain anything happening in bodies by deriving the law ruling their behaviour: bodies do not act by final causes or according to a law of final causation, for their teleological behaviour depends on the activity of an intentional agent (God). From the metaphysical point of view, no tendency toward a goal follows from the essence of bodies, while in the essence of simple substance there is something that is a goal-directed element, namely appetite.

Yet this is not the whole story. For there seems to be a very relevant exception to this distinction: a scientific use of final causes that deals with autonomous goals or ends pursued and realized by bodies alone, the realm of biology.

At the level of the practical use of final causes there is surely a difference: in biology, they are used mainly for descriptive purposes; for deriving (hypothesis on) the structure of an organ by its goal and for deducing the goals needed by the more general scope of the complex of the natural machine.¹⁷ They then play a descriptive role at the abstract level of the common features of species while in simple substances the activity that causes a change of states is at stake. Nonetheless, recalling that for Leibniz any organism is ultimately a species on its own, there should be something like a general end for each natural machine, so that, in principle, we should be able to explain its behaviour as a tendency toward its goal. Final causation as it is at stake in the realm of organic bodies should be able to provide at least an explanation of a state of a body and of its activity by individuating the way it reacts to a given state of the world. The two problems are then: can the goals be attributed in some sense to bodies? Can they be said to act by virtue of their final causes?

In the controversy with Stahl there are hints that point in different directions. On the one hand, final causation in organic bodies is referred to God's ends. The function

17. On the concept of natural machine see Fichant 2003: 1-28. The relation of mechanism and teleology in Leibniz's biology has been the object of several studies in recent years. As minimal references, see Hartz 2011: 29-37; Pasini 2011: 1261-1235.

realized by any natural machine is a particular end of God's, that realizes something that concurs in producing the more general ends.¹⁸ In a derivative and weaker sense, this applies to inorganic bodies as well. Another passage, on the other hand, however suggests a different reading. In order to ground the distinction of organic and inorganic bodies, Leibniz explains that the former have effects and goals by means of their own internal structure.¹⁹ So, not only organic bodies realize God's ends expressed by the laws of nature that rule their behaviour, but these ends are realized because these bodies follow autonomously their own goals and each of these goals constitutes a requisite for the realizing of the whole complex of bodies. With all the difficulties the organic-inorganic distinction may imply in Leibniz, this seems a clear statement of the existence of autonomously pursued goals in bodies too. If so, for providing a full reason of the effort to achieve the scope of one natural machine there is no need to make a direct reference to those things that are the metaphysical conditions for the existence of the machine, God who created it, the simple substance that "actualizes the machine". Consequently, a causal autonomy seems to hold in bodies for final causes too. Moreover, it seems quite reasonable to claim that, at least for our knowledge, ends of non-conscious monads are better described in biological, rather than in cognitive terms. Still, the passage quoted above does not refer to final causation. At first, it may be noted that since Leibniz (to my knowledge) never speaks of the essence of one body (as he does for substances) and refers just to the essence of bodies in general, from this essence, no goal-oriented activity follows. Yet, one may object that insofar a natural machine can be defined as *one* body, then ends can be attributed to *that* single body.

Even admitting that the basic elements of the Leibnizian physical world have goals, not every change in bodies can be explained by goals that might be attributed to the thing that changes. Accepting the distinction made in the controversy with Stahl, not only we cannot ascribe goals to inorganic bodies, but the particular end that inorganic bodies may accomplish cannot be ascribed to the natural machines that compose the inorganic aggregate. As problematic as the treatment of inorganic aggregates as one body may be in Leibniz, there are changes in bodies that cannot be derived by the goal of the body (or aggregate of bodies) that changes, even admitting that this change supervenes on goal-oriented changes in natural machines. Though teleology is everywhere in bodies, it does not lead to an autonomous and complete system of final causation.

18. "Quia igitur Autor rerum omnia intelligit, ideo omnia agit cum ordine seu ad Finem. Itaque duplices iterum oriuntur causae Finales, particulares et generales. Particulares apparent inprimis in Machinis naturae, seu corporibus viventium, organicis quae sunt Machinae divinae inventionis, ad certum genus operationum comparatae: et in nobis quidem a Ratiocinationem exhibendam (...). Licet autem praeter Machinas naturae multa videamus corpora, quae rudia sunt et ruderibus similia, in quibus non apparet fines speciales *dubius* tamen nullum esse debet, Deum auctores spectantibus, ipsa quoque ad fines speciales (etsi nobis ignotos) exquisitissime ordinata esse, et omnia concurrere ad finem generalem, qui est Harmonia rerum" (AGS, 28)

19. "magnum esse discrimen inter machinas et aggregata massaque, quod machinae fines et effectus habent vi suae structurae, at aggregatorum fines et effectus oriuntur ex serie rerum concurrentium" (AGS, 66).

A more problematic case might be the higher level of possible integration of bodies, a state of the world considered as a state of a machine, where in a strong sense the aggregate of bodies is not arbitrarily constructed. In this case, Leibniz's use of teleology does not rely much on a tendency toward the following state, but on the *ratio* of the change, that, being always in accordance to physical laws, expresses God's ends. From this point of view, it might be argued that following states do not play the role of ends, insofar as they are not presupposed in the description of change. However, as it will become clear in the next paragraph, the whole set of bodies shares in some sense a property of simple substances which is fundamental for final causation, namely spontaneity.

In light of the rejection of final causation in bodies I then assume as a central point of the PNG thesis that the system of final causation in simple substances means that the activity of substances is caused or described only by goals that can fully be attributed to them. I try now to argue that this is consistent with the generality of the PNG thesis, only if the system of final causation is not situated at the most fundamental level of Leibniz's metaphysics.

3. FINAL CAUSES AND MONADIC AGENCY

As seen, goals (in some cases by determining the thought of the means needed to reach them) can be intended as a cause of the activity of substances. This activity consists in an effort, a tendency toward a subsequent perceptual state, as the definition of appetition states. The point that I want to stress here is that while the "system of final causes" can provide a reason for which a subsequent state is what it is, it cannot identify the cause of the following state in the strictest sense. The premise may look quite trivial: not all efforts reach their goals. Obviously, this is something Leibniz, as anyone else, was aware of – however this quite simple point assumes in his writings a more interesting meaning. A reference to this fact can be found in a text of 1679, where, though in a different theoretical context, one point is highlighted: God's global ends are realized through a potentially conflictual composition of different particular tendency toward particular goods.²⁰ A similar point is made years later in a letter to Bourguet.²¹ This last text doesn't stress much the conflict beyond the realization of God's ends, nor it highlights the possibility that perceived good may after all be an evil in an objective sense, in any case it states that particular goods are sometimes destroyed because of the concurrence of various tendencies.

Some scholars²² have argued that this shows the pre-eminence in the world of natural teleology (God's ends) on 'desire teleology' (substances' ends). While agreeing, for natural teleology is the ultimate reason because the conflict of tenden-

20. "Itaque Deus est Mens illa quae omnia ducit ad perfectionem generalem, Anima autem est vis illa sentiens quae in unoquoque tendit ad perfectionem specialem. Ortae autem sunt animae, dum Deus omnibus conatum ad perfectionem specialem impressit, ut ex eo conflictu oriretur maxima perfectio possibilis" (*Anima quomodo agat in corpus*, 1679, A VI, 4, 1367).

21. "Le concours de toutes les tendences au bien a produit le meilleur: mais comme il y a des biens qui sont incompatibles ensemble, ce concours et ce resultat peut emporter la destruction de quelque bien, et par consequent quelque mal" (*Leibniz to Bourguet*, 1712, GP III, 558).

22. See Rutherford 2005: 173. See also Adams 1994: 318.

cies ends up in a determinate way and not in another, it should be added that this is not enough to put the ‘system of final causation’ as distinguished from teleology in bodies at the deeper level of Leibniz’s metaphysics. At the same time, Leibniz’s statement does not imply that a reference to God’s ends is necessary to derive any change of state, because the concurrence of tendencies in all substances is enough.

These two points may be worth a bit of clarification: goal-oriented activity in one substance is not enough to provide a reason or a cause for its effect (a subsequent state) considered as an internal perceptual state, because if we want to explain it in terms of goal-oriented activity, one should consider the concurrence of all simple substances’ activity. So, the system of final causation may explain a new state, only if one renounces to present it as the results of an immanent activity. Beyond the final causes system there is the immanent activity of monads, where following states are produced by previous ones. In this case monadic activity includes, in the form of its own internal limitation, what final causes explain only in terms of concurrence of various substances. Leibniz is hinting in this direction in the discussion of the well-known example of the beaten dog, provided by Bayle against pre-established harmony. He in fact holds that the unexpected pain the dog’s soul feels when suddenly beaten while he was happily eating does not mean that the dog is seeking a new state of pain and wishing to abandon his happiness. It rather means that the new state had been produced spontaneously – by the substance’s activity – from the previous state. Leibniz draws a distinction between spontaneity, by which any state of a substance is produced because of immanent action, and voluntary action.²³ Here the language of choice is once again used as a model to define tendencies toward a state, but the example of the dog may make, as said, it a bit inadequate. In any case, this passage allows a distinction between two different meaning of “action” of a substance. Spontaneous activity is situated at the deeper level of a passage from a perception to another, while voluntary (or voluntary-like) activity of one substance only partially explains the raise of its subsequent states.

In the continuation of the discussion with Bayle, namely in the remarks on the second edition of the *Dictionnaire*, Leibniz tries to develop the notion of spontaneity as acting in accordance to a pre-established law, by showing that only immaterial substances can fully ground that. He starts with the comparison with the movement of a point: a point moves along a line that is fully determined, so it acts in accordance with a law. Yet, Leibniz adds, if this point was the only one in the world, this line would be a straight line. If it is not, it is because of the concurrence of the complex of bodies plus the law of movements. In a rigorous sense, then, spontaneity is not in a single body, for the

23. “Cette incompatibilité [*sc.* the incompatibility between spontaneity and pain or, more generally unpleasant perceptions] seroit certaine, si spontané et volontaire estoit la même chose. Tout volontaire est spontané; mais il y a des actions spontanées qui sont sans election, et par consequent qui ne sont point volontaires. Il ne depend pas de l’ame de se donner tousjours les sentimens qui luy plaisent, puisque les sentimens qu’elle aura, ont une dependance de ceux qu’elle a eus” (*Eclaircissement des difficultés que Monsieur Bayle a trouvées dans le système nouveau de l’union de l’ame et du corps*, 1698, GP IV, 519). On the relevance of this distinction for the attribution of an action to the human will rather than God’s, and therefore for the whole theory of freedom see Murray 2005: 194-216.

accordance with the laws depends ultimately on the whole complex of bodies. Even the basic elements of the physical world, organic bodies, are not fully spontaneous because, while being complicated machine of perpetual motion, they still presuppose the interaction with the environment in their functioning. On the one hand, the whole world may be said to be spontaneous in some sense, as Leibniz himself admits. On the other hand, entelechies can be spontaneous, following the pre-established ‘path’, without any interference. The last lines of the text show that spontaneity grounds the possibility to consider the passivity of one substance as a state autonomously produced, because of its imperfection.²⁴ Another point to be highlighted is that if the body moving in a straight line does so in accordance to a law, what seems impossible for bodies, by their essence, is the possibility to follow any law, no matter how complicated, and therefore to differentiate their behaviour, without the concurrence of other bodies. In this sense, spontaneity is surely a requisite for final causation. However, the fact that this notion applies to the whole set of bodies suggests that it is not enough. If voluntary actions are the model on which final causation has to be understood, then they are to be referred to the strictest notion of activity, where ends can be attributed to the subject at least as long as they identify the reason of its activity and not of what is due to its passivity.

If so, describing monadic activity by means of final causes is just an abstraction on the deepest level where the concurrence is internalized. With respect to this level, it is a way of explaining the raise of a state and all its own internal features as long as the law of appetite is in every substance. It is nonetheless an abstraction that is fully legitimate. First: final causation accounts for an effective property of appetite – directedness – that fully explains activity in the restricted sense. Second: there is a sense in which the restricted notion of activity can be intended as activity *par excellence*, for it is a type of activity that follows from the perfection of a substance. It is in fact because of this restricted notion that it is possible to say that one substance acts upon another. According to the famous passage from the *Monadology* the legitimacy of the use of transitive causation in explaining states of substances depends on the differences in the perfection of substances, this difference

24. “[L]e mouvement de quelque point qu’on puisse prendre dans le monde, se fait dans une ligne d’une nature déterminée, que ce point a pris une fois pour toutes, et que rien ne luy fera jamais quitter. (...) Il est vray que cette ligne seroit droite, si ce point pouvoit estre seul dans le monde; et que maintenant elle est due, en vertu des loix mecanique, au concurs de tous les corps; aussi est par ce concurs même, qu’elle est préétablie. Ainsi j’avoue que la spontanéité n’est pas proprement dans la masse (à moins de prendre l’univers tout entier, à qui rien ne resiste); car si ce point pouvoit commencer d’estre seul, il continueroit non pas dans la lignée préétablie, mais dans la droite tangente. C’est donc proprement dans l’Entelechie (dont ce point est le point de veue) que la spontanéité se trouve: et au lieu que le point ne pouvant avoir de soi que la tendance dans la droite qui touche cette Ligne, parce qu’il n’a point de memoire, pour ainsi dire, ny de presentiment, l’Entelechie exprime la courbe préétablie même, les corps environnans ne pouvant point avoir d’influence sur cette Ame ou Entelechie, de sorte qu’en ce sens rien n’est violent à son egard. Quoyque ce que les hommes appellent violent ne laisse pas d’avoir lieu en tant que cette Ame a des perceptions confuses et par consequent involontaire” (*Reponse aux reflexions contenues dans la seconde Edition du Dictionnaire critique de M. Bayle...*, GP IV, 558).

consisting in the fact that the acting substance “contains what can give an a priori reason of what happens in another”²⁵. Active goal directedness can constitute, if not the only, at least one of the most important cases that exemplify such an a priori reason.

Incidentally, so far it seems that what final causation cannot account for is mainly the passivity of substances, considered (as it is) part of their nature.²⁶ Yet this statement should be precised. The brief remarks made earlier on the notion of deliberation, the fact that includes what comes from our passion and even the fact that one may be wrong in an intellectual deliberation shows that the passivity and limitation have to be taken into account in explaining someone’s action, even when we can legitimately say that she is acting upon someone else. An interesting statement that goes in this direction, in terms of internal impediments, can be found in the correspondence with Des Bosses.²⁷ If so, final causes do consider the activity of every created substance as intrinsically limited. To some extent the limitation of activity is fundamental in the system of final causation, because the limitation intrinsic to the activity differentiate the behaviours of created substances even if they all are instantiations of the general scheme of appetite. It is because activity is limited in different ways, i.e. there are different degrees in perfection that the laws of appetitions that rules the way in which they orient their actions is different. What, I believe, final causes cannot account for, unless they are referred to the whole set of created substances, are those changes which occur to a substance while their reasons are better understood in terms of the activity of another substance.

4. THE CAUSALITY OF ENDS

Nothing of what has been said so far can be seen as a reason to deny or to admit that goals are causes. If the law of appetite could be enough to ground, in some sense a different type of causes, there will be a much stronger metaphysical grounding for final causations.

In Leibniz’s texts there are some statements that quite clearly deny a specific and irreducible causal role to goals. Admittedly this is not a recurrent theme, yet, to my knowledge, such statements appear whenever Leibniz explicitly deals with the causal role of goals.

7) At ergo finis non est causa. Et sane fateor finem non esse causam, non enim existit, sed eius conceptum esse causam et quidem inter efficientes, nempe impellentem. Efficiens est causa quae confert ad effectum agendo.²⁸

8) Illic [*sc.* in bodies] series motuum, hic [in souls] series appetitum locum habet: illic transitur a causa ad effectum; hic a fine ad medium. Et revera dici potest,

25. *Monadologie*, §50, GP VI, 615.

26. On the issue of limitation and imperfection in created substances see Mormino 2005.

27. “[Original sin] non est virtus agendi, sed virtutis agendi impedimentum, ut ignorantia, vitium. Per impedimenta autem prodeunt actiones, quae sine ipsis non prodirent, ut frigoris exemplo patet” (*Letter to Des Bosses*, September 1706, LDB, 62).

28. *Definitiones: Aliquid, nihil*, 1679, A VI, 4a, 308-309.

representationem finis in Anima causam efficientem esse repraesentationis Mediorum in eadem.²⁹

9) Causa de fine valde improprie dicitur (...). Si A facit B quia vult C erit A efficiens, B medium, C finis.³⁰

10) Efficiens est causa activa. (...) Finis est, cuius appetitio est causa sufficiens conatus in agente.³¹

From the complex of this texts two different and apparently incompatible arguments can be drawn out. The first two quotations suggest that goals, as long as they act, are efficient causes, while the other two suggest that goals are not causes because they are not active.

As for the first, the distinction of two realms of causes does not lead to a distinction between types of causes. Indeed, in earlier writings Leibniz had used the four types of cause as example of an obscure notion.³² Behind this argument there is an evident tentative to interpret univocally the way in which causality works. Moreover, at least in the case of human action, Leibniz had done more than just stating its reducibility to efficient causes. The whole process of human deliberation and action is described by comparison with mechanical causes. Indeed, in his *Eclaircissement* to Bayle's objection against pre-established harmony, he states that the way a machine works can be a good analogy to comprehend the activity of a substance as determined by its internal state.³³ Mechanical metaphors are also used to describe the passages of the process of deliberation and action, with the same purpose of underlining its complete determination. Against *indifferentia equilibri*, Leibniz repeatedly uses the metaphor of a balance to show that the prevalent motive moves infallibly the will.

A more interesting and complicated metaphor, directly referable to Leibniz's dynamics, is used to show how a goal can be constituted as such. In the *Nouveaux essais*, Leibniz describes the composition of the winning tendency as the result of impulses, composed also by 'infinitesimal' tendencies from which the winning effort result. It is basically the scheme that lead to consider the raise of live forces from the composition

29. AGS, 32.

30. *Definitiones notionum metaphysicarum atque logicarum*, 1685, A VI, 4a, 630.

31. [*Table of definitions*], 1702?-1704?, C, 407.

32. See *Meditationes de cognitione veritate et ideis*, A VI, 4, 586. In Carlin 2006 the reducibility to efficient causes is read as the basis for a distinction between two kinds of efficient causes, intentional and mechanical. It seems to me that the stress is much more on the unique logical structure of the relation of causality, by means of the concepts of conference and requisite, than on the distinction of types of efficient causes, which is not so explicit. On the logical grounding of the concept of *requisitum* see Di Bella 2005: 63-93.

33. "l'ame, tout simple qu'elle est, a toujours un sentiment composé de plusieurs perceptions à la fois; ce qui opere autant pour nostre but, que si elle estoit composée de pièces, comme une machine. Car chaque perception precedente a de l'influence sur le suivantes, conformément à une loy d'ordre qui est dans le perceptions comme dans les mouvemens (...) Il auroit peutestre suffi de dire, que Dieu ayant fait des Automates corporels en pourroit bien avoir fait aussi d'immatériels qui representent les premiers" (*Eclaircissement des difficultés que Monsieur Bayle a trouvées dans le systeme nouveau de l'union de l'ame et du corps*, 1698, GP IV, 522-523).

and repetition of the infinitesimal death forces: here, *impulsus* has a double ‘nature’: on the one hand, it coincides with *impetus* (momentaneous entity whose infinite repetition produce motion through time), on the other, it can apply to the infinitesimal ‘component’ of the *impetus*. This way of explaining the process of deliberation highlights an important point, already mentioned at another level: all components of a perceptual state, all motives, let them come from the intellect or from passions act in the same way, making their composition in the unity of the effect intelligible.

Shall one conclude that, after all, efficient (mechanical-like) causes lay at the bottom of the created world? Few doubts can be raised on the metaphorical status of this type of reasoning, which highlights a way of functioning of deliberation, but should not be taken literally: where it is not explicitly stated, like in the case of the discussion of the impulse, the use of a model based on infinitesimals sounds as a proof that *entia rationis* are at stake. Indeed, a literal reading will equally fall under the second set of objections against the causality of goals, that ends are not causes because they do not act. Only agents are causes. The explicit limit of the balance metaphor is exactly this: motives do not act on the will, it’s the will that acts according to motives. Explaining things the other way round would, from the metaphysical point of view, be like admitting a sort of retro-activity of derivative forces on primary forces. Still, the two objections may appear to be mutually contradictory. Two features of Leibniz’s theory of causality may help to show they are not. The first is that causes are active; the second is that a full cause contains all the requisite needed to produce its effect (exactly as it is). So, monadic activity is the most fundamental cause and it is not, strictly speaking, caused by a perceptual state.³⁴ Describing a change as if perceptual states were causes of the action is the intrinsic limit both of final causes, and of their reduction by means of a mechanical metaphor. A state is the immanent effect of an activity rather than its cause. Nonetheless, since it implies all the requisite of a subsequent state, it can be treated as the full cause of it, for there is no other way to define this set of requisites as long as one cannot apply the general notion of action to derive the nature of one concrete effect. From this point of view, ends are not causes, yet the ‘system of final causations’ constitutes a way of explaining, or unfolding, the full causes of a subsequent state while it is applied to all monads. This said, the fact the mechanical metaphors cover all the logical steps of the theory of voluntary action (composition of a goal, determination of a volition, action) may seem a reason for once again dismissing the PNG thesis. After all, one may legitimately say that the activity of a substance is modelled on efficient causes. There surely is such a model of explaining activity, still, the possibility of a such a reduction does not affect, I believe, the priority of the system of final causation. While mechanical metaphors end in a complete passivity of the subject, within the system of final causes we can account for monads to be active: they act according to a law and toward an immanent effect. If this account is correct, final causes identify the active

34. On causal agency, Bobro & Clatterbaugh 1996: 408-425 is still fundamental. One point that might be added to their thesis that metaphysically speaking monadic activity is the only cause, is that from an epistemological point of view, perceptual states (plus laws of nature) can be said to be causes as long as they express the whole set of requisites for a subsequent state.

subject of change in the strictest metaphysical sense. Indeed, in most occasions (though not always) Leibniz is quite accurate in describing final causation as activity in accordance with a law that drives its orientation to some good and not as an action caused by an end. Moreover, all the mechanical metaphors used assume that from the composition of motives, the action will follow. In doing so, what is presupposed is exactly the law of appetite, that states that the result of activity is fully grounded in the perception of the previous state. The recomposition of motives in one single effect – characteristic of the explanation of action by means of efficient causes – presupposes some sort of distribution of the force intrinsic to each motive, which can be obtained only by presupposing one specific instantiation of the ‘law of good and evil’. This law may then look as nothing more, but is surely nothing less, than a statement on determinism.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations to editions of Leibniz’s works follow the citation conventions of *Studia Leibnitiana*.

AGS = G. W. Leibniz, *Obiezioni contro la teoria medica di Georg Ernst Stahl*, a cura di Antonio Maria Nunziante, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2011.

LDB = *The Leibniz-Des Bosses Correspondence*, ed. by C. Look Brandon and Donald Rutherford, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2007.

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