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Leibniz's Lure: Why is the Subject of Political Action Lost in the Labyrinths of Neomonadology?

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Abstract:

In this article I ask who is the subject of political action in the modern reception of Leibniz's metaphysics. A review of contemporary philosophers' works based on Leibniz shows that they consistently bypass the question of such a subject. Evading the question of the subject has implications for various versions of neomonadology, so this paper clarifies the problematic nature of understanding the subject by analogy with Leibniz's monads. The analysis of Leibniz's texts helps to point out the special role of the body (matter), which entails raising the problem of individual bodies' ontological status. To solve this problem, I propose an analysis of the concept of "substantial bond" (vinculum substantiale) and its role in Leibniz's system. An analysis of the substantial bond shows that it is impossible to construct a coherent theory of the subject (and, in particular, the subject of political action) on the basis of monadology. To develop and consolidate this thesis, in the final part of the article I examine the work of Agamben, which reveals the implicit aporia inherent in the monadology project.

Who could become a subject of political action today? Although such a naïve and straightforward question might be considered "banal" in modern theory, it can hardly be answered unambiguously and convincingly. Even just drawing up a list of obstacles that hinder the search for a solution to this problem is quite challenging. The challenge of answering such a question (conditioned, among other things, by the poststructuralist discrediting of the Cartesian-Kantian subject, and by the [neo]Marxist flirtation with "multitudes," etc.) can be demonstrated on various grounds, drawing on different traditions from the history of political thought. In this paper I will point out at least one of the obstacles that confound researchers who deal with the subject of political action in their work. My starting hypothesis could be succinctly expressed as follows: It is an attempt to make Gottfried Willhelm Leibniz's legacy relevant to modern theory, an attempt to update modern theory's own vocabulary with that of monadology, which has become a trap for any political thought willing to clearly articulate the answer to the question of who can act as a subject of political action today.

The argument is as follows: In the first part of this article, I review a number of works by philosophers who draw on Leibniz to show that the German philosopher's modern "heirs" consistently bypass the question of whether a monad can be understood as analogous to the (human) subject. In the second part, I analyze Leibniz's writings to illustrate that the key element of his philosophical system is to affirm the special role of the body (matter). This sets the *Monadology* creator the task of substantiating the possibility of real (substantial) existence of individual bodies. The third part is devoted to an analysis of the concept of "substantial bond" (*vinculum substantiale*) as a way of solving the problem outlined in the article's second part. This analysis will help to reveal an aporia immanent to Leibniz's project. By Leibniz's aporia, I am referring to the problem of constructing a coherent theory of the subject (and, in particular, the subject of political action) on the basis of monadic logic. Finally, the fourth part of the paper contains an analysis of several paragraphs from the final volume of *Homo Sacer* by Giorgio Agamben (2011). These paragraphs deal with Leibniz's reflections on the "substantial bond," and will allow us to develop an argument that every version of neomonadology proposed by contemporary philosophy inherits the irresoluble problem of the subject of the action. To paraphrase Walter Benjamin's words from *Theological-Political Fragment* (1978: 312–13) about Ernst Bloch's cardinal merit of "repudiating the political significance of theoc-

racy," the ultimate goal of this paper is to justify the repudiation of monadology's political significance.

Neomonadology's Blind Spot

The reception of Leibniz's metaphysics by contemporary thinkers symptomatically sidesteps the problem of the subject, or rather the construct of subjectivity that is a logical consequence of the monadological philosophy project. When confronted with it, authors dealing with the various versions of neomonadology either completely ignore this problem or consider it unproblematic and consequently do not think it requires any consideration. This situation is all the more surprising since many of Leibniz's contemporary followers use his texts, to one degree or another, to intervene in the territory of political theory and philosophy, in which context the problem of the subject of political action at the very least then seems inevitable. If monadology can provide a basis for new political concepts, how does it address one of the basic problems of political thought? Whether it is neoliberals or neo-Marxists who turn to Leibniz's texts, what both traditions have in common is this blind spot of the theory of the subject. First, most researchers consider the transition from a monad to an individual or collective subject (no matter whether of an anthropomorphic or non-anthropomorphic type) possible, and second, they believe it does not engender substantial contradictions (i.e., it does not require additional efforts of conceptualization). In an attempt to demonstrate how this kind of a leap from *monads* to *subjects* works, we need to consider the arguments of two theorists whose political goals differ significantly, but whose use of Leibniz's system reveals significant similarities.

For the Dutch philosopher and historian Frank Ankersmit, monadology serves as the basis for the project of democratic pluralism, which is understood according to the logic of perspectivism. This logic develops Leibniz's (1969a: §*56, 57*) famous claim that each monad expresses the entire universe, but does so from a certain perspective. Ankersmit's aim is to point to a picture of the Enlightenment world that would affirm the individual's primacy over the universal, which in turn reconstructs a more honorable genealogy for a liberal individualist ideology. According to the Dutch scholar, Leibniz's monadology allows us to assert that

> This is what Lebnizian monadology is all about, it is not so that
> we first have a universe with all the individual things (or monads,

if you prefer) contained by it and, only next, the perspectives from which these things or monads perceive each other. It is precisely the other way around... The universe is here *derived* from the individual monads, from individuality, and does not *precede* them. (Ankersmit 2002: 229; emphasis added).

While rhetorically registering the "crudity" and "inconvenience" of a democratic model built on such foundations, and acknowledging the seeming absurdity of Leibniz's approach, Ankersmit shows how many problems have to be addressed for the monadological version of democratic pluralism to work. However, even in doing so, he ignores the clarification of a key problem: How justified is the transition from "monads" to "things" and "subjects"? Ankersmit sees the statement that "we should conceive of the individual monad, rather, as an individual" (ibid.: 227) as logically plausible, and the very concept of monad is supposed to be easily transferable into the construction of the (human) subject, as well as to other objects: "according to Leibniz, the universe is constituted by the individual monads that correspond more or less to the objects contained by the world as we know it" (ibid.). Although Ankersmit's chosen figure of speech ("more or less") may seem appropriate to Leibniz's readers in relation to the German philosopher's thought,[1] it will be shown later that in the case of this particular problem — the possibility of transition from monads to objects of the objective world and, in particular, to the human subject — that this analogy is entirely unfounded.

The Italian philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato argues similarly, albeit with completely different political goals. In the third chapter of *The Revolution of Capitalism* (2004), Lazzarato draws on Leibniz and Gabriel Tarde, who transferred the monadology project to sociology, to offer a more precise description of the capitalist order of modernity. According to Lazzarato, neomonadology makes it possible to better understand the organization of modern enterprises and the capitalist universe, where the relationship between

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[1] The German philosopher's metaphysics is well known for its rejection of the idea of discontinuities and its postulation of multiple degrees of transition between different states, including limit states. "It is also known that there are degrees in all things. There is an infinity of degrees between motion of any kind whatever and perfect rest, between hardness and perfect fluidity without any resistance, between God and nothing. Thus there is likewise an infinity of degrees between an active being as great as it can be and pure passivity. It is unreasonable, therefore, to recognize only a single active being, that is, a universal spirit, and a single passive one, that is, matter" (Leibniz 1969d: 559).

workers and consumers on the one hand and the world of produc-
tion on the other embodies a kind of "preestablished harmony"
linking monads and God. Leibniz proves useful as a metaphysi-
cian who postulated "a distinction between 'actualization' in souls
and 'incarnation' in bodies," which helps to understand how "the
company manages non-corporeal transformations (advertising slo-
gans) that ultimately appeal exclusively to the body" (Lazzarato
2004: 100). It also follows from Lazzarato's analysis that he also
sees no problem in translating from the language of "monads" to
that of "human subjects." "The company thus seeks to establish
a correspondence, a relationship of interconnectivity and coher-
ence *between the monads (consumer and worker) and the world (the
company)*. In Leibniz's philosophy this was the place given to...
God!" (Lazzarato 2004: 95, emphasis added). Although Lazzarato's
aims differ from Ankersmit's — instead of an apologia of democracy,
Leibniz is called upon to help create a new critical theory of labor
that refines Marxist sociology — what both theorists have in com-
mon is how monadology resolves the conflict between the individ-
ual and the universal. The idea of perspectivism is also important
for Lazzarato, but his emphasis is not on the pluralism of "points
of view," as with Ankersmit, but on a different statement from
Monadology, according to which "each created monad represents
the whole universe" (Leibniz 1969a: 649; §62). "As Tarde has already
noticed, thanks to Leibniz it is possible to transcend the aporias of
the relation of individual and collective, and thus of individualism
and holism, because the collective and society are included in the
individuality of the monad" (Lazzarato 2004: 108). However, the
Italian philosopher's different intentions and his greater sensitiv-
ity to Leibniz's logic (Lazzarto's reading is much more correct and
corresponds to the letter and spirit of *Monadology*) do not change
the fact that the problem of the subject is also solved by analogy.
Apparently, Lazzarato sees no problem in equating "worker" with
"monad," agreeing with Ankersmit that monads more or less cor-
respond to real-world objects (ibid.: 109).

The outlined approaches can be considered typical, and they repeat
those forms of reception to Leibniz's metaphysics that developed at
the end of the twentieth century. Thus, as early as the mid-1970s,
the Norwegian-American political philosopher Jon Elster proposed
a reading of the monadology project as the most complete description
of a universe arranged according to the logic of capitalist rationality.
According to Elster (1975), God is the ultimate businessman, the
world is created by economic calculation, and capital is understood

as analogous to energy.[2] Ten years later, Bruno Latour began devising his Actor-Network Theory (ANT) on the basis of Leibniz's metaphysics. Latour had to somewhat refine the monadology system, but he nevertheless preserved the logical foundations of such a worldview, which allowed him to assert that "there is no preestablished harmony, Leibniz notwithstanding, harmony is postestablished locally through tinkering" (Latour 1988: 164). Latour's "anarchist" version of monadology differs from the approaches of Elster, Ankersmit, and Lazzarato in that it sidesteps the problem of a possible analogy between the monad and the human subject. Instead, Latour uses monadic logic to affirm the role of "nonhuman" actors (actants), but the analogy for the latter is still monads: "entelechies cannot be partitioned into 'animate' and 'inanimate,' 'human' and 'nonhuman,' 'object' and 'subject'" (Latour 1988: 194). Thus, Latour also evades the problem of the "subject" and, in particular, of the "subject of political action," but does so by ignoring the problem itself, by broadening the perspective. The mixing of human and nonhuman "actors" allows him to divert attention from the question of how the transition from monads to subjects of any type is possible. Since, according to Latour, everything can interact literally with everything, by virtue of the claim that one can never know who or what acts, then supposedly there is no problem of transition from Leibniz's "monad" as a metaphysical beginning-principle to the subject and, in particular, the subjective world around us:

> We should begin, here again, not from the "determination of action by society," the "calculative abilities of individuals," or the "power of the unconscious" as we would ordinarily do, but rather from the under-determination of action, from the uncertainties and controversies about who and what is acting when "we" act — and there is of course no way to decide whether this source of uncertainty resides in the analyst or in the actor. (Latour 2005: 45)

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[2] This reading of Leibniz, for all its apparent outlandishness, is certainly in keeping with the logic of the Monadology project, in which the principle of "the best of all possible worlds" represents not aspiration for the absolute good or perfection, but the result of some "optimum," that is, the universe's most economical arrangement. "It follows from the supreme perfection of God that he has chosen the best possible plan in producing the universe, a plan which combines the greatest variety together with the greatest order; with situation, place, and time arranged in the best way possible; with the greatest effect produced by the simplest means (le terrain, le lieu, le temps les mieux ménagés: le plus d'effet produit par les voies les plus simples)" (Leibniz 1969b: 639).

The case of Graham Harman is also of interest regarding the context of "nonhuman" ontologies. Even though Harman is usually represented as a follower of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, researchers typically overlook his debt to Leibniz. In his article "Plastic Surgery for the Monadology," Harman (2011: 225) admits that Leibniz is as important as Heidegger to his Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) project. He also says that it is Leibniz who helps us better understand human uniqueness not in spite of but because we can derive a rejection of the ontological distinction between human and nonhuman objects from monadology. However, using the German philosopher's thought for his own speculative purposes (far removed from Elster, Ankersmit, Lazzarato, and even Latour), Harman also evades the question of how relevant the analogy is between monads and human subjects, and, claiming the extremely broad analogy, between Leibniz's monads and the objects in OOO. And even still, he makes it no clearer to what extent we can say that a monad can act as a model for a Harmanian object. Thus, while Elster, Ankersmith (in part), and Lazzarato try in various ways, with the help of Leibniz, to "unravel" the capitalist universe, offering what they believe to be a more accurate and adequate descriptive language, Latour and Harman use Leibniz in the opposite (reactionary) way. For them, the monadology project serves as a means of asserting greater uncertainty about the subject of action and as a basis for denying existing distinctions between human and nonhuman actors/objects. However, despite all the differences between the outlined approaches, what they all have in common is the uncritical translation of the metaphysical principle of "monads" into "objects" of the real world: human subjects and (or) nonhuman objects.

In a recent paper, Alexei Penzin (2021: 218) drew attention to the fact that the connection between the dynamics of capitalism, seventeenth-century philosophical thought, and, in particular, Leibniz's works, has been repeatedly emphasized since the early 1970s.[3] Penzin shows that this period's metaphysical constructions allow for a better understanding of the logic that defines the modern capitalist order. To this end he traces the genealogy of the principle he names "always-on," that is, the always-functioning capitalist subjectivity. Wholly in accord with this methodological attitude, which seeks to clarify the immanent presence and significance of

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[3] Other approaches to a political reading of Leibniz's thought are presented (in the context of the problem of theory of state and question of power correspondingly) in the works of Artemy Magun (2020: 244–46) and of Kyle McGee (2011).

Enlightenment models of thought in the present, the question remains: Does it make sense to speak of any modes of subjectivity generated by Leibniz's metaphysics? If, as Penzin has convincingly demonstrated, "philosophical discourse that emerged in early capitalist modernity emphasized a continuity of the 'life of mind' as a constitutive feature of subjectivity" (ibid.: 220), then the question remains inescapable: Is it possible (and if so, how) to speak of a subject that logically follows from the project of monadology? Is it even possible, on the basis of monadological logic, to imagine a subject of (political) action that would not be lost in the abstractness of the metaphysical principle (monad) and whose (individual) boundaries would allow it to give concrete expression to without being dissolved into the metaphor of various impersonal multitudes? To prove that the answer to these questions is unequivocally negative, we must next turn to the works of Leibniz himself. Leibniz will show that the fundamental aporia of monadology lies in the impossibility of moving from the principle of monads to the construction of the subject, that is, the very transition to which the above authors resort is impossible.

The Role of the Body in Monadology

It makes sense to assume that the tacit consensus of Leibniz's contemporary readers regarding the possibility of transition from the monads to the object world and the human subject is due to the German philosopher himself. More precisely, due to how he answers the question of what a "body" is, and, in particular, what a "specific human body" is. To clarify this point, let us briefly reconstruct Leibniz's argumentation.

It is well known that Leibniz managed to go beyond the constructions of René Descartes and Baruch Spinoza on the question of the relation of "soul" and "body." The key task the German philosopher set for himself was to show how monads (entelechies), that is, immaterial metaphysical principles, are connected with the object world. However, such a connection could not be the nature of Descartes' dualist ontological rupture, nor could it fall into the temptation of Spinoza's unified substance. It is in this context that one should read those pages of Leibniz's texts that answer the question of how the monads can be folded into some unity of a (human) body. Leibniz (1969a: 649; §14) begins by exposing the Cartesians' error that the soul can be completely separated from the body. According to Leibniz, such a break with matter leads to a loss of all connection with

the universe: "I do not at all recognize entirely separated souls in the natural order or created spirits entirely detached from any body. …creatures free or freed from matter would at the same time be… divorced from the universal bond, I call deserters from the general order" (Leibniz 1969c: 590). At the same time, Spinoza's soul and body parallelism principle as formulated in Corollary 2 of Theorem 14 of Book 1 of the *Ethics*, that is, as modus attributions of God (the one and only substance) does not suit Leibniz either (Spinoza 1996: 9–10). Leibniz proposes to see a much more complex arrangement between *res extensa* and *res cogitans* than the Cartesian rupture or Spinozist parallelism. And to show the logic of this arrangement, Leibniz needs to propose a new notion of the "body," or rather to give the body a special functional meaning.

It may seem that Leibniz is following in Spinoza's footsteps when he states that "everything occurs in the soul as if there were no body, just as everything occurs in the body as if there were no soul" (Leibniz 1969e: 578) However, gradually, what might have reminded us of the parallelism of movements in mind and body receives unexpected clarification. In particular, Leibniz elsewhere continues and clarifies his thought thus:

> There is never any abstract thought which is not accompanied by some images or material traces, and I have established a perfect parallelism between what happens in the soul and what takes place in matter. I have shown that the soul with its functions is something distinct from matter but that it nevertheless is always accompanied by material organs and also that the soul's functions are always accompanied by organic functions which must correspond to them and that this relation is reciprocal and always will be. (Leibniz 1969d: 556)

The last remark here allows us to point to Leibniz's paradoxical movement of thought, as if oscillating between two options. On the one hand, one can indeed speak of a certain parallelism between the two beginnings. But on the other hand, Leibniz requires a kind of grounding, a logical and ontological attachment of the soul to the body. Hence, Leibniz's parallelism has nothing to do with Spinoza's argument, because through the monad binding to the body, Leibniz resolves monadology's key problem — it is the body that allows each monad to be individualized. What is known in the history of philosophy as Leibniz's substance pluralism is not provided by a metaphysical beginning (monads), but by the fact that all monads — with the important exception of the monad-God — are limited to a corporeal

beginning, a limitation that is at the same time a condition of in-
dividuation. If "it is even necessary for each monad to be different
from every other" (Leibniz 1969a: 643), then the key question is
what such a distinction guarantees. Therefore, although Leibniz
constantly emphasizes that matter is what restricts the monads,
largely repeating the commonplace wisdom of seventeenth-century
metaphysics regarding the role of matter, he then comes to argue
that it is through such restraint that the monads obtain their point
of view (1969a: 644, 647, 649; §19,42,62):

> Although each created monad represents the whole universe, it
> represents more distinctly the body which is particularly affected by
> it and of which it is the entelechy. And as this body expresses the
> whole universe by the connection between all matter in the plenum,
> the soul also represents the whole universe in representing the body
> which belongs to it in a particular way. (ibid.: 649)

It is due to "the body, according to which the universe is repre-
sented in it" (ibid.), and said body that is responsible for the bal-
ance of vague and distinct representations by which the hierarchy
of monads constructed by Leibniz on the principle of individuation
is solely possible. Each monad's uniqueness is the result of the
uniqueness of the "point of view" that the material source provides.
a monad's proximity to God is due to the greatest possible capacity
for a distinct reflection of the universe. Conversely, those monads
furthest from God are immersed in a vague vision. What is vital in
this model is that no monad can fully approach God, since the latter
is free from attachment to matter, but such freedom deprives him of
"individuality," that is, of a certain "point of view," or "perspective."[4]
Therefore, although God's power and perfection are expressed in the
fact that "God alone is entirely detached from body" (Leibniz 1969a:
650), it is important to see that this power simultaneously contains
a divine "incapacity." This incapacity is the inability to have an "in-
dividual point of view," which is always contained within the body.
Thus, for Leibniz, the body (matter) is a condition for substantial
pluralism, for the distinction between monads, which determines
the whole system of monadology's logic. This paradoxical line of

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[4] "Only God has a distinct knowledge of everything, for he is the source
of everything. It has been very well said that he is everywhere as a center
but that his circumference is nowhere, since everything is immediately
present to him without being withdrawn at all from this center" (Leibniz
1969b: 640).

reasoning (the body as the source of the capacity for individuation and, at the same time, as the limitation of the monad) was expressed very clearly by Ludwig Feuerbach: "the body is the expressive tone through which, in itself and for itself, the monad becomes a being perceived by all" (1967: 203).

It is here that the monadology project reveals its problematic nature. And it is the problem of the functional meaning of the body that allows us to return to this paper's central problem. To better capture the problematic nature of the transition from the monad to the "(human) subject" by analogy, let us point out three series of statements, the correlation between which raises certain questions.

1) The substantial pluralism of Leibniz's metaphysics (in contrast to Cartesian dualism and Spinozist monism) is based on the assertion that only monads can be considered as true substance. According to this logic, only monads are real, while everything else, including bodies, are only phenomena, that is, appearances.

2) At the same time, each monad's individuality is ensured by its attachment to a particular body, that is, due to some unity between a monad (or a set of monads) and an individual material organism. In other words, each substance's (monad's) condition of individuality is something (body) that at least has a problematic ontological status. If bodies are only phenomena, not possessing a substantial beginning, then how can they be a condition of substantial pluralism? How can that which is not fully real ensure the existence of that which is postulated to be real?

3) Finally, a third equally important problem arises: How is the transition from monads as simple substances realized, to complex substances, which are understood as "a collection or, an aggregate of simples"? (Leibniz 1969a: 643; §1, 2). In other words, in addition to the problem of the attachment of immaterial monads to bodies and the subsequent problem of bodies' ontological status, the question arises as to how it is possible that a complex organism could be formed from a set of individual monads, which would not be a phenomenal appearance, but something real? Only the answer to this question makes the transition by analogy from monads to (non) human subjects, which is used by default by contemporary theorists at least to some extent meaningful.

Compounded, this set of problems brings us back to the question that was voiced initially: How is it possible to construct a subject of (political) action on the basis of Leibniz's metaphysics? For the moment, we can assume that monadology does not just not allow for the monad to be translated into a "human subject" (whether

collective or individual). It also makes problematic as such the ontological status of any individual organism. What can a body benefit from having the status of something real rather being than a mere phenomenon? Historians of philosophy, in contrast with theorists who hastily use the system of monadology and evade this question, have the answer, and it is connected with the notion of the "substantial bond," *vinculum substantiale* (hereafter VS), which appears in the late period of the German philosopher's work.

Vinculum Substantiale and its consequences

It is noteworthy that the "substantial bond" concept was fairly quickly recognized as an important but extremely problematic element in Leibniz's theory. In his 1837 work on Leibniz, Feuerbach devotes a two-page footnote to this concept, placing the analysis of the concept outside the main text, hesitating as to the importance of such a footnote. In the footnote text itself, Feuerbach explicitly points out the contradiction introduced by the concept of "substantial bond" into the seemingly perfect structure of the monadology universe.

> It is difficult to match a definite meaning strictly consistent with the principle of the doctrine of monads to the notion of vinculum substantiale [substantial bond]. As is clear from the text of the chapter itself, Leibniz speaks indefinitely on this point, hesitates, contradicts himself. If he were to modify the original concept of the monad, then the concept of vinculum could be given a meaning more closely related to the concept of the monad. Otherwise, it is difficult, almost impossible to give such a meaning [i.e., as a complex substance] to the substantial bond. *It is only a monad, not a bond, that is substantial, though, on the other hand, Leibniz calls a true substance only a monad connected with an organic body*. (Feuerbach 1967: 205; emphasis added)

It is not just the phrasing that Leibniz "hesitates," "contradicts himself," that are symptomatic, according to Feuerbach, it is also how succinctly the aporia is expressed: Is only the monad substantial or is the only true monad the one attached to the body? For Feuerbach, it is an "either-or" question, there can be no supplementing one option with another. Curiously, only Feuerbach dared to ask the question that modern Leibnizians avoid: Can a particular individual body be something real (substantial)? However, Feuerbach stipulates

further in the footnote that "the concept of vinculum substantiale is revealed only in the letters to De Boss and, although they are an important source of Leibniz's philosophy, still they cannot be used without a critical analysis" (ibid.). Thus, having discovered the problem, the Young Hegelian brushes it aside.

Later reception of Leibniz's legacy did not just see the "substantial bond" as an element that disturbed the consistency of monadology, but even attempted to discredit the concept as the result of a diplomat's thinking rather than a philosopher's. "*Vinculum substantiale* is rather the concession of a diplomatist than the creed of a philosopher" (Russell 2005: 179).[5] Although Bertrand Russell rejects VS's significance for monadology in one fell swoop and devotes only a couple of pages to this notion in his extensive study of Leibniz, it is remarkable that it occurs in the chapter "Soul and Body." However, the fact is that the notion of VS was born from Leibniz's correspondence with Jesuit priest Bartholomew des Boss in his attempt to answer a theological question (how can monadology explain the phenomenon of transubstantiation?). The emergence of the "substantial bond" notion is not an accidental element of a separate polemic, but logically follows from the monadology project and the gaps it contained from the very beginning. In particular, we are referring to the first two paragraphs of *Monadology*, where the existence of simple and complex substances (as aggregates) is asserted, but the distinction between them is not properly substantiated (Leibniz 1969a: 636). It seems appropriate here to briefly reconstruct the moment when the concept of "substantial bond" appears in Leibniz's argumentation.

It is well known to historians of philosophy that the birth of the VS concept is a consequence of the attempt to solve the aporia of transubstantiation, which was raised in correspondence with Leibniz by des Boss. In a letter dated 6 September 1709, des Boss formulated Leibniz's task as follows: "it will help to know how on your principles you defend the real presence of Christ's body in the eucharist" (Leibniz 2007: 149). Thereafter, up to the final letter in May 1716, Leibniz would try to justify the notion of VS, born of a local question, but which in time rose to the level of a key element of the whole monadology project. Brandon Look, the translator and commentator of the correspondence between Leibniz and des Boss,

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[5] Russell's speaking about Leibniz's diplomacy stems from the fact that the VS concept was born out of a dispute that developed between Catholic des Boss and Protestant Leibniz, where Leibniz tried to prove the universality of his theory and its ability to transcend sectarian differences.

remarks: "the topic of transubstantiation merges with one of the most serious points of tension in Leibniz's metaphysics: the status of 'corporeal substances' — living creatures composed of an organic body and an immaterial soul or form" (Look 2007: xix). That is, the "substantial bond" problem is one of individual material bodies' ontological status. Namely, are such bodies something real (substantial) or are they only appearance (phenomena)? Therefore, the polemic's theological context, although important, should not obscure the underlying question. Let us recall how Leibniz solves des Boss's problem by introducing a new concept to better understand his argument's contradictory logic.

If, according to Leibniz, no monad can be destroyed, then how can the transformation at the Eucharist be explained from a Catholic perspective? If nothing can happen to the monads, that is, some cannot disappear so that others can miraculously arise in their place, then monadology, according to des Boss, is not capable of describing the experience of the transformation of bread and wine into the body and flesh of Christ. But if this is true, then Leibniz's universalism conception is called into question, which was unacceptable for the German philosopher: the possibility of rationally showing the unity of different confessions was one of his main tasks. This is where the VS concept comes to the rescue, since it allows Leibniz to argue that although phenomenally, bread and wine retain their taste and appearance, essentially there is a radical transformation. The fact is that bread itself is not a substance but a collection of substances, the relationship between which during the Eucharist takes two different forms. First, the "substantial bond" forms the totality of monads into "bread," and then the new "substantial bond" organizes the same monads into the "body of Christ." It is the new connection between monads, provided by VS, that makes it possible to assert: despite the phenomenal sameness (taste, type of bread remain the same), there is a substantial difference.[6]

It is important not to miss the subtlety of Leibniz's argument here. As a first approximation, one could agree with Russell's position, where the introduction of a new concept does not add anything essential to the project of monadology, but rather creates a number of logical problems. Namely, it aggravates the key problem of Leibniz's system: Does monadology mean that corporeal creations exist as substances, or does the thought of the German philosopher move toward an idealistic denial of the reality of everything except

[6] Leibniz's detailed argument can be found in Look's "Leibniz and the Substance of the Vinculum Substantiale" (2000: 205–07).

for monads? It is vital not to see this dilemma as a choice between two classical philosophical options — realism or idealism. For the rationalist Leibniz, this cannot be a matter of preferences, but only the consequence of a logical requirement. Therefore, it is much more important to understand that the decision that Leibniz eventually comes to (the introduction of the concept of "substantial bond," and with its help the recognition of reality, and not the mere phenomenality of concrete bodies) is a necessary logical consequence of his entire system.[7] This is the time for us to return to the argument from the second part of this work, where it was shown that the body is a condition for the presence of a perspective ("point of view") of each monad, that is, a condition for individuation. Taking into account the body's role, it is obvious that for Leibniz the question of bodily creatures' ontological status is inevitable. If concrete bodies (humans, animals) are only phenomena, then the idea of substantial pluralism (monadology as a universe embodied from different points of view) loses its meaning. Unless the problem of embodied monads' ontological status is resolved, Leibniz faces the threat of resorting to either Cartesian dualism or Spinozist monism. That is why it is necessary to give the body 1) individuality and 2) substantiality, and this is what gives rise to the concept of "substantial bond," which logically follows from it (even though the actual reason for coming up with it lay in the theological dispute with des Boss).

It is precisely these circumstances that make it possible to understand why, even having finished the discussion of transubstantiation problem, Leibniz does not abandon his new concept and continues to develop it until the end of the correspondence, supplementing his construction of monadology with a concept that at first glance introduces many problems. Des Boss's question, which pursued completely different goals, pointed to a gap in monadology that needed to be filled. However, the result of completing the construction of the metaphysical system was not the actual conceptual completion of Leibniz's theory, but the placement of a bomb at the base of the entire structure, the explosion of which, apparently, remained largely unnoticed.[8] At the very least, this problem was ignored by those

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[7] At this point, Look's position, subtle and nuanced elsewhere, seems contradictory. On the one hand, he claims that "the idea of a 'substantial bond' does not follow logically from the theory of monads" (2007: lviii). On the other hand, he convincingly demonstrates that "the vinculum serves as a solution to the problem of transubstantiation by being a solution to the problem of corporeal substance" (ibid.: lxiii).

[8] It is telling that the dispute between historians of philosophy about the role of the VS concept in Leibniz's thought ultimately rests on the

modern philosophers and theorists who saw Leibniz's monadology as an ontology convenient for solving their own problems. However, clarification of the role of "substantial bond" allows us to argue that 1) not only that the analogies between monads and "human subjects" are completely untenable, but also that 2) any theory built on the basis of Leibniz's monadology implicitly includes those unresolved questions that the German philosopher left as a legacy. Perhaps more attention should be paid to the words of Leibniz himself, who, a year before his death, in a letter to des Boss of 20 July 1715, expressed a fear that he had not succeeded in his explanation of how composite substances ascend from phenomena to real things (Leibniz 2007: 341). To clarify more the aporia faced by modern (neo) Leibnizians, let us turn to the only philosopher (not a historian of philosophy) who did not ignore the problem of "substantial bond," but addressed it directly within the framework of his own philosophical work — Giorgio Agamben.

Agamben, *Vinculum Substantiale* and Ontological (In)ability for Action

Leibniz plays a dual role in Agamben's Homo Sacer project. In *The Kingdom and The Glory* (2011), the German thinker receives several minor mentions, only to end up discredited as the bearer

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choice between options that equally lead to a dead end. Look summarized four possible ways of understanding VS: 1) as a substantial form, which is taken by a certain set of monads; 2) as a relationship between monads; 3) as a constituent substance; 4) as a separate, substantially similar thing (2000: 205). The researchers' choice ultimately rests on either a compromise option (the first three options, entailing a refusal to see VS as a separate substance (see, e.g.: Piwowarczyk 2017). Otherwise, it is a radical option, which implies that, along with monads, there is another kind of separate substance (the position to which Look is inclined). Such a conclusion, even though it disrupts the harmony of Leibniz's system, at least attempts to resolve the issue of the ontological status of material bodies. For the purposes of this paper, it is not so important whose position is more convincing. What matters is that both solutions lead to a dead end. Piwowarczyk's version does not address the key problem of monadology (the body's ontological status). Look's version, while trying to resolve a key problem, undermines the foundations of monadological logic (what are these special bodily substances that exist alongside the monad substances?). What is more important than the result of the historical-philosophical dispute is to point out that VS is not an accidental element in Leibniz's theory, and that its consequences affect the entire monadology project. Therefore, they directly concern any neomonadology project.

of a "false idea," which, at its extreme, could justify Auschwitz.[9] However, after such a dismissive gesture, Leibniz suddenly appears on the key pages of the latest volume of Homo Sacer, *The Use of Bodies* (2015). In the chapter "Toward a Modal Ontology," it is Leibniz and the concept of "substantial bond" that turn out to be the necessary guide for Agamben, who seeks to clarify his own ontology's foundations. For the purposes of this work, there is no need to clarify the Italian philosopher's positive program (this could be a subject for a separate, large-scale study), but it is important to demonstrate here what problem Leibniz and, consequently, other thinkers relying on his metaphysical constructions are facing, according to Agamben.

> Perhaps never as in the correspondence between Leibniz and Des Bosses did the inadequacy of the Aristotelian apparatus in accounting for singularity emerge with such clarity. What is in question in the correspondence is the problem of how one can conceive the unity of composite substances, in such a way that this or that body does not seem to be only an aggregate of monads but can be perceived as a substantial unity. (Agamben 2015: 146)

These are the first lines of the chapter's first paragraph, where Agamben immediately takes Leibniz's aporia to its limit, pointing to the key question: How can one derive the figure of the subject from Leibniz's metaphysics, understood through the substantial unity of the monad (a set of monads) and the body? According to the Italian philosopher, Leibniz's notion of "substantial bond" indicates the following problem, namely, "what is in question in the substantial bond is the problem of what allows one to consider as one sole substance

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[9] "Even the most beautiful minds have zones of opacity in which they get lost to the point that a much weaker mind can ridicule them. This is what occurred to Leibniz with Voltaire's caricature of his position in *Candide*. In the case of Leibniz this defeat has two reasons. The first is juridical-moral, and concerns the justificatory intent that is expressed in the very title, *Theodicy*. The world as it is does not require justification but saving; and, if it does not require saving, it needs justifying even less. But to want to justify God for the way in which the world is amounts to the worst misunderstanding of Christianity that one can imagine. The second and more important reason has a political character; and concerns his blind faith in the necessity of the law (of the general will) as the instrument of the government of the world. According to this aberrant idea, if the general law requires as a necessary consequence that Auschwitz takes place, then also 'monstrosities are within the rules,' and the rule does not become monstrous for this reason" (Agamben 2011: 271–72).

such and such a 'natural machine,' this 'horse' or that 'dog,' this or that human body, independently of the union of the body with the soul" (ibid.: 147). In other words, we are talking about the (im)possibility of asserting the substantial beginning of any particular body and its individuation: "the phrase 'this is my body' therefore does not designate the monads but the bond that actualizes their unity" (ibid.). Unlike the previously discussed Leibnizians, who ignore this problem, Agamben points out that it is the key to monadology. As a result, Agamben introduces an ontological problem that rests on the question of the subject — its ontological status and ability to act — into the context of political philosophy.[10]

Here one should remember the Homo Sacer project's political stakes. It is well known that the Homo Sacer project is a radical rethinking of Western ontology, centered on the categories of "will" and "duty." Agamben's entire archaeological enterprise is aimed at 1) searching for an alternative to the tradition of thought that reached its culminating point in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (Agamben 2013: 112–17); and 2) clarifying the failure of the ontological apparatus dating back to Aristotle. In this regard, for Agamben, Leibniz's system is the point at which the metaphysical tradition's internal contradiction reaches its utmost intensity: the unity between essence (monads) and existence (embodied creatures consisting of many monads) manifests its ultimate impossibility, which should be hidden at all costs. The name of such an impossibility, according to Agamben's analysis, is expressed in a "secret" basic ontological concept, which is not conceptualized by either Leibniz or his followers, the concept of demand. According to the Italian philosopher (Agamben 2015: 149), the only way to hide the gap between essence and existence, and in Leibniz's terminology between monads and their corporeal embodiment, is not the concept of "substantial bond." VS by itself cannot bridge the gap between the monad as a metaphysical principle and its embodied being. And since "substantial bond" is not enough, Agamben points to the presence of another ontological category, which is the imperative of demand, in the absence of which the whole construction loses its meaning. To clarify this position, Agamben refers to a key letter from the correspondence between Leibniz and des Boss on 29 May 1716:

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[10] The question of how the search for the subject of political action, which directs the intention of this work, and those provisions from Agamben's books that deal with potentiality and inaction as fundamental simultaneous political and ontological categories, remains beyond the scope of this work.

> This substantial bond is naturally, and not essentially, a bond.
> For it requires monads but does not involve them essentially, since
> it can exist without monads and monads without it. . . . An aggregate
> is resolved into parts; a composite substance is not. The latter merely
> requires component parts; it is not essentially constituted from them;
> otherwise it would be an aggregate. It acts mechanically, because it
> has in it primitive or essential forces and derivative or accidental
> ones. It is an echo of monads, according to its constitution, with the
> result that once posited it requires monads, but it does not depend
> on them. The soul likewise is an echo of external things, and never-
> theless it is independent of external things. (Leibniz 2007: 367, 369)

The contradiction that Leibniz has to deal with is fully manifest-
ed here. The need to give a substantial status to specific bodies,
which is a consequence of the body's individualizing role, forces it
to supplement, and in fact to replace the well-known constructivist
metaphor that defines monads as a "living mirror of the universe"
(1969a: 648; §56), with a new one — the metaphor of an "echo."
According to Agamben,

> What the image of the echo seeks to express is this curious inti-
> macy and, at the same time, exteriority between the bond and the
> monads. If the body were something other than an exterior echo of
> the monads, it would be a different substance and not their bond;
> if it were something inherent to them, it would be one of their ac-
> cidents or a modification. And yet the idea of an echo as something
> substantial is certainly paradoxical. (Agamben 2015: 149)

Agamben's analysis shows to what extent all the same doubts
and hesitations are reiterated here that the historians of philoso-
phy encountered when they turned to the concept of "substantial
bond." It is also difficult for the Italian philosopher to streamline
the course of Leibniz's argument to discover a coherent construction
from which one could draw an unambiguous conclusion (in particu-
lar, the conclusion about what theory of the subject is possible — and
whether it is possible — on the basis of the project of monadology).
But even if this analysis makes a positive conclusion, the negative
one is obvious: Leibniz's monadology cannot, without contradic-
tions, offer a translation from the language of "monads" into the
language of "actors," "objects," and most importantly, there is no
way "monads" can be understood as "subjects of political action."
"Monads" embody the ultimate untranslatability into the language

of political theory. Agamben's analysis makes it possible to clarify the contradiction that was originally inherent in monadology project, but which only becomes apparent due to the introduction of the concept of "substantial bond." Although Agamben's ultimate goal is to inscribe Leibniz's project into the long tradition of Western ontology going back to Aristotle, what is important for the purposes of this paper is not to agree with (or question) such an analytical approach, but only to place this "local" aporia, which appears to have significant implications, on record.

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As a result of the analytical route we have taken through the texts of Leibniz, his followers and critics, it can be argued that the German philosopher's attempt to transfer bodies from the status of phenomenality (appearance) to the mode of substantial existence inevitably comes to a standstill. This is what prompts the monadology creator not only to supplement his theory with the concept of "substantial bond," but to smuggle in one more ontological concept — the demand. Agamben's analysis helps us to understand that even the introduction of the VS concept turns out to be insufficient and an addition is required here, which turns out to be a "demand" as a certain type of relationship between monads and bodies, essence and existence. What can be read as an instrumental train of thought, where the word "demand" is repeated from sentence to sentence, in the above passage from Leibniz's letter, is in fact a symptom of the fact that monadological logic does not allow for the transition from monads — to actors, to objects, to the subject of (political) action. This is what allows Agamben not only to assert that "demand is a category of ontology," but also to ask the question: "what if demand is more original than the very distinction between essence and existence, potential and act?" (ibid.: 169), and in the context of this study, between monads and their bodily incarnations. Agamben argues that for Leibniz, the existence of individual bodies is not a mode of expression of some entity (monad), but an effect/consequence of the requirement of being, a kind of immanent coercion to exist.

In my opinion, Agamben's attempt to conceptualize "demand" in Leibniz as an ontological category should be seen as a symptom of the original aporia inherent in the monadology project, which was discussed in the first three parts of the article. Namely, the impossibility within the framework of monadological logic to make the transition from the monad as a metaphysical principle to the subject

of (political) action. Agamben's analysis should be viewed as a subtle symptomatology: if one does not avoid the problems generated by Leibniz's system, then they represent a funnel into which the initially harmonious construction of the universe consisting of monads is gradually drawn. What is not seen as a problem for modern neomonadology projects — the transition from monads to subjects of action by analogy — in fact reveals an ontological abyss of insoluble contradictions, which has political consequences. If it is possible to speak of some subject of political action within monadology's limits, then such a subject can only be understood as a fiction (in the sense in which this word is used by lawyers). In this regard, the popularity of Leibniz's monadology among modern philosophers indicates the ultimate level of philosophy's depoliticization, breaking the bond between politics and ontology. In a text written almost simultaneously with *Monadology, Principles of Nature and Grace Based on Reason* (1714), Leibniz claims: "together with a particular body, each monad makes a living substance" (Leibniz 1969b: 637). To all appearances, the neo-Leibnizians accepted the equation proposed by Leibniz as obvious and not requiring clarification of how this kind of "togetherness" is embodied. The concept of "substantial bond" not only allows us to point out a gap in the system of monadology but also reveals the impasse immanently inherent in this tradition of thought — a dead end at least in its political variety.

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