

LEIBNIZ'S PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE?

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Abstract: The main concern of this essay is to make a case for the thesis that Leibniz conceived of his philosophy as a way of life in something like the sense articulated in the works of Pierre Hadot. On this view, philosophy was a type of conduct, or a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practised at each instant, with the goal of transforming the whole of the individual's life. The essay also serves as an introduction to some of the main themes in Hadot's work. While it includes a brief discussion of a number of the central components of Leibniz's philosophy conceived as a way of life, the essay does not aim to do so in great detail. Rather, it offers a manifesto and initial road map.

Keywords: Leibniz, Pierre Hadot, philosophy as a way of life, Stoicism, ethics.

In a 2012 review of Lloyd Strickland's *Leibniz and the Two Sophies* (LTS), which is a selection of Leibniz's correspondences with Electress Sophia of Hanover and her daughter Sophia Charlotte, queen in Prussia, I made the following observations:

As Strickland rightly points out, the correspondence has one very important dimension. . . . For nowhere else in Leibniz's corpus do we find Leibniz as concerned to press the practical importance of his conclusions about the nature of reality and the proper conception of our relation to God. The contentment that should arise from believing in the justice of a God who has created us as members of the best of all possible worlds is clearly offered as a way of life rather than as an abstract theory. There may well be a PhD thesis or book in the waiting for someone who works closely with these texts and others to explore Leibniz's philosophy as way of life. (Lodge 2012, 181)

Since 2012, I have written papers on Leibniz's views on damnation and mysticism, Leibniz's ultimate justification for the principle of sufficient reason, and most recently an introduction to Leibniz's book the *Theodicy* (see Lodge 2015; 2017; 2018; forthcoming). A recurrent theme in these essays has been that a proper understanding of Leibniz's views requires a focus on Leibniz's practical concerns. None of them, however, is a direct engagement with my suggestion in my 2012 review that someone explore Leibniz's philosophy as a way of life, nor do I know of a place where that

line of thought has been explored independently of my suggestion. This essay is an initial step in that direction.

While I didn't mention Pierre Hadot (1922–2010) explicitly in my review, the choice of language was not accidental. I had read *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Hadot 2002) not long before I wrote it. Furthermore, in a way that clearly resonates with others who encounter that book for the first time, it had left me with the sense of having been given a phrase with which to express something obvious and yet seemingly novel, namely, that there is a philosophical way of living, and that we should regard at least some of the “great philosophers” as having conceived of their lives in that way and as having attempted to make that way of living available to others.

Hadot's own focus was mainly on philosophers of antiquity. But Hadot also gives voice to his sense that much of what passed for philosophy during his professional lifetime was not of this kind. While this is clearly an oversimplification, it also has an air of truth, at least when we restrict our attention to much of the Anglophone philosophy that has been produced since the beginning of the twentieth century. Furthermore, I think it is hard to deny that this has cast an unhelpful shadow over the way in which the work of some figures in the history of modern philosophy has been taken up during that time. And it is my contention that Leibniz has been one of the primary victims.

My main concern in this essay is to make a preliminary case for the thesis that Leibniz conceived of his philosophy as a way of life. I include brief discussions of a number of the central components of that philosophy. I do not spell out the Leibnizian way of life out in any detail, since I do not yet have those details organized in the right way. In part encouraged by a referee for this collection, however, who noted that the essay “offers a surprising and potentially illuminating central proposal,” it seems to me that the public provision of a manifesto and initial road map at this point is a worthwhile endeavour.

I begin by saying something more about why I think the essay might be seen to make “a surprising . . . proposal.” Then I provide a summary of Hadot's account of what it is for philosophy to be a way of life. With Hadot's account in place, the remainder of the essay offers a sketch of how Leibniz measures up against Hadot's criteria. It may be that some readers will be a little disappointed by the lack of detail at this point, but I hope that the essay will prove valuable for most.

While the expression “philosophy as a way of life” now has a life of its own, it seems to me that it is worth starting my road map with Hadot. This is partly because he remains a relatively obscure thinker, and I think it is worth trying to expose his ideas to a wider audience. But, more important, Hadot provides a detailed set of criteria that give concrete expression to the generic sense that one can live philosophically. And these criteria allow the existential elements in Leibniz's philosophy to come readily into view.

It may be that these criteria will serve as a ladder that can be thrown away if the manifesto is taken up. Indeed, it may also be the case that consideration of Leibniz's philosophy as a way of life in Hadot's sense will lead to a rethinking of the adequacy of Hadot's account. Nonetheless, I think it is a useful ladder for now.

1. Common Conceptions of Leibniz's Philosophy

The bulk of this essay is concerned with Hadot and the positive case for thinking of Leibniz's philosophy as a way of life. I want to begin, however, by returning to the apparent novelty of this claim and reflect a little on why it gives this appearance. The comments like those from my referee are still somewhat unexpected to me. The reaction I have received from colleagues and students, however, when suggesting that Leibniz's philosophy has existential concerns at its heart has often been one of surprise as well. Indeed, when presenting a version of the present essay at a recent history of philosophy conference, around half of the audience raised their hands when I asked whether this was their reaction.¹

Just why people are surprised is unclear. It could be that some think of Leibniz as the kind of grandiose thinker who falls foul of Kierkegaard's accusation: "In relation to their systems, most systematisers are like a man who builds an enormous castle and lives in a shack beside it" (1938, 156). I suspect, however, that the explanation is often more mundane, namely, the fact that Leibniz is not generally regarded as someone who engaged with ethics in his philosophy at all. And the reasons for this are easier to discern.

Exposure to Leibniz's philosophy, in the Anglophone world at least, is usually available only in the context of university courses in early modern philosophy that are devoted to issues in "theoretical philosophy," that is, metaphysics, epistemology, and logic broadly construed. This is, in turn, an artefact of the fact that the history of ethics and the history of political philosophy are generally taught separately from the history of theoretical philosophy, and the fact that Leibniz never made his way into the mainstream conception of the canon in the history of ethics and political philosophy.² Furthermore, the fact that Leibniz's practical philosophy has been largely absent from the classroom has had a knock-on effect, namely, that the standard collections to which those taking courses on Leibniz

¹ Hadot himself suggests that there are figures in the modern era who "rediscovered . . . some of the existential aspects of ancient philosophy" (PWL 271). Even he misses out Leibniz, however. Among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers, Descartes and Spinoza are the only ones he mentions (271).

² It is interesting to note, however, that John Rawls's course at Harvard, which was later published as *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*, included a lengthy discussion of Leibniz (Rawls 2000, 104–42).

have access are ones in which pieces concerned with metaphysics, epistemology, and logic predominate—here I am thinking primarily of the collections edited by G. H. R. Parkinson (PW) and by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (AG).³

It does not take much effort to see that this lens is highly distorting. Two of Leibniz's most famous pieces both have as their denouement an account of what the good life consists in (see the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, secs. 35–37 [A VI iv, 1584–88/AG 66–68], and *Monadology*, secs. 82–90 [GP VI, 621–22/AG 223–24]); and works such as the *Theodicy* are saturated with ethical concerns (Lodge forthcoming). Moreover, in another of Leibniz's major writings—*New Essays on Human Understanding*—which is a dialogue between characters representing the views of Locke and Leibniz, respectively, Theophilus (the stand-in for Leibniz) declares: “You had more to do with speculative philosophers, while I was more inclined towards moral questions” (NE 71). Finally, ethical concerns come to the fore in other collections of Leibniz's writings, including *Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters* (L), the general selection used by more advanced students, *Leibniz: Political Writings* (POL), and *Leibniz on God and Religion* (LGR). But first impressions are crucial, of course.

Another potential obstacle to conceiving of Leibniz in the Hadot mould comes in the form that appeared in an essay by a graduate student that I read recently, which included a sentence that began: “As a Christian” While hard evidence might be difficult to locate, my sense is that, to the extent that most people entertain thoughts about the more practical sides of his thought, they take Leibniz to be little more than an apologist for a version of Christianity. Indeed, scholars such as C. W. Russell in the nineteenth century and Maria Rosa Antognazza in the twenty-first have sought to argue explicitly for such a view (see Russell 1841, 429, and Antognazza 2007).

It is an interesting question whether there is really any problem with the idea that Christianity could be a philosophical way of life. Hadot himself gives reasons for thinking that there is a tension, although he is willing to talk of Christian philosophy. In a move that might surprise some readers, however, he does not locate this in the fact that Christianity involves “the explanation of sacred texts” or the fact that it is “based on revelation” (2002, 240). This is because he contends that “within Greek philosophy as well, there existed an entire tradition of systematic theology inaugurated by Plato's *Timaeus* and the tenth book of the *Laws*, and developed in book twelve of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*” and that “this tradition distinguished the various sources of revelation and the different modes of action of divine reality” (240). Instead he draws attention to the fact that, unlike philosophical ways of life, Christian life—the paradigmatic form

³ A list of abbreviations of primary works is provided in the References section below.

of which for Hadot is monastic life—“always presupposed the help and grace of God, as well as the fundamental disposition of humility” (248). Christianity does not rely solely on human therapeutic techniques for its transformation of human nature. It may well involve techniques for the “renunciation of one’s will” (248), but this can only yield the *hope* of salvic transformation. The transformation itself also requires divine intervention that is essentially mediated by a relationship with Jesus. How might this fit with Leibniz?

A full case for my view would be an essay unto itself. Popular conceptions notwithstanding, however, the writings of Leibniz suggest an interpretation that would circumvent any perceived tension between his Christianity and regarding his philosophy as a way of life. For according to this interpretation Leibniz wasn’t a Christian in any conventional sense at all—at least towards the end of his life.⁴

Let me for now briefly outline some of the key pieces of evidence for this claim. One is biographical, namely, the fact that Leibniz had earned the nickname “Glaubenichts” (“believes in nothing”) in his hometown of Hanover by the time he died, partly due to his infrequent attendance at his local Lutheran church (see LGR 10 n. 46). A second consideration arises when one notices that the *Monadology*, a late work that gives the appearance of being a résumé of Leibniz’s philosophy, speaks openly of God, but does not include any mention of Jesus, in the closing sections, which are concerned with moral and political issues (see secs. 84–90, GP VI, 621–22/AG 223–25). But more striking is the preface to Leibniz’s 1710 publication, the *Theodicy*.

Leibniz begins the preface with the claim that “sound piety,” which he also calls “light and virtue,” though not widespread, is something that has been “imitated” in the “formularies of belief and ceremonies” of religion. He goes on to express positive views about Moses, before referring to “Jesus Christ, divine founder of the purest and most enlightened religion” (GP VI, 25/H 49). All that Jesus is said to have done, however, is to have successfully propagated to the masses the truth of an essential dogma of the religion that Leibniz favours, namely, the dogma of personal immortality. Along with a monotheism that ascribed the traditional attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence to the ground of reality, Leibniz suggests that immortality was already taught esoterically among some adherents to Judaism. Jesus is said to be “divine” (GP VI, 25/H 49),

⁴ A number of scholars have tried to make the case that Leibniz was not a Christian in quite different ways. For example, see Macdonald Ross (1993), Brown (2001), Hunt (2003), Coudert (1995). The difficulty of determining the basis for making the assessment was brought home to me in conversation with the Leibniz scholar Robert Adams, who noted that at the founding of the Society for Christian Philosophers it was ultimately decided that what was required to count as a Christian philosopher was simply that one self-identify as a “follower of Jesus.”

but there is no talk of the incarnation, and it is tempting to see the word “divine” as indicating nothing more than the fact that Jesus’s life, like Moses’s, was a special gift from God.

Of course, it is not the case that theological commitments disappear from Leibniz’s philosophy. Indeed, the *Theodicy* is in part an extended argument that allows one to take seriously the claim that the universe was created by a God whose nature comprises the traditional attributes. But this is all a matter of natural theology rather than revelation (Lodge forthcoming). And, as we have seen Hadot point out, a commitment to a form of theism leaves Leibniz happily in the company of many other philosophers who were clearly not Christians.

2. Hadot’s Conception of Philosophy as a Way of Life

I want to turn next to the ideas that are involved in the conception of philosophy as a way of life that is particular to Hadot’s work. Given that Hadot discusses elements of this conception across numerous writings, this is not a straightforward task. A key source is the essay entitled “Philosophy as a Way of Life” in the volume of translations of Hadot’s writings that appeared in English under that title. But the themes of that essay are repeated many times elsewhere. A proper account would therefore require more careful exploration of Hadot’s writings than I shall be able to undertake here. But for present purposes, I take the essay “Philosophy as a Way of Life” (which I refer to as “PWL” to distinguish it from Hadot’s thesis) as the canonical statement of Hadot’s view and draw on his other writings only occasionally.

2.1. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: An Outline*

PWL begins with a long quote from Philo of Alexandria’s *On the Special Laws*, which dates from around the beginning of the Common Era. According to Hadot, “one of the fundamental aspects of philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman eras comes clearly to the forefront [in this work]. During this period, philosophy was a *way of life*” (PWL 265). Hadot goes on to suggest that “for the ancients, the mere word *philosophia*—the love of wisdom—was enough to express this conception of philosophy” (265), fleshing this conception out, along with examples from figures from various philosophical schools, as follows: “This is not only to say that [philosophy] was a specific type of moral conduct Rather it means that philosophy was a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual’s life” (265). We can see four elements in Hadot’s characterization of Hellenistic and Roman philosophy here. It

1. is a “type of moral conduct”;
2. is a “mode of existing-in-the-world”;
3. must be “practised at each instant”; and
4. “has a goal,” namely, “to transform the whole of an individual’s life” (265).

Soon after Hadot adds a fifth:

5. “[philosophy] presented itself as a therapeutic, intended to cure mankind’s anguish” (265–66).

And in order to complete the picture, Hadot also characterises wisdom itself—as opposed to the love of wisdom—as having the following three features. It

6. brings “peace of mind (*ataraxia*)” (PWL 265);
7. brings “inner freedom (*autarkeia*)” (265), later glossed as “that state in which the ego depends only on itself” (266); and
8. brings “a cosmic consciousness” (265–66), later glossed as “the consciousness that we are part of the cosmos and consequent dilation of our self throughout the infinity of universal nature” (266).

2.2. *Philosophy and Discourse About Philosophy*

With his conception of philosophy as a way of life in place, Hadot adds another distinction that is central to his work, which he attributes to the Stoics, namely, the distinction between “discourse about philosophy” and “philosophy itself” (PWL 266). On Hadot’s reading, for the Stoics “the parts of philosophy—physics, ethics, and logic—were not, in fact, parts of philosophy itself, but rather parts of philosophical *discourse*” (266–67). The key issue here is: “[W]hen it comes to teaching philosophy, it is necessary to set forth a theory of logic, a theory of physics, and a theory of ethics. . . . But philosophy itself—that is, the philosophical way of life—is no longer a theory divided into parts, but a unitary act which consists in *living* logic, physics, and ethics” (267). It is natural to wonder at this point how one should conceive of the relationship between the teaching and living of philosophy, and how one might move from understanding the content of philosophical discourse to living it. Hadot himself asks the rhetorical question: “Does the philosophical life, then, consist only in the application, at every moment, of well-studied theorems, in order to resolve life’s problems?” (268). The answer is, perhaps unsurprisingly, no. More precisely, we are told: “As a matter of fact, when we reflect on what the philosophical life implies, we realise that there is an abyss between philosophical theory and philosophizing as living action. To take a similar

case: it may seem as though artists, in their creative activity, do nothing but apply rules, but there is an immeasurable distance between artistic creation and the abstract theory of art" (268). With philosophy the goal "is to transform ourselves" rather than "the mere creation of a work of art" (268). Nonetheless, Hadot wants us to understand the role of theory and practice as analogous. While he does not quite put it this way, the thought seems to be as follows: In both cases one begins by being taught the rules; this is followed by a process of internalising the rules through practice, and the eventual outcome is creating art/living in a way that accords with the rules but does not depend on attempting to self-consciously follow them.

2.3. *Spiritual Exercises*

At this point in PWL the final piece in Hadot's picture comes into view, namely, the claim that the philosophy of the schools of the ancient world involved the use of "spiritual exercises" (PWL 269). Hadot does not elaborate on this idea much in PWL. It is, however, explored at length in other essays, including "Spiritual Exercises" and "Ancient Spiritual Exercises and 'Christian Philosophy,'" which both appear in the *Philosophy as a Way of Life* volume (in Hadot 1995, 79–144), and "Philosophy and Philosophical Discourse," which is in the volume *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (2002, 172–233).⁵

In "Philosophical Discourse as Spiritual Exercises," an interview with Arnold Davidson from 2001, Hadot makes the following remark: "I would define *spiritual exercises* as voluntary, personal practices meant to bring about a transformation of the individual, a transformation of the self" (Hadot 2009, 87). As we learn in the introduction to *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* Hadot suggests that the scope of these practices is wider than one might otherwise imagine: "By [spiritual exercises], I mean practices which could be physical, as in dietary regimes, or discursive, as in dialogue and meditation, or intuitive, as in contemplation. . . . The philosophy teacher's discourse could also assume the form of a spiritual exercise, if the discourse were presented in such a way that the auditor, reader, or interlocutor, could make spiritual progress and transform himself within" (2002, 6). Hadot expands on his understanding of the expression "spiritual practice" at length in the essays mentioned above, with examples from various figures and traditions in Greek and Roman philosophy. Furthermore, in the essay "Philosophy and Philosophical Discourse" he provides a complex account that divides the exercises into three broad categories with subdivisions according to the aspects of the philosophical life that they are supposed to enhance. But again, given my present purposes, I shall rest with this basic outline.

⁵ Hadot's suggestion that such exercises were constitutive of ancient philosophy has proved contentious. I shall not enter the debate on the issue here, however. For critical discussion, see Cooper (2013, 19–23).

3. Leibniz's Conception of Philosophy

I want now to turn to issues that are more directly related to the overall case I want to make, beginning with what Leibniz himself has to say about the nature of philosophy.

Unfortunately, Leibniz does not use the term "philosophy" in such a way that its meaning is made transparent. He regularly refers to people as "philosophers," but not in such a way that it is evident why they all fall under this category. And while Leibniz often employs the noun "philosophy," the term is used in such a way that it appears to mean little more than whatever is done by the people whom he calls "philosophers." Thus, although there is a sense in which Leibniz thinks philosophy is a "mode of existing-in-the-world," it clearly does not bring with it the kind of commitments that Hadot demands.

In one of his most prominent journal publications, the "New System" from 1695, Leibniz observes: "In philosophy we must try to give reasons by showing how things are brought about by divine wisdom, but in conformity with the notion of the subject in question" (GP IV, 483–84/AG 143), and the idea that philosophy is connected with the use of reason is present in other writings. For example, in the *Theodicy*, where Leibniz expounds at length on the relation between faith and reason, he presents a "thesis" that he claims "philosophy establishes no less than revelation" (part 1, sec. 115/H 186) and another thesis that is described as "purely philosophic, that is, recognizable by the light of natural reason" (part 1, sec. 114/H 185). Thus, it seems that Leibniz regards philosophy as a discipline that employs human reason.

Leibniz also offers, however, a conception of wisdom throughout his writings, which helps flesh things out more, namely, that wisdom is "the science of happiness" (see, e.g., A VI iv, 2798/LGR 138; LTS 167, 169; GP III, 387/L 422; L 425), or as he qualifies it in an essay usually referred to as "On Wisdom," wisdom is "that science which teaches us to achieve happiness" (GP VII, 86/L 425). Given this, I would like to suggest that there is something in Leibniz's writing that could plausibly be regarded as constituting his view of what it is to be a philosopher, or "lover of wisdom," which can be equated with being a pursuer of the knowledge of happiness through the use of reason.

With this account in place, there is more that can be said. "Happiness," which is on at least one occasion equated with "tranquillity of the soul" (A VI iii, 668/LST 166), receives a somewhat equivocal treatment, but there is a common theme. Thus it is said to be a "a lasting state of pleasure" (LST 167), "durable joy" (A VI iv, 2798/LGR 138), or "a state of permanent joy" (GP VII, 86/L 425), where "joy" is understood to be "a pleasure which the soul feels in itself" (GP VII, 86/L 425); or, in a more detailed account, "an impression of pleasures, that is a sense of present pleasures, a recollection of past pleasures and a hope of future pleasures"

(A VI iv, 2798/LGR 138). Finally, “pleasure” is a state that is intentional and consists in “the feeling of a perfection or an excellence, whether in ourselves or something else” (GP VII, 86/L 425; also see A VI iv, 2798/LGR 138), though Leibniz is also willing to admit a more sophisticated kind of pleasure, which involves not just a feeling but also “knowledge of perfection” (LST 167).

These quotes might seem to suggest a rather implausible view, on which happiness involves a constant positive feeling. But another passage from “On Wisdom” is a little more nuanced and can probably be regarded as employing Leibniz’s considered view: “The happy man does not, it is true, feel this joy at every instant for he sometimes rests from his contemplation, and usually also turns his thoughts to practical affairs. But it is enough that he is in a *state* to feel joy whenever he wishes to think of it and that at other times there is a joyousness in his actions and his nature which arises from this” (GP VII, 86/L 425).

The considerations above suggest that Leibniz took the philosopher to be a person concerned with the kinds of things that are at the heart of philosophy as Hadot conceives it. But it still leaves us at some distance from an account of Leibniz’s view of philosophy that satisfies the criteria for Leibniz regarding it as a way of life in Hadot’s sense. In the rest of this essay I consider, in turn, whether Leibniz is one who simply provides what Hadot calls “discourse about philosophy,” how his views square with the criteria that I isolated in Hadot’s work, and whether there is any scope for thinking that Leibniz recommended spiritual exercises.

4. Leibniz, Philosophy, and Philosophical Discourse

We have seen that Hadot wants to distinguish philosophy from what he calls “philosophical discourse,” where the latter is something that makes theoretical claims about philosophical matters independently of a concern with what it would be to live out a life that internalised those claims. Hadot’s view is that much Western philosophy from the Middle Ages onwards should be regarded as a form of philosophical discourse, and there is still a question of whether what Leibniz wrote is merely philosophical discourse.

Prima facie evidence to the contrary comes from one of the earliest of Leibniz’s writings, the *Dissertation on the Combinatorial Art* of 1666, in which Leibniz suggests that theory and praxis should not be conceived independently (see A VI i, 229). Indeed, the slogan “*theoria cum praxi*” has been presented as a motto that Leibniz himself adopted.⁶ But, of course, such a slogan is consistent with a more modern conception of the way in which theories might be related to human activity, namely, as

⁶ For example, the Third International Leibniz-Kongress in 1977 was entitled “*Theoria cum praxi*.”

instrumentally valuable accounts of the nature of reality. While this is not entirely divorced from the living of a good life, it clearly lacks the kind of existential immediacy that Hadot intends. This is not all we have to go on, however.

One interesting line of thinking, which I shall only mention in passing here, is connected with an argument put forward by Ansgar Lyssy in “‘Theoria cum Praxi’ Revisited—Leibniz on ‘Dangerous’ Philosophers” (2016). Lyssy traces the ways in which Leibniz took the theoretical writings of others such as Hobbes and Spinoza to pose a threat on the grounds that problematic modes of life would follow for those who took the claims seriously. The critique that Leibniz offers here implies that there might be better writings to be had, namely, his own, where better is to be cashed out in terms of a preferred mode of existing.

We also find more direct evidence of the way in which the reflections Leibniz offers on the doctrines he presents is accompanied by reflections on a living out of those ideas. In the *Theodicy* and elsewhere, he provides explicit comparisons between his goals and the kind of tranquillity that is the aim of Stoicism, and claims superiority (see Rutherford 2001). But I also want to mention two other striking examples.

The first appears in conjunction with Leibniz’s conception of substance in the *New Essays*. “It should be borne in mind that matter, understood as a complete being . . . is nothing but an aggregate or the result of one; and that any real aggregate presupposes simple substances or real unities. If one also bears in mind what constitutes the nature of those real entities, namely perception and its consequences, one is transported into another world, so to speak: from having existed entirely amongst the phenomena of the senses, one comes to occupy the intelligible world of substances” (NE 378). I return to the details of Leibniz’s metaphysical claims here later. For now, I simply want to draw attention to the fact that the passage includes the suggestion that exposure to theoretical consideration of the nature of matter and substances will lead the persons using those concepts to come to understand themselves as a substance so conceived. And the kind of understanding that is at issue is articulated in terms of “occupying [a] world” in which one falls under the theoretical concept.

The second piece of evidence draws primarily on the preface to the *Theodicy*. Here Leibniz presents his conception of justice as wise charity and combines it with the claim that the wisest charity is that which is directed towards God, given that God is the most perfect being and thus the most liable to generate happiness in those who love him. Crucial in all of this is the additional doctrine that we ourselves have an innate idea of God. For, in so far as we have the idea of God, we are intentionally directed toward God’s perfection and have at least the potential to love God (see GP VI, 26–27/H 50–51). In another piece, “On the True Mystical Theology,” Leibniz makes it clear that the enlivening of this idea as we become aware of it will bring love of its object (see LGR 80–84). And in

the preface to the *Theodicy* he draws explicit attention to the existential significance of this:

This kind of love gives birth to that pleasure in good actions which highlights virtue, and, returning all to God as to the centre, transports the human to the divine. For in doing one's duty, in obeying reason, one carries out the orders of the Supreme Reason. One directs all one's intentions to the common good, which is no different to the glory of God; one finds that there is no greater individual interest than to take up the common interest, and one gains satisfaction for oneself by taking pleasure in the acquisition of true benefits for men. Whether one succeeds or not, one is content with what happens, being resigned to the will of God and knowing that what he wills is best. (GP VI, 27–28/H 51–52)⁷

Interesting as they are, I don't want to dwell on the content of these claims here. My reason for presenting them in this section is that they again show Leibniz offering his views not as philosophical discourse but to be lived in the sense that Hadot suggests was true of Stoic logic, physics, and ethics.

5. Leibniz and Hadot's Conception of Philosophy as a Way of Life

Earlier in this essay, I sketched my understanding of Hadot's particular conception of philosophy as a way of life. I want now to reflect on the extent to which Leibniz's views fall under that conception, partly by drawing on the resources I have presented above.

As I have interpreted Hadot, the word "philosophy" carries with it a number of connotations—eight in total. On the assumption that Leibniz is offering more than philosophical discourse, what we have seen so far allows us to tick off some of Hadot's criteria. I am going to set aside criterion (7) above, that is, the claim that philosophy brings "inner freedom" (PWL 266). While I think what Leibniz says satisfies this criterion, the complications that attend the notion of freedom that he favours render the task of showing this impossible given current space constraints.⁸ It is worth noting, however, that Leibniz would not agree with Hadot's suggestion that freedom is "that state in which the ego depends only on itself" (266). But a preliminary case for the remaining criteria seems manageable.

Leibniz's philosophy can surely be said to "ha[ve] a goal," namely, to deliver knowledge of happiness, and there is no obvious reason to think this goal is not intended to "transform the whole of an individual's life"

⁷ While the *Theodicy* dates from 1710, more condensed statements of the same kinds of ideas can be found much earlier in Leibniz's career, e.g., in the *Confessio Philosophi*, which was written in 1672–73 (see A VI iii, 141/CP 89).

⁸ For a useful introduction to Leibniz's views on human freedom, see Jolley (2005, chap. 5); and see Seidler (1985) for a discussion that presents many texts that would be required for a proper treatment of this issue.

(PWL 265). Thus, it satisfies criterion (4). In addition, the conception of happiness that Leibniz offers makes it clear that philosophy is supposed to bring (6) “peace of mind (*ataraxia*)” (265), and it looks as though this suffices for regarding Leibniz as having a conception of philosophy that satisfies Hadot’s criterion (5), according to which philosophy is “a therapeutic, intended to cure mankind’s anguish” (265–66).

Leibniz’s writings also seem to provide evidence for (1), that his philosophy is a “type of moral conduct” (PWL 265) and (2) is a “mode of existing-in-the-world” (PWL 265). Consider an observation that Leibniz makes in the preface to his *Codex Juris Gentium*, a collection of medieval writings that he published in 1693 designed to support claims of the Holy Roman Empire against the French. After defining “Right” as “a kind of moral power” and “obligation” as “moral necessity,” Leibniz adds: “[B]y *moral* . . . I mean something equivalent to natural for a good man” (GP III, 386/L 421). This allows us to see that, for Leibniz, philosophy is a “type of moral conduct.” The quick version of why this is the case is to be found via the way that Leibniz characterizes justice, the virtue that constitutes what it is to be “a good man.” Throughout his writings, including the preface to the *Codex Juris Gentium*, Leibniz tells us that “we define justice . . . as the charity of the wise man” (GP III, 386/L 421; also see A VI iv, 2798/LGR 137; LST 163). Thus, to be good and to be one who has successfully pursued wisdom are coextensive, and to be a philosopher one must also be a good person, or one who engages in moral conduct. On the assumption that this is the case, (2) follows. For wisdom, as component of justice, is a “mode of existing-in-the-world” (PWL 265).

To address (8) properly, that is, the claim that philosophy brings “a cosmic consciousness” (PWL 265–66), or “the consciousness that we are part of the cosmos and consequent dilation of our self throughout the infinity of universal nature” (266), would require a detailed exploration of Leibniz’s anthropology and cosmology. For now, I want to make two points. Earlier in the essay, I introduced a passage from the *New Essays* as evidence that Leibniz is in the business of providing not just philosophical discourse but also a “lived physics.” Part of what that passage suggests is that when understanding ourselves properly, we come to inhabit the conception of ourselves as entities whose nature includes “perception and its consequences” (NE 378). There is much more to be said here, but Leibniz is committed to the idea that for substances to perceive is for them to “express” the entire universe from a unique perspective. And while he does not think that what is expressed can ever be transparently available to any of us, he does hold that we can come to understand that we are in such a state.⁹ In other words, we acquire a kind of cosmic consciousness.

⁹ For a helpful discussion of this thesis see Sleigh (1990, 170–80).

The issue of “dilation” is addressed in a piece that has come to be called “Leibniz’s philosophical dream.” Here Leibniz describes a process of being guided to enlightenment through the power of reason, which includes the following characterization of the perception of an enlightened rational being, along with some of its consequences:

I saw at a distance what I only wanted to consider in general; yet when I studied some spot in a determined way, it at once grew and I needed no other telescopic vision than my own attention to see it as though it were next to me. This gave me a marvelous pleasure and emboldened me to say to my guide: “Mighty spirit—for I cannot doubt that you are of the number of those celestial figures who make up the court surrounding the sovereign of the universe—since you have wanted to clarify so my eyes, will you do as much for my mind?” It seemed to me that he smiled at this speech and took pleasure in hearing of my desire. “Your wish is granted,” he said to me, “since you hold wisdom above the pleasure of those vain spectacles the world presents to your eyes. However, you will lose nothing that is substantial in those same spectacles. You will see everything with eyes clarified in a completely different way. Your understanding being fortified from above, it will discover everywhere the brilliant illumination of the divine author of things.”¹⁰

This leaves (3), the claim that philosophy must be “practised at each instant.” Evidence for this is harder to find. Leibniz does suggest at one point that wisdom is “to be studied above everything else” (LST 167). But the only place I have discovered in which there is a direct indication of something like the need for ongoing pursuit of wisdom is a letter to André Morrell from 1696. Here Leibniz has drawn attention to the work of Friedrich von Spee. Leibniz often recommended Spee’s book *Güldenes Tugend-Buch* (Cologne, 1646) as a manual which would help people acquire the virtue of “true piety,” from which love of God above all things follows, and which is equivalent to Leibniz’s conception of justice as wise charity. In this letter he also mentions with approval the fact that Spee “even proposes a nice method for praising God at all moments” (LST 155).¹¹ While nothing more is said here about what it is to praise, there is scope for thinking that to praise God requires one to be philosophical in the extended sense that has emerged through consideration of the relation between Leibniz’s views and Hadot’s criteria. But even if this account of criterion (3) is too tenuous, I hope that I have made a plausible case for thinking that most of what Hadot implies when he offers his summary of

¹⁰ The translation is Donald Rutherford’s. See <http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/rutherford/Leibniz/translations/Dream.pdf>

¹¹ As Irene Backus notes, Leibniz also provided extracts from Spee’s *Güldenes Tugend-Buch* to Electress Sophia along with a letter that probably dates from autumn 1697 in which he provides accounts of his key ethical concepts (A I xiv, 54–60/LTS 175–81). See <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/leibniz-and-the-two-sophies-the-philosophical-correspondence/>

what philosophy as a way of life comprises can be thought to apply to Leibniz's work.

6. Leibniz and Spiritual Exercises

I want to end by turning to the other element that Hadot emphasises when he suggests that ancient philosophy was a way of life, namely, the employment of "spiritual exercises" (PWL 269). As we saw, Hadot has in mind practices that individuals engage in for the sake of their own transformation. But he also allows that philosophical discourse presented by a teacher in a form that could be used by individuals on their own might do this job.

On Hadot's view, spiritual exercises were undertaken by people who were either living in philosophical communities that embraced a particular tradition or committed followers of a given philosophy in Hadot's sense of the term "philosophy." No such devotion to the philosophy of Leibniz existed during his lifetime, and while there are eighteenth-century philosophers who are sometimes identified as Leibnizian, such as Christian Wolff, they do not seem to have been exemplars of the kind Hadot intends. The very thing that alerted me to the possible connections between Leibniz and Hadot seems relevant here, however, namely, the kind of interactions that Leibniz had with Electress Sophia and Queen Sophia Charlotte, as well as with others with whom he met and corresponded. There is again much more work to be done on these issues, including further exploration of hundreds of pieces of correspondence, but I want to point to two things here.

The first is the analysis that we find in Lloyd Strickland's introduction to the correspondence between Leibniz and "the two Sophies." Strickland notes that Leibniz focuses much of the philosophical elements of his letters on two issues: (1) his conception of substance and (2) the material that forms the central ethical components of his *Theodicy*, which Strickland refers to as Leibniz's "philosophy of contentment" (LTS 45). As Strickland points out, Leibniz draws his correspondents' attention to those of his ideas that, if taken up in a lived way, would enable virtue and the happiness that accompanies it. But it is the mode of presentation that is of particular interest, since the letters also contain repeated pithy accounts of the key philosophical concepts in accordance with which the Leibnizian way of life would need to be lived. Furthermore, as Strickland notes, these elements of Leibniz's philosophy are by no means restricted to this correspondence. Strickland points to writings that I have already cited, such as "On Wisdom," but a particularly interesting example is found in an unpublished piece from the late 1670s, from which I have quoted liberally above. This appears in another volume of Strickland's translations, *Leibniz on God and Religion*, where Strickland gives it the title "Aphorisms

Concerning Happiness, Wisdom, Charity and Justice” (LGR 137). It consists of a series of definitions of terms that are central to Leibniz’s ethics, such as “justice,” “charity,” “wisdom,” “happiness,” “pleasure,” and “joy,” followed by a series of short propositions concerning God’s will and similarly short “theorems concerning wisdom and happiness” (LGR 138–40). The form of writing that we find here is such that the central claims could easily be digested and remembered by anyone whom Leibniz managed to convert to his way of philosophizing.

I don’t know of a place in which Leibniz explicitly advocates anything like the repetition and internalization of these kinds of concepts and claims by individual people, although it doesn’t seem to be much of a stretch of the imagination to think that he would have hoped that they would have received attention as something quite removed from a set of theoretical claims. Other evidence of his commitment to something like Hadot’s spiritual practices can, however, be found in writings in which Leibniz offers suggestions for how we might go about securing virtuous actions.

Among these, the chapter in the *New Essays* concerned with freedom is a particularly perspicuous case. After noting that we have the requisite ideas innately, that is, those of “God, virtue, and happiness” (NE 186), Leibniz suggests that the kind of knowledge we have of them “cannot influence us” and that “something livelier is needed if we are to be moved” (186). We are then given a number of suggestions as to how these ideas might gain the force they need. While the “first step would have to be in education” (NE 187), Leibniz offers another route for “a grown man who missed this” (187), namely, that when “in a good frame of mind he ought to make himself laws and rules for the future, and then carry them out strictly, drawing himself away—abruptly or gradually, depending on the nature of the case—from situations which are capable of corrupting him” (NE 187). He then proceeds to offer some more concrete examples:

A lover will be cured by a voyage undertaken just for that purpose; a period of seclusion will stop us from keeping company with people who confirm some bad disposition in us. Francisco Borgia, the General of the Jesuits, who has at last been canonized, was given to drinking heavily when he was a member of fashionable society; when he was considering withdrawing from the world, he retrenched gradually to almost nothing, by each day letting a drop of wax fall into the flagon which he was accustomed to drinking dry. To dangerous interests we will oppose innocent ones like farming or gardening; we will avoid idleness, will collect curiosities, both natural and artificial, will carry out experiments and inquiries, will take up some compelling occupation if we do not already have one, or engage in useful and agreeable conversation or reading. (187)

Later in the same chapter, Leibniz turns to another strategy that it appears may still be required by those who have been educated well by others or

by themselves. Here the issues concern situations in which inclinations towards just activity might be overwhelmed by more immediate passions.

[W]hat is required is that the mind be prepared in advance, and be already stepping from thought to thought, so that it will not be too much held up when the path becomes slippery and treacherous. It helps with this if one accustoms oneself in general to touching on certain topics only in passing, the better to preserve one's freedom of mind. Best of all, we should become accustomed to proceeding methodically and sticking to sequences of thoughts for which reason, rather than chance (i.e. insensible and fortuitous impressions), provides the thread. It helps with this if one becomes accustomed to withdrawing into oneself occasionally, rising above the hubbub of present impressions—as it were getting away from one's own situation and asking oneself “Why am I here?”, “Where am I going?”, “How far have I come?”, or saying “I must come to the point, I must set to work!” (NE 196)

In fact, the *New Essays* are by no means unique in this regard. Michael Seidler suggests that although “Leibniz's remarks on this subject are scattered and unsystematic, when gathered they comprise an informal program of practical moral advice that . . . reflects the psychic therapy [*Seelenleitung*] offered by Seneca and his Neostoic disciples” (1985, 24). And Seidler's article provides a useful compendium of examples from across Leibniz's career (see 1985, 25–33; also see Jorati 2017, chap. 6). *Pace* Seidler, though, there is at least one place in which we find a systematic outline of what is described as a “sensible means to arouse one daily” if one is “concerned with [one's] salvation” (A VI iv, 2276/D 191).

The piece in question, which dates from 1679–81, is a fictional dialogue entitled “Conversation Between Father Emery the Hermit and the Marquis of Pinese, Minister of Savoy, Which Has Yielded a Remarkable Change in the Minister's Life, or Dialogue About the Application One Must Have for One's Salvation” (A VI iv, 2245–83/D 169–200). Towards the end of this piece, the character of Father Emery provides the character of the Marquis of Pinese with seven rules that he should follow, the elaboration of which includes such things as: “look for a study companion” (2276/191); “prepare a written project that will serve as a rule for the rest of one's life, which will thereby be reduced to a few major maxims one should always have in sight” (2277/191); “examine oneself every day about the standing of one's project in order to verify what one has missed and what one has achieved” (2277/192); “keep a record of everything that may be useful” by having “a diary notebook of passed things, a reminder-notebook of future things or things to do, handy sheets of paper for writing down quickly whatever memorable thing pops up in reading, in conversation, in work, or in meditation” (2277/192); and “one must look for all imaginable skills in order to moderate the passions, which can disturb the use of reason” (2277/192). At one point, Leibniz adds that it would

“be practical to have an *Enchiridion* or handbook, where the most important pieces of knowledge we need would be marked” (2277/192), even suggesting that “since there are things one must know by heart, one could assure this by means of verse—for which purpose the burlesque would be particularly appropriate” (2277/192). The “Conversation” provides a schema for spiritual exercises rather than a set of spiritual exercises. Nevertheless, it shows us that, albeit in the context of a fictional dialogue, Leibniz was committed to the idea of a regimen of spiritual exercises. And with such a schema in mind, we are well placed to use the more disparate material to construct a more detailed account of the kinds of spiritual exercises that were part of Leibniz’s philosophy conceived as a way of life.

7. Conclusion

As I noted at the beginning of this essay, my intentions have been to provide an initial road map for further elaboration of what it would be to conceive of Leibniz’s philosophy as a way of life. My hope is that, by looking at Leibniz through the lens of Hadot’s work, I have shown that there are reasons for thinking that such an approach might be productive—whether Hadot himself is ultimately the most useful guide or not.

But I want to end with two further reflections. Although I have focussed on Leibniz, I also hope the discussion might encourage people to consider the extent to which it might be illuminating to think similarly about more recent philosophers whose work is not usually taken to be existentially motivated. How does the philosophy of W. V. O. Quine or David Lewis, for example, look if understood as “a way of life”? And what should our attitude be towards philosophers whose work cannot be conceived in such a way?

Finally, while I have not spelled out the content of Leibniz’s views in enough detail at this point, I want to suggest that reflection on what it would be to have a lived version of those views might provide the basis for developing a neo-Leibnizian approach to twenty-first-century life. Leibniz himself might well have welcomed such an attempt, given the recent emergence of a cottage industry in guides to living a Stoic existence of the kind that he vehemently opposed.¹² But one can only wonder what kinds of opposing strategies he might have endorsed on noticing resources available to his Stoic opponents, such as the webpage <https://dailystoic.com/>, which features the work of Ryan Holiday along with the opportunity to buy merchandise like the *memento mori* signet ring and a variety of medallions, pendants, and prints of sages.

¹² The authors of these books range from academics such as William Irvine (2009), John Sellars (2019), and Massimo Pigliucci (2017), through those without such affiliations, such as Ryan Holiday and Stephen Hanselman (2016) and Nils Salzgeber (2019).

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Abbreviations of Primary Texts

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- AG: *Leibniz: Philosophical Writings*. Edited and translated by R. Ariew and D. Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989.
- D: G. W. *Leibniz: The Art of Controversies*. Edited and translated by M. Dascal with Q. Racionero and A. Cardoso. Dordrecht: Springer, 2008.
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