

Leibniz's Philosophy as a Way of Life?

In a 2012 review of Lloyd Strickland's *Leibniz and the Two Sophies* (LTS), which is a selection of the correspondences between Leibniz and Electress Sophie and her daughter Queen Sophie Charlotte, 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 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.¹

Since 2012, I have written essays on Leibniz's views on damnation, mysticism, his ultimate justification for being committed to the principle of sufficient, and most recently an introduction to his book the *Theodicy*.² A recurrent theme in these papers has been that a proper understanding of Leibniz's views requires a focus on his practical concerns. As such, they have all involved attempts to articulate Leibniz's philosophy in ways that might provide a basis for seeing how the views articulated in his writings relate to the way in which he himself lived and the kind of life that he was trying to make available to others. However, none of them is a direct engagement with my suggestion in the review, nor do I know of a place where that line of thought that has been explored independently of my suggestion. This paper is an initial step in that direction.

Whilst I didn't mention the 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 the book for the first time, it had left me with the sense of having been given a

¹ Reference omitted for sake of blind review.

² Reference omitted for sake of blind review.

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.

As we shall see, Hadot’s own focus was mainly on philosophers of antiquity. But he also gives voice to his sense that much of what passed for philosophy in his professional lifetime, was not of this kind. Whilst 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. Furthermore, it is my contention that Leibniz has been one of the primary victims.

My main concern in this paper is to make a self-consciously sketchy case for the fact that Leibniz conceived of his philosophy as a way of life. This will include allusions to a number of the central components of that philosophy. But it is not my intention to spell out the Leibnizian way of life out in any detail, since I do not yet have those details organized in the right way. It is tempting to think that the appropriate response to this situation would be to remain silent. However, in part encouraged by a referee for this journal who noted that the “paper offers a surprising and potentially illuminating central proposal”, it seems to me that the public provision of a manifesto and initial road-map with all the detail I can currently muster is a worthwhile endeavour. As when I wrote my initial review it seems to me an open question whether I will fully meet the challenge set. Thus, it may be that the progress I have made so far will mostly be groundwork for others.

The structure of the paper will be as follows. I will begin by saying something more about why I think the paper might be seen to make “a surprising ... central proposal”. This will be followed by 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 paper will be a sketch of how Leibniz measures up against Hadot’s criteria. It may be that some will be a little disappointed by the lack of detail at this point. But I hope that it will prove illuminating enough for most readers.

Whilst 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 roadmap 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 importantly, Hadot provides us with a detailed set of criteria which allow us to give concrete expression to the generic sense that one can live philosophically. And these criteria allow the existential elements in Leibniz’s philosophy come readily into view.

It may be that this is a ladder that can be thrown away if and when the manifesto is taken up. Indeed, it may also be the case that consideration of Leibniz as a philosopher will lead to a rethinking of the adequacy of Hadot’s account of what it is for philosophy to be a way of life. Nonetheless, I think it is a very useful ladder for now.

1. Common conceptions of Leibniz’s philosophy

The bulk of this paper will be concerned with Hadot and the positive case for thinking of Leibniz’s philosophy as a way of life. However, I want to begin by returning to the apparently novelty of this claim and reflect a little on why it gives this appearance. Much as comments like those from my referee are still to me somewhat unexpected to me, the reaction I have received from colleagues and students when suggesting that Leibniz’s philosophy has existential concerns at its heart, has almost without exception been one of similar surprise. Indeed, when presenting a version of the current paper at a recent history of philosophy

conference, around half of the audience raised their hands when I asked whether this was their reaction.³ Just why this is the case is unclear, but some of the following considerations may be relevant.

It may 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" (Kierkegaard 1938: 156). But I suspect the main explanation is often more mundane, namely that Leibniz is not generally regarded as someone who engaged with ethics in his philosophy at all. And the reasons for this are easy 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', i.e., metaphysics and epistemology broadly construed. This is, in turn, an artefact of the fact that the history of early modern ethics is generally taught separately from the history of theoretical philosophy, and the fact that Leibniz has never made his way into the mainstream canon in the history of ethics.⁴ 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 such courses would have had access are ones in which pieces concerned with metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophical logic predominate – here I am thinking primarily of the collections edited by G. H. R. Parkinson (PW), and Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (AG).

³ Hadot himself recognizes that there are figures in the modern era who "rediscovered ... some of the existential aspects of ancient philosophy" (PWL 271). However, even he misses out Leibniz, and among 17th and 18th century philosophers Descartes and Spinoza are the only ones mentioned (ibid.).

⁴ An interesting exception in this regard is to be found in the case of John Rawls, whose *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* includes two chapters on Leibniz (Rawls 2000: 104-42).

It does not take much effort to see that this lens is highly distorting. Indeed, two of Leibniz's most famous pieces – the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and *Monadology* - both have as their denouement an account of what the good life comprises.⁵ And works such as the *Theodicy* are saturated with ethical concerns.⁶ Moreover, in another of Leibniz's major works – *New Essays on Human Understanding* - which comprises 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). Furthermore, ethical concerns come to the fore in other collections of Leibniz's writings – including *Leibniz: Political Writings*, the volume dedicated to Leibniz in the *Cambridge History of Political Thought* series (POL), the selection *Leibniz: Philosophical Papers and Letters* used by more advanced students (L) and the more recent selection *Leibniz on God and Religion* (LGR). But first impressions are crucial.

Another *prima facie* 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...”. Whilst 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 Leibniz's thought, they take him to be little more than an apologist for some version of Christianity. Indeed, scholars such as C. W. Russell in the 19th Century and Maria Rosa Antognazza in the 21st have sought to argue explicitly for this view.⁷

It is, of course, an interesting question as to whether there is any conflict in the idea of having a Christian philosophy as way of life. Hadot himself gives reasons for thinking that there is a tension, although he is willing to talk of Christian philosophy. However, in a move

⁵ See *Discourse on Metaphysics*, secs. 35-37 (A VI iv, 1584-88/AG 66-68); *Monadology* secs. 82-90 (GP VI, 621-22/AG 223-24)

⁶ For an overview of the *Theodicy*, see reference omitted for blind review.

⁷ See Russell (1841: 429) and Antognazza (2007).

that might surprise some readers, 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” (Hadot 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*” (ibid.), and that “this tradition distinguished the various sources of revelation and, and the different modes of action of divine reality” (ibid.). Instead he draws attention to the fact that, unlike philosophical ways of life, Christian life – the paradigmatic form of which for Hadot is monastic life – “always presupposed the help and grace of God, as well as the fundamental disposition of humility” (Hadot 2002: 248). Christianity does not rely solely on human therapeutic techniques for its transformation of human nature. Rather, it requires the “renunciation of one’s will” (ibid.) in the hope of salvation through divine intervention. How might this fit with Leibniz?

A full the case for my view would be a paper unto itself. However, popular conceptions notwithstanding, Leibniz’s writings suggest admissible interpretations that would circumvent any perceived tension between his Christianity and regarding his philosophy as a way of life, namely interpretations according to which he wasn’t a Christian in any conventional sense at all – at least by the end of his days.⁸

Let me for now briefly outline some of the key evidence for this claim. One is biographical, namely the fact that Leibniz had earned the nickname ‘Glaubenichts’ (‘believes in nothing’) in Hanover by the time he died, partly to his infrequent attendance at his local

⁸ There are a number of scholars have tried 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 M. 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’.

Lutheran church.⁹ A second consideration arises when one notices that the *Monadology*, a late work which gives the appearance of being a resume of Leibniz's philosophy, whilst speaking openly of God, does not include any mention of Jesus in the closing sections (secs. 84-90) which are concerned with moral and political issues (see 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). However, all that Jesus is said to have done is to successfully propagate to the masses the truth of an essential dogma of the religion which Leibniz favours – namely the dogma of personal immortality. For along with a monotheism which ascribed the traditional attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, 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", but there is no talk of incarnation and it is tempting to see the word 'divine' as indicating nothing more than the fact that Jesus's life, like that of Moses 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.¹⁰ And, whilst the content of his theology may be different, as we have seen Hadot point out, a

⁹ See LGR 10 n.46.

¹⁰ See XXX for further discussion (reference omitted for sake of blind review).

commitment to a form of theism leaves Leibniz happily in the company of many other philosophers who are clearly not Christians.

2. Hadot's conception of philosophy as a way of life

As noted above, 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. There 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 this essay are repeated many times elsewhere. A proper account would therefore require more careful exploration of Hadot's writings than I will be able to undertake here. But for present purposes, I shall take "Philosophy as a Way of Life" the essay as the canonical statement of Hadot's view (which I shall refer to as 'PWL' to distinguish it from Hadot's thesis) drawing on his other writings only occasionally.

2.1 Philosophy as a way of life: an outline

Hadot begins PWL with a long quote from Philo of Alexandria's *On the Special Laws* (c20 BCE-c50 CE). According to Hadot, in this piece, "one of the fundamental aspects of philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman eras comes clearly to the forefront. During this period, philosophy was a *way of life*" (PWL 265). And he goes on to suggest that "for the ancients, the mere word *philo-sophia* – the love of wisdom – was enough to express this conception of philosophy" (ibid.), fleshing this conception out – with examples from figures from various philosophical school – 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. (ibid.)

We can see four elements in Hadot's characterization of 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" (ibid.).

Soon after he adds a fifth:

- 5) "[I] presented itself as a therapeutic, intended to cure mankind's anguish" (PWL 265-66)

And in order to complete the picture, Hadot also characterises wisdom itself – as opposed to the love of wisdom - with the following three features. It:

- 6) brings "piece of mind (*ataraxia*)" (PWL 265);
- 7) brings "inner freedom (*autarkeia*)" (ibid.), later glossed as "that state where in which the ego depends only on itself" (PWL 266); and
- 8) brings "a cosmic consciousness" (PWL 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" (PWL 266).

1.2 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 that between "discourse about philosophy" and "philosophy itself" (PWL 266). On this 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*" (PWL 266-67). The key issue here is that:

[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 longer a theory divided into parts, but a unitary act which consists in *living* logic, physics, and ethics. (PWL 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?” (PWL 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. (ibid.)

With philosophy “the goal is to transform ourselves” rather than “the mere creation of a work of art” (ibid.). Nonetheless, we are to understand the role of theory and practice as analogous. Whilst Hadot does not quite put it this way, his 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.

1.3 Spiritual exercises

It is at this point that the final piece in Hadot’s picture comes into view, namely the claim that that practicing to be a philosopher involves – or at least involved in philosophical schools of the Ancient world – the use of “spiritual exercises” (PWL 269). Hadot does not elaborate this idea much in PWL. However it is explored at length in other essays, including “Spiritual Exercises” and “Ancient Spiritual Exercises and ‘Christian Philosophy’”, which both appear in the PWL volume (Hadot 1995: 79-144), and “Philosophy and Philosophical Discourse” which is in the volume *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Hadot 2002: 172-233).¹¹

¹¹ Hadot’s suggestion that such exercises were constitutive of ancient philosophy has proved contentious, though I will not enter that issue here, given the task I have set myself, namely to investigate the extent to which Leibniz fits Hadot’s model. For critical discussion, see Cooper (2013: 19-23).

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 have otherwise imagined:

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. (Hadot 2002: 6).

Hadot expands on his understanding of the expression 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 which 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 restrict myself to the basic outline I have offered.

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’ and often employs the noun ‘philosophy’. But the latter is used in such a way that it appears to mean little more than whatever is done by people such that they are called ‘philosophers’. Although this implies that 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*, Leibniz does offer a more contentful account: “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). The idea that philosophy is connected with the use of reason is present in other writings, and particularly in the *Theodicy*, where Leibniz expounds at length on the relation between faith and reason, and presents a “thesis” which “philosophy establishes no less than revelation” (Part 1 sec. 115/H 186) and another which is described as “purely philosophic, that is, recognizable by the light of natural reason” (Part 1 sec. 114/H 185).

However, Leibniz also offers a conception of wisdom throughout his writings, which is more pertinent, namely that it 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’, “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 comprising what it is to be a “lover of wisdom”, and which can be equated with being a pursuer of the knowledge of happiness.

‘Happiness’, which is on at least one occasion said to comprise “tranquillity of the soul” (A VI iii, 668/LST 166) receives a slightly more equivocal treatment, but there is a common theme. Thus it is said to be and “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 “a pleasure which the soul feels in itself” (GP VII, 86/L 425); or, in a more detailed account, it is said to be “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). ‘Pleasure’ is, in turn, a state that is intentional and comprises “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 “knowledge of perfection” (LST 167).

These quotes seem to suggest an account on which happiness involves a constant positive feeling. But another passage, from ‘On Wisdom’ is a little more nuanced:

The happy man does not, it is true, feel this joy at every instant because he sometimes rests 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 allow us to see that Leibniz conceived wisdom in ways that would underwrite a conception of the ‘lover of wisdom’ as a person concerned with the kinds of things that are at the heart of philosophy as Hadot conceives it. But this still leaves us at some distance from an account of Leibniz’s views that satisfies the criteria for being a way of life in Hadot’s sense. In the rest of the paper I shall consider, in turn, whether Leibniz is one who simply provides what Hadot calls “discourse about philosophy”, how his views square up 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 which makes theoretical claims about philosophical matters independently of a concern with what it would be to live out a life which internalised the those claims as accurate. Hadot’s view is that much western philosophy from the middle ages onward should be regarded as a form of the latter. 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 he 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 which Leibniz himself adopted.¹² But, of course, such a slogan is consistent with more modern conception of the way in which theories might be related to human activity, namely as instrumentally valuable accounts of the nature of reality. And, whilst this is not entirely divorced from the living of a good life, it lacks the kind of existential immediacy that Hadot intends. However, this is not all we have to go on.

One interesting line of thinking, which I shall only mention in passing here, is connected with a line of argument put forward by Ansgar Lyssy. In a recent paper "'Theoria cum praxi' revisited – Leibniz on 'dangerous' philosophers" (Lyssy 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 clearly implies that there might be better discourse to be had, namely his own, where better is to be cashed out in terms of a preferred mode of existing.

But we also find in Leibniz's writings more direct evidence of the way in which reflection on the doctrines he presents is accompanied (at least in principle) by a living out of those ideas. In the *Theodicy* and elsewhere, Leibniz is keen to bring in explicit comparisons with the kind of tranquillity that is the aim of Stoicism and to claim superiority for his own views.¹³ But I also want to mention two particular striking examples.

The first appears in conjunction with Leibniz's conception of substance in the *New Essays*.

¹² For example, the third International Leibniz-Kongress in 1977, the now international meeting of Leibniz scholars from around the world that takes place at roughly five year intervals, was titled "Theoria cum praxi".

¹³ For discussion, see Rutherford (2001).

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)

Interesting as they are, I not concerned with the details of Leibniz's metaphysical claims here.

Rather I want to draw attention to the fact that it includes the suggestion that exposure to theoretical consideration of the nature of matter and substances will lead the person 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 toward 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 insofar as we have the idea of God, we are in fact intentionally directed toward perfection and thus there is in all of us at least the potential to love of 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, 27-8/H 51-52)¹⁴

Again, whilst it would clearly be pertinent to an account of the nature of the Leibnizian way of life, I don't want to dwell on the content here. Again my point is that in this passage we see Leibniz presenting his ideas as things 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 paper, I sketched my understanding of Hadot's conception of philosophy as a way of life. I want now to reflect on the extent to which Leibniz's ideas falls 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, in fact 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 7), i.e., the claim that philosophy brings "inner freedom" (PWL 266). Whilst I think Leibniz's views satisfy this criterion the complications that attend the notion of freedom that he favours render the task impossible given current space constraints.¹⁵ But a case for the remaining criteria seems manageable.

Leibniz's writings can surely be said to 4) "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" (PWL 265). In addition to this, the conception of happiness that Leibniz offers makes it clear that philosophy will bring 6) "piece of mind

¹⁴ Whilst 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).

¹⁵ For a useful introduction to Leibniz's views on human freedom, see Jolley (2005: ch. 5) and see Seidler (1985) for a discussion which presents many texts that would be required for a proper treatment of this issue.

(*ataraxia*)” (PWL 265), and it looks like this suffices for regarding Leibniz as having a conception of philosophy that satisfies Hadot’s 5), according to which philosophy is “a therapeutic, intended to cure mankind’s anguish” (PWL 265-66).

Leibniz’s writings also seem to provide evidence for 1), that 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 “by *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 is constitutive of 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 2) is a “mode of existing-in-the world” (PWL 265).

To address 8) properly i.e., 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” (PWL 266) would require elaborating on the role that Leibniz’s account of the human being plays in the pursuit of wisdom. For now I want to make two points. Earlier in the paper, I introduced a passage from the *New Essays* as evidence that Leibniz is not just in the business of providing philosophical

discourse. What this passage also allows us to see is that Leibniz is offering his conception of the human as part of “lived physics”, i.e., a lived understanding of the nature of created reality.

The passage starts to bring out some of what that entails for our self-conception, namely that 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 well-known for his commitment to the idea that for substances to perceive is for them to “express” the entire universe from a unique perspective.¹⁶ And whilst he does not think that this content is transparently available to any of us, it is clear that he thinks that we can become more and more attuned to this over time. Indeed, in a piece which has come to be called “Leibniz’s philosophical dream”, he 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. You will recognize only wisdom and happiness, wherever men are accustomed to find only vanity and bitterness. You will be content with your creator; you will be enraptured with the vision of his works.”¹⁷

¹⁶ For a helpful discussion of this thesis see Sleight (1990: 170-80).

¹⁷ The translation is Donald Rutherford’s. See <http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/rutherford/Leibniz/translations/Dream.pdf>

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 in 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 his 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).¹⁸ Whilst nothing more is said about what it is to praise here, 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 views and Hadot’s criteria. But even if this account of 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 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 emphasizes 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. Thus, we might think of them as analogous to the kinds of activities undertaken by someone who had decided to convert to a religion or someone who was trying

¹⁸ As Irene Backus notes, Leibniz also provided extracts from Spee’s *Güldenes Tugend-Buch* to Electress Sophie along with a letter which 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/>.

to ensure that their initial religious commitments bore the fruit they hoped for - such as fasting, prayer, and scriptural study groups. But Hadot also allows that philosophical discourse presented by a teacher in a form that could be taken up and used by an individual on their own might do this job.

On Hadot's view, spiritual exercises would have been undertaken by people who were either living in philosophical communities or who were committed followers of a given philosophy. Nothing of this kind existed during Leibniz's lifetime, and whilst there are 18th Century philosophers who are sometimes identified as Leibnizian, such as Christian Wolff, they do not seem to be exemplars of the kind Hadot intends. However, the very thing that alerted me to the possible connections between Leibniz and Hadot seems relevant here, namely the kinds of interactions that Leibniz had with the Electress Sophie and Queen Sophie Charlotte, and 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 correspondences. But I want to point to two things: 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 which, 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, Strickland notes that these elements of Leibniz's philosophy are by no means restricted to this correspondence. Here he points to writings that I have already cited, such as 'On Wisdom', but a particularly interesting example appears in an unpublished piece from the late 1670s, from which I have quoted liberally above. This appears in another of Strickland's volumes of translations where he gives the title "Aphorisms concerning happiness, wisdom, charity and justice" (LGR 137). It comprises 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 be easily digested and remembered by anyone whom Leibniz managed to convert to his way of philosophizing.

I don't know of anywhere in which Leibniz 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. However, there are places in which he offers suggestions for how we might go about securing virtuous actions.

Among these, the chapter in the *New Essays on Human Understanding* concerned with freedom is a particularly perspicuous case. After noting that we have the requisite ideas in our mind, i.e., those of "God, virtue, and happiness" (NE 186), Leibniz suggests that the kind of knowledge that we have of them "cannot influence us" and that "something livelier is needed if we are to be moved" (ibid.). We are then given a number of suggestions as to how these ideas might gain the force they need. Whilst the "first step would have to be in education" (NE 187), Leibniz offers another route for "a grown man who missed this" (ibid.), 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. (ibid.)

Later in the same chapter, Leibniz turns to another strategy which is not dependent on framing general rules, and which it appears may still be required by those who have been educated well by others or by themselves. Here the issue concerns situations in which inclinations toward 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).

But the *New Essays* are by no means unique in this regard. As Michael Seidler notes, 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 his article provides a useful compendium of examples from across Leibniz’s career.¹⁹

7. Conclusion

As I noted at the beginning of this paper, my intentions have been to provide an initial road-map for further elaboration of what it would be to conceive 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 strong 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, it is my hope that my discussion might encourage people to consider the extent to which it might be illuminating to think of contemporary philosophers in something like the same way. How does the philosophy W. V. O. Quine or David Lewis look if conceived as a way of life? And what should our attitude be toward philosophers whose work cannot be conceived in such a way?

Finally, whilst I have not spelled out the content of Leibniz’s views in enough detail for it to be apparent 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 21st Century life. Leibniz himself would likely have welcomed such an attempt, given the emergence of the numbers of philosophical seekers who have been sufficient to sustain the recent cottage industry in guides to the kind of Stoic existence that he vehemently opposed.²⁰ However, we can only wonder how he might have reacted, and what kinds of strategies he would have endorsed on noticing resources available to his Stoic opponents,

¹⁹ See Seidler (1985: 25-33). Also see Jorati (2017: ch. 6).

²⁰ These authors of these books range from academics such as William Irvine (2009), John Sellars (2019) and Pigliucci (2017), through those without such affiliations such as Holiday & Hanselman (2016) and Salzgeber (2019).

such as the webpage <https://dailystoic.com/>, which features the work of Ryan Halliday along with the opportunity to buy merchandise, such as the *memento mori* signet ring and a variety of medallions, pendants and prints of sages.²¹

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Abbreviations of primary texts:

A: *Samtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 8 series, each divided into multiple volumes (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923–). Cited by series, volume, and page.

AG: *Leibniz: Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. R. Ariew and D. Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).

GP: *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. C. I. Gerhardt, 7 vols. (Berlin: Weidman, 1875-90). Reprinted (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1978). Cited by volume and page.

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²¹ Many thanks to XXX for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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