

## How the soul acts in the body<sup>1</sup>

As God [acts] on the world: that is not through the mode of a miracle, but through mechanical laws. Thus if *per impossibile* Minds were removed, and the laws of nature were to remain, the same things would happen as if there were minds, and even books would be written and read by human machines understanding nothing. Truly it is to be known that this is impossible, that minds should be removed with the laws of mechanics preserved. For the general laws of mechanics are decrees of divine will, and the special laws of mechanics in each body (which follow from the general laws) are decrees of its soul or form, striving towards its own good or perfection. Therefore, God is that mind which leads everything to general perfection. The soul however is that sentient force which in each thing tends to special perfection. Souls have arisen, however, while God impresses on all a conatus to special perfection so that from this conflict there should arise the greatest possible perfection. Everything in the whole of nature can be demonstrated both through final causes and through efficient causes. Nature does nothing in vain, nature acts through the briefest (*brevissimas*) paths provided that they are regular paths. Hence the briefest paths are to be sought not in reflecting surfaces themselves but along tangents. But this in passing. Souls do not act on bodies outside of order. Nor God in nature, even if things appear to happen outside of order; from the beginning, things have been so arranged that the general order is involved in some way in extraordinary appearance.

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<sup>1</sup> This short note short note by Leibniz has been dated by the Akademie Editors to the beginning of 1677 to the beginning of 1678. The Latin text appears as *Anima Quomodo Agat in Corpus*, 257 in G.W. Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1923-) volume VI.iv.B. Thanks to Paul Hoffman and Benjamin King for helpful suggestions concerning the present translation.