Haecceitism, Existentialism

Philipp Blum, Leibniz in Ligerz, June 29, 2018

According to Leibniz, substances are characterised by having so-called "complete individual concepts":

> Since this is so, we can say that the nature of an individual substance or of a complete being is to have a notion so complete that it is sufficient to contain and to allow us to deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which this notion is attributed. (§8 of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, 1999: 1540, 1989: 41)

Such complete individual concepts not only individuate substances, but also grounds God's omniscience:

> God, seeing Alexander's individual notion or haecceity, sees in it at the same time the basis and reason for all the predicates which can be said truly of him. (§8 of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, 1999: 1540–1541, 1989: 41)(A VI iv 1540–41/AG 41)

That it is not absurd to think of substances as essentially, even characteristically, complete things may be illustrated by a contrast to fictional entities. Even realists about Sherlock Holmes – ontologists who believe that there must be something, i.e. some thing, in reality that makes it both true (or, at least: true in the story) that Sherlock Holmes lives in Baker Street and true (or, at least: true of the story) that Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character created by Arthur Conan Doyle – will have to admit that Holmes differs from more paradigmatic examples of existents such as myself. They differ from me principally in being incomplete, in lacking determination in some qualitative dimensions.

Suppose a is a substance. Then it has an individual concept A that is complete: all past, present and future properties of a 'contained' (i.e. derivable from) A. What relations of metaphysical priority obtain between a and A? Here, Leibniz's answer is two-fold:

ontological A is prior to a in the sense that God creates a by 'actualising' A.
metaphysical a is prior to A in the sense that a grounds the unity of marks that together constitute A.

It is the second claim that distinguishes Leibniz's metaphysics from conceptual idealism. Leibniz puts it in terms of the question that something is required for the unity of a substance:

> A substantial unity requires a thoroughly indivisible and naturally indestructible being, since its notion includes everything that will happen to it, something which can be found neither in shape nor in motion (both of which involve something imaginary, as I could demonstrate), but which can be found in a soul or substantial form, on the model of what is called *me*. (letter to Arnauld, 1879: 76, 1989: 79)
> Something lacking extension is required for the substance of bodies, otherwise there would be no source [*principium*] for the reality of phenomena or for true unity…But since atoms are excluded [because they violate **PII**], what remains is something lacking extension, analogous to the soul, which they once called form or species. (*Primary Truths*, 1999: 1648, 1989: 34)

The requirement of unity is that a substance need to be a "unum per se", not just a "unum per aggregationem". Substances, therefore, are by definition simple, at least in the sense of not being 'built up' from other substances.

Leibniz denies that Arnauld, for example, would have existed, and been the same individual, if he had married.[1] While this may be a startling claim about the real, historical Arnauld, it is entirely unproblematic if read as talking about 'bachelor Arnauld', if there is such a thing. Bachelor Arnauld, Arnauld-in-so-far-he-is-a-bachelor cannot marry – if and when Arnauld marries, it goes out of existence. In such a case, "bachelor Arnauld" becomes what Wigginis calls a phase sortal, a sortal concept true of an individual only through a phase or period of its life.

Leibniz's main claim about the individuation of substances is that it is not, contra Duns Scotus and Aquinas, the result of a combination of a general essence with individuating matter: "[since] there are no universals before [i.e.: antecedent to] the operation of the mind, there is no composition from the universal and the individuating [principle] …There is no real composition, not all of whose members are real" (DIsputatio §23, G IV 25, MLI 65) The principle of individuation is the whole entity itself, because *unitas* and *entitas* "in re idem est" (Disputatio §20, G IV 24, MLI 60) and "what is not *one* being is not one *being* either" (Arnauld 1687). Aquinas did, after all, accept cases where individuation was not the outcome of the coming together of two different factors: angels, according to Aquinas, are individuated by their whole being. This is why Leibniz says that he says "of all substances" what Thomas "says about angels or intelligences (that every individual is an *infima species*)" (G IV 433, L 308).

But what does it mean that substances are self-individuating, individuated by their whole being? Leibniz glosses the crucial claim of the *Disputatio* – "every individual is individuated by its whole entity" (§4, G IV 18, MLI 100) – in terms of "one" being a transcendental: because "*one* adds nothing to *being*" (Disp §5), "that by means of which a thing is one in number is that by means of which it *is*" (Cover & Hawthorne 1999: 33). Consider what Fine (2005: 30) calls "modal anti-Haecceitism" (that haecceitistic permutations do not distinguish possibilities), which Fine (1978: 126) argued "coincides" with de re skepticism, a certain version of Quine's view that quantification into modal contexts does not make sense (cf. also Kaplan 1975: 724).

This position is different from both what Fine (2005: 31) calls "metaphysical Haecceitism", that individuals (ie.: actually existing individuals) have non-qualitative identities, and from what Lewis (1986) calls "Haecceitism", that counterpart relations have to be given qualitatively. It is also different from what Kaplan calls "Haecceitism", the doctrine that "it does make sense to ask – without reference to common attributes and behavior – whether *this* is the same individual in another possible world, that individuals can be extended in logical space (i.e. through possible worlds) in much the way we commonly regard them as extended in physical space and time, and that a common "thisness" may underlie extreme dissimilarity or distinct thisness may underlie great resemblance." (Kaplan 1975: 722–723)[2]

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1. A little confusingly, Adams (1994: 4) calls this Leibniz's "denial of counterfactual individual identities".

2. This latter view is better called "modal individualism" (Almog 1986: 226), and presupposed by the view that some singular terms are rigid.

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