

Kantian Conceptualism

Handout 3 --- Leibniz

9.12.13

1 Leibniz - Overview

1.1 Chronology

- Born in Leipzig in 1646, trained as a lawyer and defended his degree in law at, 20 in Altdorf in 1666.
- Lived in Paris from 1672-6 where he received much of his training in mathematics and physics, and independently from Newton invented the differential and integral calculus
- Appointed court councilor at Braunschweig-Lüneberg in Hanover in 1676.
 - Wrote some of his most important work (e.g. **Meditations, Discourse**, the **New System**, and the **Monadology**)
- Died in Hanover on November 14, 1716
- Some Contemporaries:
 - Descartes (1596-1650)
 - Malebranche (1638-1715)
 - Thomas Reid (1710-1796)
 - Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

1.2 The Logical Conception of Substance

- All truth is analytic truth by virtue of containment¹
 - in every true predication the concept of the predicate is contained in the concept of the subject
- Substance is the ultimate subject of predication, and that which cannot be predicated of anything else
- If x is a substance then there is a concept of x that contains all true predications concerning x²
 - finite beings grasp truths about substances via partial grasp of their complete concept
 - God knows all truths about all substances via a perfect grasp of their complete concepts

¹ In every true affirmative proposition, whether necessary or contingent, universal or particular, the notion of the predicate is in some way included in that of the subject. **Praedicatum in est subjecto**; otherwise I do not know what truth is. (G II 56; L 337).

² It is the nature of an individual substance or complete being to have a concept so complete that it is sufficient to make us understand and deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which the concept is attributed. An accident, on the other hand, is a being whose concept does not include everything that can be attributed to the subject to which the concept is attributed (DM §8; L 307).

1.3 Five Conditions on Substance

1. **Independence:** A substance is that in which other things exist, which itself does not exist in anything else. (Here 'in' must mean something stronger than 'depends upon,' since created substance depends upon God for its existence.)
2. **Persistence:** A substance is that which persists as the same thing through change (i.e. it possesses an identity through change).
3. **Activity:** A substance is necessarily active, or involves a principle of change. Leibniz often refers to this principle as a substance's "entelechy" or "primitive active force."
4. **Unity:** A substance is that which is truly one. A substance cannot be broken down into any collection of simpler beings, themselves satisfying the **Independence** condition. (This is consistent with our being able to distinguish different aspects of a substance, e.g. its active and passive force, or form and matter, so long as these cannot exist independently of the complete substance.)
5. **Individuation:** A substance has a principle of individuation intrinsic to its nature. This condition entails that substances satisfy the principle of the identity of indiscernibles (PII): for any two things, a and b, if a and b are non-identical, there is some property F, such that Fa and not-Fb. If a and b are Leibnizian substances, they satisfy PII by virtue of a property intrinsic to their natures.

Conditions (1)-(5) must be satisfied by anything that is to count as a substance for Leibniz, but by themselves they do not comprise a fully worked-out theory of substance. Leibniz experiments with several such theories: (i) the corporeal substance theory; (ii) the monad theory. These theories serve different purposes, and are not necessarily competitors.

The corporeal substance theory and monad theory are most plausibly seen as rival accounts of the extension of 'substance,' i.e., the set of actual things that satisfy the necessary conditions for being a substance:

- (i) According to the corporeal substance theory, associated primarily with the middle (1680-1695) period of Leibniz's career, substances are much like Aristotle's "hylomorphic" substances: living bodies, which are composites of form and extended matter.
- (ii) According to the monadic theory, associated with late writings such as the *Monadology*, the only substances are simple, soul-like entities, endowed with intrinsic properties of perception and appetite.

1.4 Monads

Characteristics of monads (M §1-15):

- A. Monads are **simple**---i.e. without parts.
- B. Monads are **immaterial**---they lack extension, shape, etc. (This is required by their being simple).
- C. Monads are **indestructible**---there is no natural way for a monad to come into or go out of existence, they must be created or destroyed by an act of God. Indestructibility is also a result of simplicity.
- D. Monads are **windowless**---there is no interaction, causal or otherwise, between monads.
 - i. No parts which may be rearranged, so no causation.
 - ii. No 'influx' of properties, since 'wandering' properties are incoherent.
- E. Monads **differ** from one another in virtue of their **perceptions** - each monad has a unique point of view on the universe
- F. The order in which a monad's perceptions proceed is in accordance with its **appetite**.
 - "Appetite" here is not to be understood in terms of hunger but rather in terms of a striving or motive force.

1.5 Idealism

- Physical bodies 'result' from monads³
 - monads 'express' bodies via 'perception'⁴
 - * physical bodies (i.e. matter) are a kind of stable group hallucination which Leibniz terms a 'well-founded phenomenon'⁵

2 Sensation & Perception

Reflective consciousness: awareness of a thought or feature thereof **considered as such**

Phenomenal consciousness: what it is like to think the relevant thought; the way in which the object of thought is present to the subject

Access consciousness: the object of A-consciousness is 'poised' for use in reasoning and rational action

³ Accurately speaking, however, matter is not composed of these constitutive unities but results from them, since matter or extended mass is nothing but a phenomenon grounded in things, like the rainbow or the mock-sun, and all reality belongs only to unities. Phenomena can therefore always be divided into lesser phenomena which could be observed by other, more subtle, animals and we can never arrive at smallest phenomena. Substantial unities are not parts but foundations of phenomena. (Letter to de Volder, L 536).

⁴ Although each created monad represents the whole universe, it represents more distinctly the body which is particularly affected by it and of which it is the entelechy. And as this body expresses the whole universe by the connection between all matter in the plenum, the soul also represents the whole universe in representing the body which belongs to it in a particular way. (Monadology §62).

⁵ Matter and motion are not so much substances or things as the phenomena of perceivers, whose reality is located in the harmony of perceivers with themselves (at different times) and with the other perceivers. (G II, 270; L 537).

- A thought or idea:
 - (a) "presentationally represents" something in so far as it phenomenally presents that thing to the mind
 - (b) "referentially represents" something insofar as it, like a mental sign, stands for or refers to something outside the mind that may not exist exactly as it is phenomenally presented to the mind

2.1 The Cartesian Theory of Sensation

- The Cartesian understands sensations as the result of the mind's embodiment⁶

Features of Cartesian Sensation:

1. Simple states of mind
 - may be combined and rearranged but there is nothing more primitive out of which they are composed
2. Conscious states
 - essentially phenomenally conscious states of mind⁷
3. Ineffable/inexplicable
 - there is no further primitive from which sensation might be analyzed or explained
 - but this doesn't distinguish sensation from representation generally⁸
4. Caused or Occasioned by bodily motions
 - type-type correlation
5. Do not resemble any bodily motion
 - sensation does not present to the mind anything that does or could exist as presented in a body
6. Do not represent anything bodily

2.2 The Leibnizian View

Expression: an isomorphism between representation and represented⁹

Perception: the expression of many things in one---i.e. expression as it occurs in simple substances¹⁰

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⁶ Sensory awareness comes about by means of nerves, which stretch like threads from the brain to all the limbs, and are joined together in such a way that hardly any part of the human body can be touched without producing movement in several of the nerve-ends that are scattered around in that area. This movement is then transmitted to the other ends of the nerves which are all grouped together in the brain around the seat of the soul...And the various different states of mind, or thoughts, which are the immediate result of these movements are called sensory perceptions, or in ordinary speech, sensations.

⁷ What is distinctive about thought is that it makes itself known to the mind that has it (Simmons (2001), 35).

⁸ The word "idea" is one of those that are so clear that they cannot be explained by others, because none is more clear and simple. (Arnauld and Nicole (1996), 25).

⁹ One thing represents or expresses another "when there is a constant and fixed relation between what can be said of one and what can be said of another" (letter to Arnauld, G 2:112/L 339; see also NE 2.8.13, A/RB 131). In other words, representation involves an isomorphism between *res repraesentans* and *res repraesentata*. Resemblance is the paradigm case, but other forms of isomorphism will do planar projective drawings represent solids, maps represent cities, musical notation represents a musical composition and so on. (Simmons (2001), 41-2).

¹⁰ The crux of the matter seems to be that perceptual representation occurs in a simple substance. Corporeal representation, by contrast, occurs in composite entities: paintings, mirrors, and sense organs. The important consequence of a substance's simplicity is that it must represent complex things from a single point of view...I think Leibniz means the point of view talk quite literally: a simple substance represents the world as if it were positioned at a single point in it: "mathematical points are the points of view from which [simple substances] express the universe" ("A New System of Nature," G 4:483/AG 142). (Simmons (2001), 41).

- The defining characteristic of the mental is **perception**, which is itself a form of **expression**¹¹
 - We are conscious of perceptions when they are **distinct**
 - **Sensory** perceptions are a special kind of distinct but essentially confused perception¹²
 - Sensation may only be had by creatures that can **apperceive**--- i.e. can be conscious of their perceptions

Consciousness: a perception of a perception¹³

Features of Leibnizian Sensation:

1. Complex states
 - composed of '**petites perceptions**'---unnoticeable and unconscious perceptions¹⁴
2. Contingently & extrinsically conscious
 - contingent because there can be unconscious sensation---viz. sensation that is not noticed
 - extrinsic because consciousness is the result of being the object of a second-order perception
 - is Leibniz talking about **access** consciousness or **phenomenal** consciousness here?
3. Explicable in terms of their components
 - constituted in the confused running together of many **petites perceptions** (cf. Simmons, 63)¹⁵
4. Connected with bodily motions
 - type-type correlation
5. Resemble bodily motions
6. Represent bodily motions

2.3 Questions

1. Simmons presumes that Leibniz inverts the Cartesian order---for him intentionality rather than consciousness is the mark of the mental. But is this accurate?
 - Not obvious that Cartesian notion of consciousness is fundamentally a phenomenal rather than access notion
 - Leibniz himself seems to think of consciousness fundamentally in terms of access, so even if we grant that the phenomenal notion is fundamental to the Cartesian system, it would still be wrong to say that Leibniz **inverts** the Cartesian system---instead he seems to simply change the subject.

¹¹ When I consider only distinct ideas, it seems to me conceivable that divisible phenomena or a plurality of beings can be expressed or represented in a single indivisible being; and this is sufficient for the concept of a perception, without the necessity of adding thought or reflection to this representation (1687 G II 121; L 344).

¹² It is usually said that the **concepts** of these qualities are **clear**, since they serve us in recognizing them, but that these same concepts are not **distinct**, because we cannot distinguish or develop the content included in them (Leibniz 1702; L 548).

¹³ It is good to make a distinction between 'perception', which is the internal state of the monad representing external things, and 'apperception', which is 'consciousness' [conscience], or the reflective cognition of this internal state, which is not given to all souls, or at all times to the same soul. (PNG §4).

¹⁴ A perception of light or color of which we are aware is made up of many petites perceptions of which we are unaware. (NE 2.9.4, RB 134) [petites perceptions] constitute that **je ne sais quoi**, those flavors, those images of sensible qualities, vivid in the aggregate but confused as to the parts. (NE Preface, RB 54-55)

¹⁵ I believe one could say that sensible ideas [=sensations] are simple in appearance because, being confused, they do not provide the mind with any way to distinguish what they contain. It is like distant things that appear rounded because one cannot discern their angles, even though one is receiving some confused impression from them. (NE 2.2.1, RB 120; see also NE 2.20.6, RB 165 and 3.4.16, RB 299).

2. One objection to Cartesianism is that it makes sensory experience too intellectually demanding, with the result that non-rational animals lack any sensory experiences. Is Leibniz any better off here?
3. Descartes and especially Malebranche and Reid, all seem to deny that the phenomenal character of mental representation has any inherently representational content or features. Does Leibniz dispute this?

3 Further Reading

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