Leibniz's Metaphysics of Finite Substance in 1680-86

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1. Introduction

In this article, I will offer a general examination of the representative discussions of finite substance in relation to the ontological status of body on the basis of Leibniz's texts from 1680 to 1686. I believe this investigation will show how Leibniz's discussions crystallized in the *Discourse of Metaphysics* of 1686. I hope it will also illuminate Leibniz's doctrine on substance, which leads us to consider its complete concept based upon his investigation of logic. My discussion will not proceed exactly in accordance with the time period. In other words, I do not necessarily discuss, for instance, the texts of 1681 right after the texts of 1680. Rather, I will roughly sum up Leibniz's view of 1680-86, and how it developed out of the views discussed above.

In 1680-86, Leibniz introduced a list of ontological categories, and it is useful for understanding the ontological status of body in this period. Donald Rutherford had an intensive study on Leibniz's discussion of term and ontology in the 1680s (Rutherford 1995, pp. 105-11). On the basis of a text, written between September 1680 and February 1685, he introduces five stages for explaining Leibniz's doctrine of complete individual concept and his ontology of individual substance. The first stage distinguishes impossible terms from possible ones, saying that only possible ones can refer to beings. For instance, the term of "round triangle" is incoherent and impossible, while "winged horse" is possible. Since some actual entity could be created on the basis of a possible term, utilized by God, he could also create a winged horse. The second stage differentiates concrete and abstract terms. "God", "man", "body", "circle", "hour", "hot", "acting" are concrete, whereas "divinity", "magnitude", "heat", "state" and "action" are abstract. Any term that "involves a subject" is concrete, and according to Leibniz, "hot" is used to refer to a specific hot thing or subject, whereas "heat" can be predicated of any hot thing. The third stage distinguishes substantial and adjective terms. For Leibniz, "man [*homo*]" is a substantial term whereas "hot [*calidum*]" is an adjective. Substantial term "straightforwardly" involves a subject of some predication, whereas an adjective term does not. The fourth differentiates complete and incomplete terms. Complete term involves all the predicates of the same subject. "Man" is still incomplete since it does not involve all the predicate of a specific man, while "Alexander" involves all of his predicates. The fifth stage distinguishes a singular substance from a real phenomenon. A divisible body can be an ultimate subject of predications, but it is not a complete being with an intrinsic unity. It may have many predicates (moves with the speed of 100 miles/h, weighs 10 pounds, etc.), but it can be (and it is) divided into parts, each of which can have many predicates as well. So it cannot be taken as a singular substance.

Now, it is evident that Leibniz introduced two necessary conditions of a truly complete being: Individuality

and Unity. These are different conditions, and both need to be satisfied. Leibniz's discussion seems to suggest that even an individual entity can be divided. Some specific body, like the tomb of Archimedes, can be considered as an individual entity, and yet it is divisible. But, as we will see, Leibniz did not characterize a particular and yet divisible thing as an individual substance. Somehow Leibniz was strongly conscious of the condition of indivisibility as necessary for a substance. In the following sections, I will see how Leibniz dealt with unity and individuality in the early 1680s.

2. Further Discussions of Unity

I start from Leibniz's discussions of unity of body, which was already found in the previous chapter. Leibniz argued that substantial form provides an intrinsic unity to a body. Leibniz further developed his view on the unity of a body in the early 1680s. Leibniz started to use the expressions "unity [*unum*]" and "entity [*ens*] per se." Leibniz introduced a well-known distinction between "unity in itself" and "accidental unity" in 1684-6.

> Every real entity is either a unity in itself, or an accidental entity. An *entity (unity) in itself* is, for instance, a man; an *accidental entity (unity)* ——for instance, a woodpile, a machine—— is what is only a unity by aggregation, and there is no real union in it other than a connection: perhaps a contact or even a running together into the same thing, or at least an agreement observed by a mind gathering it into a unity. But in an entity per se some real union is required, consisting not in the situation and motion of parts, as in a chain, a house, or a ship, but in some unique individual principle and subject of its attributes and operations, which in us is called a soul, and in every body a substantial form, provided the body is a unity in itself. [A.VI.iv.301 = RA.283 March 1864-Spring 1686]

Here Leibniz argued that body is an entity per se insofar as it is united by its substantial form. In another passage, Leibniz used the expression "substantial forms, such as minds, and souls or primary entelechies," suggesting that "primary entelechy" is among substantial forms (A.VI.iv.627 = RA.271 Mid-1685). Here primary entelecies may be considered as soul-like entities in plants. Or they may refer to soul-like entities that can be found even in inorganic bodies. Also, "a unity per se" is considered to have a substantial form here, suggesting that substantial form is the principle of unity.

To be sure, Leibniz already suggested that a body has an intrinsic unity in *De Summa Rerum* (DSR), though he did not use the term "unity." In DSR, he argued that a body has a mind, and because of that the body is an indestructible element (A.VI.iii.521 = RA.121). Also, he argued that some bodies are aggregated from smaller bodies with minds, and these aggregates bodies can be destroyed.

But there is one new and remarkable point in the quoted passage: That bodies are considered to have mind-dependent unities. Leibniz started to introduce the view that aggregate has an accidental unity, and this unity comes from a perceiving mind. To be sure, Leibniz already argued that mind provides a unity for its body in DSR.

But he did not argue that the unity of a table is provided by a human mind that perceives it.

I think what Leibniz suggested is still different from his later view. He wrote that body is aggregated by "a contact or even a running together into the same thing, or at least an agreement observed by a mind gathering it into a unity." This may be taken as claiming that not all aggregated bodies are mind-dependent. That is to say, some aggregated body has a mind-independent unity based upon spatial contact. In a sense, Leibniz's later view is more idealistic in that all aggregated bodies are considered as mind-dependent.

Another remarkable point of the passage is that new features of an "entity in itself" are introduced. It needs to have a "real union," which consists in "some unique individual principle and subject of its attributes and operations," which is called "in every body a substantial form." So, three features of a substantial form are introduced: (1) It is individuated as a unique entity. (2) It is a subject of attributes. (3) It is a subject of operations. Although (3) was already introduced in 1678-9, (1) and (2) are not explained enough at that period. Here Leibniz did not provide an example of an attribute. Even if extension is an attribute, it is not ascribed to a substantial form. If thought is an attribute, it may be ascribed to it since any substantial form seems have some kind of cognitive ability.

3. Corporeal Substance

Another aspect of Leibniz's developed theory of substantial form is that he started to assume that there are corporeal substances, and each of them has a substantial form.[1] In 1678-79, Leibniz did not use the term "corporeal substance" though he reintroduced substantial forms in his metaphysics. But Leibniz started to use the term, suggesting that it is a composite of form and matter:

> Corporeal substances have parts and species. The parts are matter and form. Matter is the principle of passion, or primitive force of resisting, which is commonly called bulk or antitypy, from which flows the impenetrability of body. Substantial form is the principle of action, or primitive force of acting. But in every substantial form there is a kind of cognition, that is, an expression or representation of external things in a certain individual thing, according to which the body is a unity in itself, namely, in the substantial form itself. [A.VI.iv.1507-8 = RA.285-7 March 1684 – Spring 1686]

So, every corporeal substance has the principles of passion and action. Substantial form as the principle of action is also referred to as "soul," for Leibniz said that "[e]very corporeal substance has a soul" (A.VI.iv.1466 = RA.265).

Leibniz suggested that there are corporeal substances everywhere in the universe. He wrote that "[e]very

1 As I have pointed out in the introduction of the dissertation, some commentators have intensive discussions of corporeal substance on the basis of the texts from 1686 and later. Moreover, Pauline Phemister even argues that according to Leibniz's mature metaphysics, any genuine substance is corporeal, and thus any of immaterial being is incomplete and should not be counted as a genuine substance (Phemister 2005, pp. 73-4). I do not agree with her interpretation, but as she suggests Leibniz showed a strong interest for corporeal substance in the texts of 1686 and later. And I think Leibniz did so before in 1686, as I discuss in the present chapter.

created thing has matter and form, i.e. is corporeal" (A.VI.iv.1466 = RA.265). Any created being has some body, and needs to be corporeal. In a text dated at 29 March 1683, Leibniz also stated that "[t]here are as many souls as there are substantial atoms or corporeal substances" (A.VI.iv.1466 = RA.265). Then what is the difference between the discussion here and the one in letters to Arnauld? Unlike in the letters to Arnauld, Leibniz did not suggest that there are many smaller corporeal substances inside of a corporeal substance here. Leibniz did not assume that corporeal substances are purely material, since he suggested that a corporeal substance has cognitive ability. In the following passage, Leibniz argued that every corporeal substance is "confusedly omniscent":

> For every soul, or rather every corporeal substance, is confusedly omniscient and diffusedly omnipotent. [A. VI.iv.1466 = RA.265 29 March 1683]

So just like souls of human beings, substantial forms of bodies have perceptions, and at least confusedly grasp the whole world. Also, there are different types of corporeal substances. Leibniz wrote that "if beasts are not mere machines, it is necessary for them to have substantial forms, and these are called *souls*" (A.VI.iv.1508 = RA.287).

But as we can gather from the terminology, Leibniz also suggested that a corporeal substance produces physical actions:

> Every substance has within it a kind of operation, and this operation is either of the same thing on itself, in which case it is called reflection or thought, and such a substance is spiritual, i.e. a mind; or it is the operation of its various parts, and such a substance is called a corporeal substance. [A.VI.iv.1507 = RA.285 March 1684 – Spring 1686]

So, corporeal substance produces physical actions. This point may differentiate it from the corporeal substance in letters to Arnauld of 1686, given that Leibniz there suggested that corporeal substances act spontaneously, and other created substances cannot act upon them (GP.II.58 = MA.66). In order to be clear about this, we need to see what is meant by "the operation of [a corporeal substance's] various parts." In a text dated at summer 1678 to winter 1680-81, Leibniz argued that "body is extended substance," and its action is by "local motion" (A.VI.iv.1398 = RA.245). Here we need to understand that the local motion as an action of a body is not mind-dependent. In other words, local motions are not mere appearances for perceiving minds. These motions exist outside of perceivers, and are considered to be something absolute.

But how corporeal substances move their parts is not clear. At least Leibniz seems to have assumed that extension alone cannot be the cause of motions, and we need to seek something beyond it as their cause. This point does not show that substantial forms are causes of movements, but they can be since they do not consist solely of extension.

To sum up, for Leibniz, all finite substances have mental properties. They are "confusedly omniscient," and

they perceive all the other finite substances though they do not clearly understand all the features of the other finite substances. Not all, but some substances produce physical actions, though they also have perceptions. This kind of substance is corporeal, and a corporeal substance has "the operation" of its various parts. Since corporeal substances seem to receive actions of other corporeal substances, they seem to be acted on by others. It seems that corporeal substances are not causally independent of others as ones in the middle years are. Later on, Leibniz had the view that any created substance is causally independent of the other created substances, but this view cannot be found in the texts of the early 1680s. Whether a human being is among corporeal substances is not clear. At least, the human mind and corporeal substance seem to be different, and yet the human mind is united to a body since Leibniz wrote that "[m]ind is either separate from or united to a body: separate, as is God; united to a body, as is our soul" (A.VI.iv.1507 = RA.285). Still, a human being, or the whole union of the human mind and the body may be categorized as a corporeal substance.

4. Individual Substance

Lastly, I discuss the well-known concept of individual substance. Although it is not as relevant to the metaphysics of body as that of corporeal substance is, still its introduction helps us to understand how Leibniz understood the notion of one complete individual, and whether it is completely immaterial. In the following passage, presumably written before the *Discourse of Metaphysics*, Leibniz used the expression "individual substance":

> Every entity is either a substance, or an accident or mode. A substance is, for instance, a mind, a body; a mode, for instance, heat, motion. Now from an accident or mode one can form a concrete term, which is predicated of a substance or even of another accident. But whereas the concept 'substance' is already a concrete concept, and cannot be predicated of anything but a substance, and an individual substance is not contained in any other individual thing, an individual accident, on the other hand, is contained in an individual substance, with several accidents in one substance. And indeed the concept of an individual substance is something complete, which already potentially contains everything, whatever can be understood of it. [A.VI.iv.1506-7 = RA.283-5 March 1684—Spring 1686]

Here we can find several features of individual substance. It is not contained in anything else. It contains individual accidents. Its concept is complete. The doctrine of complete individual concepts in the *Discourse of Metaphysics* was already introduced here. Another text also has a discussion of "the notion of individual substance":

> From the notion of individual substance it also follows in metaphysical rigor that all the operations of substances, both actions and passions, are spontaneous, and that with the exception of the dependence of creatures on God, no real influence of them on one another is intelligible. [A.VI.iv.1620 = RA.311 1686?]

Leibniz thought that the individual notion which God recognizes forms the essence of the individual, and makes it possible that all the events that happen to the individual are spontaneously produced by it. As we have seen above, the view that an individual has its unique essence that is not shared by any other individual, and the individual produces future states in accordance with its essence, provided Leibniz some basis for overcoming the monistic view that God is the only substance. In DSR, form is considered as a positive and simple attribute. It is contained in God, and together with other forms, by being combined and related in many ways, produces many modes. Properties, which arise through forms being related to each other in many different ways, are not essential features. Thus individuals that are differentiated from each other are not considered as substances. But in 1684-86, Leibniz wrote that "the concept of an individual substance" is complete, and it potentially contains "whatever can be understood of it" (A.VI.iv.301 = RA.283). Although it is not clear whether Leibniz held any component of the concept of an individual substance is a part of the essence of the substance,[2] he did not introduce the distinction between essence and property, nor suggest that two individuals cannot be different substances if they share the same essence. Also, Leibniz rehabilitated scholastic substantial forms. Form is not shared by individuals any more. Rather, it exclusively belongs to an individual, and it enables the individual to act successively. Leibniz still discusses simple terms [*termina*] and notions (GP.VII.517 1696), but his understanding of forms changed. Although his understanding came to be "scholastic," it is not an imitation of old thoughts. In Leibniz's new framework, even sensations are spontaneously produced by an individual. Actions and passions have something in common here. Any experience or any perception, coming from spontaneous actions, is considered as an expression of the whole universe. An individual keeps its identity even while undergoing change. As we will see in the next subsection, Leibniz seems to hold the view that any individual substance, whether it is corporeal or immaterial, has a complete concept that contains the information about all that happens to it. Later on, Leibniz needed to examine whether this kind of individual substance is corporeal or immaterial.

5. Summary of 1680-1686

Leibniz developed his doctrine of unity, and suggested that an aggregate has a mind-dependent unity. An inorganic body is considered as one thing by a perceiving mind, but it does not have an intrinsic unity. Leibniz held this view in later periods as well. Moreover, succeeding his view of 1678-9, he argued that the intrinsic unity of a body can neither consist in its shape, nor in the firmness. It should come from its substantial form.

Leibniz started to discuss corporeal substance on the basis of his rehabilitation of substantial forms. Corporeal substance is thought to produce physical actions owing to its substantial form. But corporeal substance has something in common with mind, since it has perceptions as well. It perceives the whole universe, at least

2 Whether Leibniz was committed to superessentialism, according to which any trivial feature of an individual substance is a part of its essence, is debatable. According to Robert Sleigh, Leibniz was not a superessentialist when he wrote the *Discourse of Metaphysics* and letters to Arnauld (Sleigh 1990, p. 79). But at least, Leibniz's discussion in 1684-86 has a reminiscence of Leibniz's claim in his bachelor's thesis of 1663: "Any individual is individuated through its whole Being [*omne individuum sua tota Entitate individuatur*]" (GP.IV.18).

unconsciously.

Leibniz also introduced the doctrine of individual substance, according to which an individual substance is causally independent of another individual substance, and its concrete concept involves all the predicates which the individual substance could ever have. Still, Leibniz did not try to explain individual and corporeal substances together as fitting in to a consistent system of metaphysics.

Abbreviation

A. = *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe.* Herausgegeben von der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin. Darmstadt, 1923 ff., Leipzig, 1938 ff., Berlin, 1950 ff. Cited by series, volume, and page.

GP. = *Die philosophischen Schriften von G. W. Leibniz.* Ed. C. I. Gerhardt. Berlin: Weidmann, 1875-1890. Reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1978. Cited by volume and page.

MA. = *The Leibniz-Arnauld Correspondence* Trans and ed. by H. T. Mason. Manchester : Manchester University Press, 1967.

RA. = *The Labyrinth of Continuum.* Trans. and ed. R. Arthur. New Haven: Yale University Press.

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