

Is an Aggregate of Substances Internal for a Perceiving Mind?

—Leibniz on the Mind-Dependency of Aggregates—

実体の集合体は表象する精神の内にあるのか?
—ライプニッツにおける集合体の精神依存性—

枝 村 祥 平
Shohei EDAMURA

〈要旨〉

In this paper I wish to examine the ontological status of an aggregate of substances in Leibniz's mature thought. First, I discuss the nature of an aggregate of substances and argue that its existence requires both the existence of many substances and the mental action of a perceiving mind. Second, I introduce Robert Adams' view that an aggregate of substances is internal for a perceiver. Then I will point out some problems concerning his interpretation. This leads finally to a discussion of a passage in which Leibniz suggests that an aggregate of substances is an external object for a perceiving mind.

〈キーワード〉

ライプニッツ, 観念論, 物体, モナド

1. Bodies as Aggregates of Substances

Leibniz believes that bodies are not substances but phenomena, since the divisibility of bodies undermines their substantiality. What Leibniz considers when he talks about “bodies” is not that easy to understand. But let us begin from our ordinary understanding. Bodies are extended, and have some qualities such as color, solidity, inertia and so on. Though it is natural to understand that they actually exist, some philosophers have argued that they are phenomena, since they are mutable (cf. Mates 1986, p. 205). Leibniz is one of them, consciously succeeding his great forerunner Plato:

Only incorporeal substances are independent of every other created substance. So it seems that in philosophical strictness the body does not deserve the name of substance, a view which seems to have been Plato's, who says that there are transient beings which never subsist longer than a moment. (L 623 = G6 586)

Where does the mutability of bodies come from? Among all, extension has been regarded as one of essential properties of bodies, and it is also associated with their mutability. All bodies are extended, and have parts. Therefore, bodies are divisible. This divisibility, for Leibniz, conflicts with the substantial unity. Thus he argues that bodies are not substances, since they are divisible:

Anything that can be divided into many things (which already actually exist) is aggregated from many things, and a thing that is aggregated from many is not one except from a mind, and has no reality except that which is borrowed from what it contains. Then I inferred from this that therefore there are indivisible unities in things, because otherwise there will be no true unity in things and no reality that is not borrowed, which is absurd. For where there is no true unity then there is no true multitude. And where there is no reality except that which is borrowed, there will never be reality, since it ultimately must be

proper to some subject. (Lodge 301 = G2 267)

Thus Leibniz argues that bodies are “aggregates.” The notion of aggregate is often contrasted with that of substance. A substance has its substantial unity, while an aggregate does not. Any aggregate is by definition aggregated from many things, and does not have any intrinsic unity (cf. Sleight 1990, p. 124; Adams 1994, p. 241; Rutherford 1995, p. 136). Then what is aggregated when we have a body? According to Leibniz, bodies are aggregates of substances. As we have seen in the passage above, without indivisible substantial unities, bodies do not have any reality, which is untenable for Leibniz. Indeed, Leibniz once wondered if bodies might be mere phenomena, and there is no substantial unity in them in 1680s (cf. Garber 2009, pp. 286-92). According to Leibniz, our minds have perceptions without any causal influence from other substances, so strictly speaking it is difficult for us to tell whether what we perceive is phenomena in a perceiver, or something more than that. But later he became convinced that God must have created many substances which guarantee the reality of bodies. There is a passage in which Leibniz explicitly takes bodies as aggregates of substances:

For me, however, it is just the opposite. Strictly speaking, the bodies cannot be substances by themselves, since they are always mere aggregates or results of simple substances or of true monads, which cannot be extended, and therefore cannot be bodies, either. So the bodies presuppose the immaterial substances. We can therefore conclude that a mass of matter is not truly a substance, that its unity is only ideal and that (leaving the understanding aside) it is only an aggregate, a collection, a multitude of an infinity of true substances, a well-founded phenomenon. (G7 564)

2. Bodies and Mind-dependent Unities

Now we shall consider the ontological status of aggregates of substances. We have seen that an aggregate does not have any intrinsic unity. However, Leibniz often talks about the unity of an aggregate, and he argues that it

comes from a perceiving mind:

This unity of the idea of aggregates is very true; but ultimately you must admit that this collective unity is only a congruity or relation, whose ground is in that which is found in each of the single substances separately. Thus these *beings by aggregation* have no other completed unity than the mental... (Lan 149 = NE 2.12.7)

Though an aggregate of substances is not one substantial unity but composed of many substances, a mind perceives them at once and regards them as one thing. Now we can understand two aspects of an aggregate. First, it is actually composed of many substances. It is not a mere phenomenon or illusion. Second, it still needs a perceiving mind to actualize its unity. The first aspect seems to suggest that an aggregate is mind-independent entity. Even if there is no perceiver, many substances which constitute the reality of an aggregate still exist. On the other hand, the second aspect suggests the ontological dependence of an aggregate. It seems that without a perceiving mind, an aggregate of substances cannot be given.

Robert Adams takes the latter aspect seriously, and argues that an aggregate of substances exists in a perceiving mind.

The ontological status of entities logically or metaphysically constructed from substances, “being nothing but phenomena, abstractions, or relations” (ibid.), is therefore at least partly mental. They exist in the mind and are dependent on being thought of. (Adams 1994, p. 246)

Adams tries to justify his argument by referring to the passage in a letter to Arnould:

To put it briefly, I hold this identical proposition, differentiated only by the emphasis, to be an axiom, namely, *that what is not truly one being is not truly one being either*. It has always been thought that one and being are mutually supporting. (AG 86 = G2 97)

This kind of convertibility of one and being was already

suggested by Aristotle. There is no doubt that Leibniz consciously succeeds this traditional thesis. Consequently, it seems advisable to say, with Adams, that Leibniz's acceptance of the claim that an aggregate exists within a mind amounts to his acceptance of the convertibility of unity and being (cf. Smith 2011, p. 111). Thus Adams compares an aggregate to a set as an abstract entity, and for him it is reasonable to suppose that the ontological status of an aggregate of pencils, for example, is different from that of pencils (Adams 1994, p. 246).

3. Problems Concerning Adams' Interpretation

However, I think there are several problems with Adams' interpretation. First, in the letter to Arnauld, probably Leibniz talks about a substance rather than an aggregate. A substance truly has its intrinsic unity, therefore it is truly one thing or being. On the other hand, an aggregate does not have its intrinsic unity, so it is not truly one and not one being, either. Leibniz does not discuss the weak unity of an aggregate here. So even if the strong substantial unity can be convertible or reciprocal with being, the weak and mind-dependent unity may not. Second, Leibniz often talks about the forces which bodies hold:

Meanwhile I discover that it is further true in phenomena and derivative forces that masses do not so much give new force to other masses as they give determinate direction to the force already existing in them, so that one body is repelled away from another by its own force rather than being propelled by the other. (L 530)

Bodies have their own forces to act. If these forces exist in bodies, then according to Adams these forces must exist in a perceiving mind. But it is unnatural to suppose that the kinetic energy of a baseball, for example, exists in my mind. That energy is supposed to cause the motion of the baseball. Does my mind have a causal power to realize this motion? In a sense it is true, since for Leibniz, my mind produces all the perceptions spontaneously. But it is not plausible to suppose that many physical forces exist in my mind, and each of them causes a specific motion. The force of the baseball causes the straight orbit. And the force of

bat causes the change of the trajectory of the baseball. And these two forces somehow coexist within my mind, and change the trajectory of the baseball in appropriate time. That is a strange view.

4. Aggregate as an External Object

Considering these problems, I would like to propose to take an aggregate of substances to be an external object for a perceiving mind. Leibniz uses the expressions "external object," "external thing" and "thing outside of us" etc. One of the problems is what does he mean by these expressions. I begin the examination of texts with a consideration of the one passage from the *New Essays* in which Leibniz states explicitly that when a mind has a sensation, it consciously perceives an external object. This seems to be a good evidence that Leibniz takes an aggregate of substances to be external.

I will say then that it is *sensation* when an external object is perceived; that *remembrance* consists in the repetition without the reappearance of the object... (Lan 165 = NE 2.19.3)

The passage refers to "an external object" rather than the plurality of external objects. So it is supposed to be "one thing."

Then what does the expression "an external object" refers to? One may be tempted to think that it means a monad or simple substance. However, there is a problem in this interpretation. In the passage of the *New Essays*, Leibniz clearly discusses sensation. This sensation must be conscious, since in the original text, Leibniz uses the term "appercevoir," which is clearly related to "apperception," which means conscious perception. Then can we consciously perceive one monad? Suppose that I am perceiving an desk. According to Leibniz, this desk is an aggregate of simple substances or monads, rather than one monad. I can be conscious of the brown color, oblong shape, and so on. But I cannot pick up one monad from this aggregate and specifically be conscious of it.

To be sure, Adams suggests that my mind can perceive one monad by perceiving its organic body. For example, Adams argues that when I see the body of a

kitten, I perceive the soul or dominant monad or that kitten by perceiving the body. For example, when I see the kitten jump upon the ball, I perceive the mental properties of its soul. In other words, I understand what the kitten wants or desires to do by perceiving its body. However, this kind of perception can be realized only if I perceive an organic body. That is to say, whenever I perceive an inorganic body like my desk, I cannot argue that I perceive one monad by perceiving the desk.

Now in the passage of the *New Essays*, Leibniz discusses sensations in general. It is not reasonable to suppose that Leibniz considers the perceptions of organic bodies particularly. Therefore, probably Leibniz is not talking about the perception of one monad in this passage. In this context, we should not take “an external object” as one monad.

Then should we suppose that “an external object” means many substances outside of a perceiving mind rather than one monad? Certainly, but before concluding that the expression “an external object” means an aggregate of substances, I will introduce another candidate. Recently Donald Rutherford distinguished a plurality of monads from an aggregate. Rutherford introduces the notion of a plurality of monads or matter:

The claim that the unity of an aggregate is ideal, or mind-dependent, follows directly from Leibniz’s theory of relations. A plurality of things is merely a plurality, and not a unity, unless it is represented as one, through relations supplied by a mind. (Rutherford 2008, p. 176)

A plurality of substances that does not have a unity, whereas a body is an aggregate of substances that is perceived as one thing. Unlike an aggregate of substances, matter or a plurality of substances is a mind-independent entity.

I do not say that “a unity exists in a mass of extension,” or rather of extended things, or, as I would prefer, in a multitude of things, but rather innumerable unities. (Lodge 321 = G2 276)

So before a mind perceives many substances as one thing, there are merely many substances as themselves and nothing else. There is no unity among them, and each of

them exists independently. Then is it possible to take “an external object” to be these substances or a plurality of substances? One of the merits of doing so is that a plurality of substances is totally mind-independent, so we do not have to hesitate to take it as external for a perceiver. Unlike an aggregate of substances, a plurality of them does not require a perceiving mind.

However, I think it is not possible to take a plurality of substances as one external object, since by definition, it is supposed to lack any unity. Since there is no unity among these substances, it is not reasonable to consider them as one external object. In other words, when Leibniz talks about one external object, he must regard it as something endowed with a certain kind of unity.

Since there are no other candidates, I think, there is a good reason to conclude that by the term “an external object,” Leibniz means an aggregate of substances. One of the worries is that in the *New Essays*, Leibniz tends to use his terms following Locke’s terminology. Given this, Leibniz may not use the term “external object” in a strict sense, in his own metaphysical framework. Second, we have just picked out one short passage for interpretation. So one might suggest that we have to show more textual evidence to support the view that an aggregate of substances is an external object for Leibniz. Thus it seems that we need to introduce another passage concerned with the ontological states of an aggregate. I will take note of the following passage from *On What is Independent of Sense and of Matter*:

Instead, our lack of attention causes us to take sensible things for the only true ones. It is also well to observe that if I should discover some demonstrative truth, mathematical or other, in a dream (and this can in fact be done), it would be just as certain as if I were awake. This shows us that intelligible truth is independent of the truth or existence of sensible and material things outside of us [l’existence hors de nous des choses sensibles et matérielles]. (L 549 = G6 503)

In this passage, Leibniz discusses “sensible and material things” outside of our minds. It seems that these sensible and material things are external objects for our minds. Now we have to consider what is a “sensible and material thing” in this context. One possibility is that this term

refers to a simple substance or monad. One serious problem with this reading, however, is that a simple substance or monad is not sensible, and not material, either. Leibniz explicitly states that simple substances are immaterial and not extended. Also, one simple substance or monad is hard to perceive consciously. So it is unnatural to state that it is “sensible.” For these reasons, we should not take a “sensible and material thing” to be a simple substance or monad.

The second possible reading is that the term “sensible and material thing” refers to a corporeal substance. Indeed, unlike a simple substance, a corporeal substance is material by definition. Though it has a substantial unity, it is also extended. But, as we have seen in section 3, some corporeal substances are too tiny to perceive consciously. My desk is supposed to be an aggregate of miniscular corporeal substances, for instance. Even though the whole desk can be perceived consciously, these organic parts cannot.

Another possible reading is that the term “sensible and material things” refers to a plurality of simple substances or monads. To be sure, if we take a single sensible and material thing to be a plurality of simple substances, there will be a problem: A plurality of simple substances do not even have a mind-dependent unity, so they can neither be a single entity per se, nor be a mind-dependent single entity like an aggregate. But in this reading, a plurality of simple substances are “sensible and material things,” which are not a single entity. However, there is another problem with this reading. The expression “sensible and material things” suggests that there are many sensible and material things, and any one of them is still sensible and material. So, not only a plurality of sensible and material things, but one of them should be sensible and material. Now, if we take “sensible and material things” to be a plurality of simple substances, then one “sensible and material thing” is either a simple substance or another plurality of simple substances, which is a proper subset of the original group of simple substances. But if we take it as a simple substance, we confront a serious worry, since generally speaking a simple substance is neither sensible nor material. Also, it is unnatural to take it as a plurality of simple substances, since a plurality of simple substances do not even have a mind-dependent unity, so it is difficult to regard them as one sensible and material thing.

Thus we are in a position to read this passage in

accordance with the claim that an aggregate of substances exists outside of a perceiving mind as a material thing. Aggregates of substances are often sensible. Whenever I consciously perceive my desk, cup, door and table, all of them are objects of my conscious sensation. So we can understand “sensible and material things” in the passage as aggregates of substances. This reading solves problems with other readings. Given an aggregate of substances is material (since it is identical to a body), and often sensible, it is natural for Leibniz to discuss material and sensible aggregates of substances.

Before closing our discussion, we have to consider a problem in supposing that an aggregate of substances is an external object for a perceiver. As Adams states, the mind-dependence of an aggregate seems to affect its ontological status. How can Leibniz justify the claim that an aggregate is external? Perhaps a perceiving mind has many external intentional objects at the same time, and by regarding them as one thing, it perceives them as “one external object.” Even though many substances are regarded as one thing, they are nonetheless not absorbed into a perceiving mind.

Perhaps Leibniz holds the following view: Any substance that constitutes an aggregate exists in an aggregate. The in-relationship is transitory: So if A exists in B and B exists in C, then A exists in C. Then if a substance exists in an aggregate, and an aggregate exists in a perceiving mind, then a substance exists in that perceiving mind! But this clearly violates the doctrine of independence of substance from other created substances. Thus Leibniz takes an ambivalent position: On the one hand, the unity of an aggregate comes from a perceiving mind. An aggregate of substances absolutely requires a perceiver to come into existence. On the other hand, nonetheless an aggregate exists outside of a perceiver. The unity somehow comes from a perceiver, as an extrinsic denomination. Even if a perceiver regards many substances as one thing, it changes nothing of internal properties of substances. However, it changes the extrinsic or relational properties of substances. By having this kind of relational properties with respect to a perceiver, many substances constitute an aggregate though they still exist outside of any perceiver. This understanding of the ontological status of an aggregate also fits with Leibniz’s terminology. Leibniz uses the term “semi-mental” when he talks about a body or an aggregate (G2 517; Russell 1937, p. 13).

Abbreviation

AG. = *G. W. Leibniz Philosophical Essays*. Trans. and eds. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Hackett, 1989.

G. = *Die philosophischen Schriften von G. W. Leibniz*. Ed. C. I. Gerhardt. Weidmann, 1875-90 Reprint, Georg Olms, 1978. Cited by volume and page.

L. = *Philosophical Papers and Letters*. Trans. and ed. by Leroy Loemker. Second edition, Reidel, 1969.

Lan. = *New Essays*. Trans. by Alfred Gideon Langley. The Open Court Publishing Company, 1949.

Lodge. = *The Leibniz-De Volder Correspondence*. Trans. and ed. by Paul Lodge. Yale University Press, 2012.

NE. = *Nouveaux Essais sur l'Entendement*. Cited by book, chapter, and section.

Idealist. Oxford University Press.

Garber, Daniel. 2009. *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad*. Oxford University Press.

Mates, Benson. 1986. *The Philosophy of Leibniz*. Oxford University Press.

Russell, Bertrand. 1937. *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*. 2nd ed. George Allen & Unwin.

Rutherford, Donald. 1995. *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature*. Cambridge University Press.

_____. 2008. "Leibniz as Idealist" *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* 4: pp. 141-90.

Sleigh, Robert C. Jr. 1990. *Leibniz and Arnauld*. Yale University Press.

Smith, Justin. E.H. 2011. *Divine Machines: Leibniz and the Sciences of Life*. Princeton University Press.

References

Adams, Robert Merrihew. 1994. *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist,*

[Kanazawa Seiryō University, Associate Professor]