

Comments on Roger Ariew's "Descartes and Leibniz as Readers of Suarez"

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Professor Ariew has provided us with a lovely paper that is throughout clear, learned and convincing. He begins by noting that Suarez's influence on early modern philosophy can be most securely inferred by attention to those doctrines on which he stakes out a distinct position, often steering a course between the two towers of Thomas and Scotus. He next argues that Descartes's handling of the theory of distinctions suggests that the one time pupil of La Flèche hadn't read his Suarez carefully prior to composing the *Meditations*, although he might well have dove back into the *Metaphysical Disputations* in order to "arm himself against the expected objections of the Jesuits" (7).¹ Finally, Professor Ariew argues that Leibniz's treatment of individuation reveals him to be, from early on, a much more careful reader of the scholastics, including of Suarez, than Descartes had been. Since I find Professor Ariew's general argument quite compelling, I'd like to focus the rest of my comments on some issues raised by the last part of his stimulating paper.

As Professor Ariew notes, in his *Disputatio Metaphysica* of 1663, Leibniz defends the Suarezian view that "every individual is individuated by its whole entity" (significantly setting aside the individuation of "accidents and incomplete beings") (A VI.i.12, §3; A VI.i.14, §10).² The position Leibniz endorses here is intended to be both *general* and *nominalist*. In the opening sections of the *Disputatio*, Leibniz notes that "we shall here abstract from material and non-material substance – we shall examine only the general opinions" (A VI.i.12, §3). In this, Leibniz sees himself as breaking from those like Aquinas who offer distinct accounts of individuation for material and immaterial substances. Leibniz in this period likewise denies that there are any universals *in re* effectively echoing Suarez's insistence that "the disposition to exist in many things is not

a real property belonging to the common nature of its own apart from the operation of the understanding” (*Disputationes* VI.iv.2).³ In this, Leibniz sees a powerful weapon to be used against what he views as the “extreme realism” of Scotus and others (A VI.i.16.§17).

Around the time of the *Catholic Demonstrations* of 1668, Leibniz appears to have rethought his views on individuation in connection with his attempts to show the logical and metaphysical tenability of Catholic interpretations of the mysteries of faith (see, A VI.i.489-536 *passim*).⁴ Thus, for example, Leibniz offers the following defense of (what he takes to be) the Catholic understanding of transubstantiation:

If a body consecrated and appropriated by the mind of Christ has the same concurrent mind as the glorious body of Christ who suffered for us,

it has numerically the same substantial form or the same substance as the body of Christ who suffered for us . . .

Accordingly the bread and wine in transubstantiation are the numerically identical substance as the body of Christ who suffered for us. Q.E.D. (A.VI.i.509.§13-15)

The main idea here is that what began as merely bread and wine might be transformed into the substance of Christ by being united in an appropriate way with God’s concurring mind. But that implies that the identity – and a little less clearly, the individuation – of a substance is determined by its substantial form rather than by its whole entity. Leibniz drives this point home in the *Catholic Demonstrations* declaring, “I demonstrate the numerical identity of substantial form, in conformity with the principles of the noblest Scholastic and Aristotelian philosophers, those for whom substantial form is the principle of individuation” (A. VI.i.511).

It is clear that in 1668, Leibniz is no longer a strict proponent of Suarez’s “whole entity” account of individuation. But how deeply is his new position at odds with the one he held in 1663? Answering this question is complicated both by the fact that it is not entirely clear – at least to me! – what exactly Leibniz’s considered metaphysics is in

1668, and by the fact that already by the time of the Arnauld correspondence and the *Discourse on Metaphysics* it is much disputed how some of the relevant details of the scholastic framework are to be applied. For such reasons it is perhaps worth noting that Suarez himself seems not entirely unsympathetic to the view that Leibniz comes to embrace. In his *Metaphysical Disputationes* V, Section iv, he tells us that “the primary basis” for the “important” view that the “internal principle of individuation is the substantial form” is to be found in the following line of thought:

[T]he principle of individuation must be what [1] intrinsically constitutes this substance and [2] is most proper to it. Therefore, by reason of the former property [1], it must be something substantial; for accidents . . . do not constitute substance or this substance, for this substance, even [insofar] as it is “a this,” is a being by itself and substantial. Moreover, by reason of the latter property [2], this principle cannot be matter, but form, because this matter is not most proper to this individual, since it could be under other forms. Therefore, form is the principle of individuation (*Disputationes* V.iv.1/*Gracia trans.*).

Suarez ultimately rejects this line of thought (and another) saying that “although it may rightly prove that form contributes to unity, nevertheless, [it does] not [prove] that it [i.e. form] alone is the principle of individuation. For matter is also an intrinsic principle constituting the entity of a thing, and thus, it too will be a principle of individuation, if not alone, at least [together] with form” (*Disputationes* V.iv.3). But Suarez is far from unsympathetic to the view that substantial form is the principle of individuation, and he goes on to acknowledge that “form surpasses matter in the fact that it *principally* constitutes the individual, and that it is more proper to it . . . [so that one must conclude that] form is more than anything else the principle of individuation” (*Disputationes* V.iv.6). Indeed, he concludes his treatment of the view that substantial form is the principle of individuation by conceding that “this view, as explained by us, is quite defensible, and comes very close to the truth,” even if strictly speaking, “it must be said that form alone is not the full and adequate principle of individuation of material beings” (*Disputationes* V.iv.7). If it is clear that around the time of the *Catholic Demonstrations*, Leibniz abandoned the letter of Suarez’s position on individuation, it remains, I think, an

open question as to what extent Leibniz abandons the philosophical spirit of Suarez's position.

Relatedly, it remains, I think, an open question as to the extent that Leibniz came to embrace the Scotistic position he rejects in the *Disputatio*. Leibniz's completely individualized substantial forms, corresponding to complete conceptions in the divine intellect, are certainly reminiscent of Scotus's *haeccities*, and Professor Ariew helpfully notes that in the *Catholic Demonstrations*, Leibniz tells us that "Averroes, Angelus Mercenarius, and Jacob Zabarella also assert that substantial form is the principle of individuation," the latter two being authors that Leibniz had previously cited as supporters of the Scotist position (A VI.i.510). Nonetheless, Suarez himself implies that this is a position quite different from Scotus's, citing Durandus, Averroes, Avicenna, Zimara, and Sebastian, Bishop of Osma, as commonly cited proponents, and tracing the view to Aristotle's claim in *De Anima*, Book II, Chapter 1 that "form is what constitutes 'this something' (*Disputationes* V.iv1). Furthermore in the *Disputatio*, Leibniz seems to flatly reject not just Scotus's formal distinction, but more generally the philosophical role he takes Scotus's haecceity to play, namely, that of particularizing a (more than rationally distinct) universal nature.^v His original Suarezian account respected his rejection of that philosophical role by placing the burden of individuation on the whole entity. Leibniz's later view places the burden of individuation wholly on the shoulders of the substantial form itself, but there is, as far as I know, no reason to suppose that he came to allow anything to play the philosophical role he attributes to Scotus's haecceities. Thus, in spite of some apparent concessions to Scotus, it might well be the case that Leibniz's position is best thought of not as "the Scotist position" "with a few significant modifications," but rather, as he suggests, as a variation on Thomas's account of the individuation of (immaterial) angels (20).^{vi}

Finally, I'd like to draw attention to Professor Ariew's closing suggestion that "For Leibniz, in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, an individual is a haecceity, that is, a Scotist individuating form, or mind" (21). That conclusion might well seem inescapable given the premises that (i) substantial forms are the principles of individuation for created substances, and (ii) for Leibniz substantial forms are Scotistic haecceities. But I think we should tread carefully here. For the doctrine that created substances are individuated by

their substantial forms leaves open two importantly different conceptions of substance: I, for example, might be just a unique substantial form – an Aquinian angel as it were in a world full of other Aquinian angels, all perhaps projecting a common world of experience. Alternatively, I might be a union of a body and mind whose individuation and identity is nonetheless wholly determined by his substantial form; very crudely, I might be this corporeal substance even if my identity and individuation conditions are determined by my rational soul. This ambiguity is, of course, at the heart of contemporary debates over whether Leibniz is a “realist” or an “idealist” about bodies in the so-called “middle years.” It is an ambiguity that I’m now inclined to think that he cherished for reasons going back to the project of the *Catholic Demonstrations*. The straightforward identification of created substances with Scotistic haecceities, however, would seem to shut down that ambiguity since it would identify creatures with their particularized formal natures. That may, of course, at the end of the day be the best reading of Leibniz’s metaphysics around the time of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, but his treatment of individuation seems to me to commit him only to the principle that creatures are *individuated* by their unique substantial forms, not that they are *identical* to their unique substantial forms. His treatment of individuation would thus seem to preserve, rather than close, the crucial ambiguity of his metaphysics during his middle years.

¹ All unaccompanied page references are to Professor Ariew’s manuscript.

² Leibniz’s *Disputatio Metaphysica De Principio Individvi* is reprinted in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Ed. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften. Darmstadt, Leipzig, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923-. Reference is abbreviated A and is to series, volume, page, section. An English translation of the *Disputatio* is available in Laurence B. McCullough, *Leibniz on Individuals and Individuation*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996. I have borrowed freely from Ariew’s and McCullough’s translations when possible.

³ Francisco Suarez, *Disputationes metaphysicae*, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1988). Reference is abbreviated *Disputationes* and is to disputation, section and number. An

English translation of *Disputation V* is available in Jorge J. E. Gracia, trans., *Suarez on Individuation. Individual Unity and Its Principle: Metaphysical Disputation V* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1982). An English translation of *Disputation VI* is available in J.F. Ross, trans., *On Formal and Universal Unity and Its Principle: Metaphysical Disputation V* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1964). I have borrowed freely from Gracia's translation when possible.

⁴ English translations of selections from these writings can be found in Leroy E. Loemker, *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Philosophical Papers and Letter, 2nd Edition* (Boston, MA: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1976). I have borrowed freely from Loemker's translation when possible.

^v For a helpful discussion of this point, see J. A. Cover and John O'Leary-Hawthorne, *Substance and Individuation in Leibniz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), Chapter 1.

^{vi} Cf. Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §9.