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Leibniz on Spinoza's Concept of Substance¹

By

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Résumé

Quoique Leibniz donne l'apparence de baser sa philosophie sur le Principe de l'Identité, c'est pourtant sur celui de la Raison Suffisante qu'il insiste le plus dans son oeuvre. Ce Principe de la Raison Suffisante joue un rôle majeur parce que Leibniz dérive sa conception de la substance d'une analogie entre le sujet et les attributs des propositions et les concepts de substance et leurs attributs.

Cette analogie mène à une théorie de retenue de la vérité et à une autre qui affirme que les attributs sont inhérents à la substance: théories compatibles avec la Raison Suffisante mais non avec celle de l'Identité. Leibniz n'a pas compris la conception de la substance chez Spinoza dans laquelle les attributs sont identiques à la substance. Le raisonnement de Leibniz contre Spinoza n'est donc guère convainquant. Je suggère que la raison de ce malentendu ne relève pas uniquement de la logique de Leibniz, mais aussi d'une théologie basée sur une âme d'une immortalité qui persiste et sur la théorie d'une morale vengeresse.

It is well known that Leibniz was interested in Spinoza's philosophy and met with him in 1676². In addition to the brief notes written after the meeting, we have his unedited extracts³ and a rather detailed commentary on Spinoza's *Ethics*⁴.

Leibniz says, in a letter to Henry Justel, February 4/14, 1678:

"The posthumous works of the late Mr. Spinoza have at last been published. The most important part is the *Ethics*. . . I have found there a number of excellent thoughts which agree with my own, as some of my friends know who have also learned from Spinoza. But there are paradoxes which I do not find true or even plausible. As for example, that there is only one substance, namely God; that creatures are only modes or accidents of God, that our mind perceives nothing further after this life, that God himself does indeed think but neither understands nor wills, that all things happen by a kind of fatal necessity, that God does not act for the sake of ends but only from a certain necessity of nature. This is to retain in word but to deny in fact providence and immortality. I consider this book

¹ This article was initiated at the National Endowment for the Humanities Seminar on Leibniz among the Rationalists. Subsequent revisions benefited from the comments of Prof. James C. Anderson, R. C. Sleight, Jr., and Clark Zumbach.

² G. W. LEIBNIZ, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. L. E. LOEMKER (Dordrecht, 1969, second edition), pp. 167–169. Hereafter cited as LOEMKER. LEIBNIZ, *Die philosophischen Schriften*, ed. C. I. GERHARDT (Berlin, 1875–1890, Repr. Hildesheim, 1960). 7 vol., vol. VII, pp. 261–2. Hereafter cited as GP.

³ G. W. LEIBNIZ, *Textes inédits*, ed. G. GRUA (Paris, 1948), pp. 277–284. Hereafter cited as GRUA.

⁴ LOEMKER, pp. 196–206. GP I, pp. 139–150.

dangerous for those who wish to take the pains to master it. For the rest will not make the effort to understand it”⁵.

What is the basis for these dangerous “paradoxes”? What is the underlying difference between Spinoza and Leibniz which results in such different logical, epistemological, and metaphysical theories when there are points of agreement between them? For example, both philosophers characterize substance as unitary, persistent, simple and indivisible; but Spinoza has only one substance, while Leibniz has an infinite number of simple substances. What is the difference between them which accounts for Leibniz’ derogation of Spinoza and his eventual “refutation” of Spinoza?

I shall argue that the basis for Leibniz’ disagreement with Spinoza is to be found in their very different concepts of substance. Both philosophers are systematic, and both construct their philosophies on a theory of substance which pervades their philosophies. Whether one starts from his logic (as do Russell and Couturat), or from his epistemology, or his metaphysics, one is ultimately confronted with Leibniz’ view of substance. The epistemological theory known as the concept containment theory of truth⁶ is an analogue of both the logical theory that predicates are “in” subjects and the metaphysical theory that attributes “inhere in”, or “belong to”, substances. These inter-related theories constitute one set of fundamental pre-suppositions for Leibniz, and they lead to the principle of sufficient reason, the belief in contingent beings, and the acceptance of possible truths.

There is another set of pre-suppositions which can also be found in Leibniz’ philosophy. There is an identity thesis which maintains that subjects can be resolved into predicates and that truths can be resolved into identities which are necessary truths. It might be said that the identity thesis eschews the “is” of predication found in the concept containment thesis and relies upon the “is” of identity⁷. Leibniz chooses not to pursue the implications of the identity thesis with the same fervor as he develops the containment thesis. Absent the containment thesis and its corollaries, given the identity thesis, Leibniz himself might well approximate the “paradoxes” of Spinoza. However, this development would contradict Leibniz’ deep ethical and theological beliefs.

⁵ LOEMKER, p. 195. LEIBNIZ, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Preuß. Akad. d. Wiss., R. 2, vol. 1 (Darmstadt, 1926) p. 393.

⁶ R. C. SLEIGH, JR., *Leibniz on the Simplicity of Substance*, in: *Essays on the Philosophy of Leibniz*, ed. M. KULSTAD, *Rice University Studies* Vol. 63, No. 4.

⁷ I wish to thank Prof. Zumbach for this insight.

Both sets of assumptions appear in *First Truths*. Leibniz says:

"First truths are those which predicate something of itself or deny the opposite to its opposite. For example, A is A, or A is not non-A. These and other truths of this kind . . . can nevertheless all be grouped under the name of identities"⁸.

It should be noted that in these identities, one finds equivalents – either of predicates with predicates, or subjects with predicates, or subjects with subjects. In these "identities", there is no inherence or containment. Leibniz goes on:

"All other truths are reduced to first truths with the aid of definitions or by analysis of concepts. In this consists proof a priori, which is independent of experience".⁹

I understand that definitions assert the identity between definiendum and definiens, and an analysis of concepts should lead to a statement of identity between "the complete concept" and its constituent concepts. These assertions are commensurate with Spinoza's thesis, but Leibniz does not develop this theme in his philosophy. The metaphysical result of this analysis would lead to an identity of substance with its attributes, an identity of a subject with its predicates. It would lead to an ultimate decomposition set of a concept in terms of other concepts¹⁰.

Leibniz then asserts that "the predicate or consequent therefore always inheres in the subject or antecedent"¹¹. And it is here that Leibniz moves from identity to something quite different and most significant for his entire philosophy. He departs from the necessity of identity and goes to contingency and possibility; he leaves the principle of identity and adopts the principle of sufficient reason. And this is due to the principle of inherence or containment. Indeed, it might even be argued that the basic intuition of substance-attribute differentiation, or subject-predicate distinction, underlies the Principle of Sufficient Reason. That principle is appealed to only when subjects (substances) cannot be resolved into their predicates (attributes) and truths cannot be reduced to explicit identities. This distinction, the differentiation between substance and its attributes, is retained throughout Leibniz' life and underlies his inability to understand Spinoza's philosophy¹². It is this theme that Leibniz uses as the basis of his philosophy.

⁸ LOEMKER, p. 267. LEIBNIZ *Opuscles et fragments ineditis*, ed. L. COUTURAT (Paris, 1903), p. 518. Hereafter cited as C.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Sleigh says that a decomposition is ultimate in its kind, when none of its components can be decomposed into entities of the same type.

¹¹ LOEMKER, p. 267. Emphasis added. C, p. 518.

¹² Cf. LEIBNIZ, *Leibniz: Philosophical Writings*, ed. G. H. R. PARKINSON (Totowa, N.J., 1973), p. 88. (C, p. 518); *Nature of Truth*, pp. 93–94 (C, pp. 401–3); *Necessary and*

While the identity thesis asserts that some truths are explicit identities or truths which we can, through a finite analysis, reduce to an identity, there are also truths whose identity is only implicit for us. Only God can complete the required infinite analysis "through one thrust of his mind"¹³. The assertion that there are such implicit identities, resolvable only by God is simply a belief or claim concerning the intelligence of God. This sort of an analysis would reduce a subject to its predicates, or a substance to its attributes, and Leibniz seems to be committed to a position which denies such a reduction.

For Leibniz, the fundamental concept of substance depends not on the identity thesis but rather on the inherence or containment thesis, on the principle of sufficient reason, on implicit identities. In this view, the substance, or subject, is of a different category than the attribute or predicate. The ultimate decomposition set of a concept must always leave the subject or substance as an unknown remainder, something in which the known and knowable attributes or predicates inhere. This notion of inherence is fundamental for Leibniz and pervades his philosophy, even though there are situations where he stresses the identity theory.

The notion of inherence depends upon identifying a subject with a substance and a predicate with an attribute. This is based upon an Aristotelian tradition, although Aristotle himself does not state this explicitly. Ian Hacking makes this point, when he says, "Leibniz's treatment of substance is in part derived from an Aristotelian tradition. . . . He regularly uses the term 'individual substance' as opposed to 'material (or 'corporeal') substance.' The former is akin to Aristotle's first substance. First substance form part of the answer to a problem of predication. This is equally true of Leibniz's individual substance"¹⁴. Leibniz is quite explicit in identifying subject with substance and attributes with predicates:

Contingent Truth, pp. 96, 100 (C, pp. 16, 24); LEIBNIZ, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, ed. P. G. LUCAS and L. GRINT (Manchester, 1961), pp. 12, 13, 20, 22. Hereafter cited as *Discourse*. (GP IV, pp. 432–3, 437, 438); LOEMKER, p. 519 (GP II, pp. 182–183); LEIBNIZ, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. P. REMNANT and J. BENNET (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 277, 357, et al. Hereafter cited as REMNANT. Page references in REMNANT are those of *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*, edited by A. ROBINET and H. SCHEPERS (Berlin, 1962.).

¹³ GRUA, *De Contingentia*, p. 303: "... in contingentibus vero progressus est analy-seos in infinitum per rationes rationum, ita ut nunquam habeatur ⟨plena⟩ demonstratio [perfecta], ratio tamen veritatis ⟨semper⟩ subsit, et a solo Deo perfecte intelligatur, qui unus seriem infinitam uno mentis ictu pervadit".

¹⁴ I. HACKING, *Individual Substance*, in: *Leibniz: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. H. G. FRANKFURT (New York, Anchor Books, 1972), p. 143.

"Now since actions and passions properly belong to individual substances . . . when several predicates are attributed to the same subject and this subject is not attributed to any other, it is called an individual substance"¹⁵.

"The nature of an individual substance, or of a complete being is to have a notion so complete that it is sufficient to comprise and to allow the deduction from it of all the predicates of the subject to which this notion is attributed"¹⁶.

As predicates inhere in or belong to subjects, and attributes are contained in substances, so also substance "involves" accidents and vice versa¹⁷, persons "contain" what will happen to them¹⁸, and monads "have" perceptions. Leibniz says, "Indeed, considering the matter carefully, it may be said that there is nothing in the world except simple substances, and, in them, perception and appetite"¹⁹. In *New Essays* he says, "And just as what is shut up or is in some whole, is supported by it and goes where it goes, so accidents are thought of similarly as in the subject – sunt in subjecto, inhaerent subjecto"²⁰. The notion of inherence or containment depends upon the distinction between substance and attribute, subject and predicate. Leibniz says, "Subjects, on the contrary, are conceived by means of such attributes. Yet these attributes are different from the subjects of which they are attributes"²¹. This belief is contrary to the identity thesis which identifies the totality of attributes with the substance.

The notion of inherence can be found in both Leibniz and Descartes as a remnant of Aristotelianism, and this might explain why it is not to be found in Spinoza. Leibniz' acceptance of inherence is so ingrained in his thinking, is such a fundamental pre-supposition that he cannot properly comprehend a system based upon a very different account of the relation between substance, attributes, and modes – the system of Spinoza. Whatever account of this relation one accepts as an interpretation of Spinoza, it is not that of inherence as Leibniz interprets it, nor is it the relation of subject to predicate. I believe that Leibniz' misinterpretation of this basic concept of Spinoza leads to his abrupt dismissal of Spinoza's philosophy. Spinoza's very different concept of substance and attributes produces the necessitarianism, lack of teleology, and atheism

¹⁵ *Discourse*, p. 12. Emphasis added. GP IV, p. 432.

¹⁶ *Discourse*, p. 13. Emphasis added. GP IV, p. 433.

¹⁷ LOEMKER, p. 519. Letter to De Volder of 23 June 1699. GP II, p. 183.

¹⁸ *Discourse*, p. 18. GP II, p. 12.

¹⁹ LOEMKER, p. 537. Letter to De Volder of 30 June 1704. Emphasis added. GP II, p. 270.

²⁰ REMNANT, p. 277.

²¹ LOEMKER, p. 620. GP VI, p. 582.

which draws forth Leibniz' vitriolic comments. Leibniz asserts that Spinoza is "obscure"²², "departs from rigorous demonstrations"²³, and "does not know the true art of demonstration"²⁴.

Spinoza defines substance as "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; in other words, that the conception of which does not need the conception of another thing from which it must be formed"²⁵. In his notes, Leibniz recounts Spinoza's definition as: "Substance is that which is in itself, or that which is not in another, as in a subject"²⁶. In his more complete criticism, Leibniz gives the definition as: "Substance is that which is in itself and is conceived through itself"²⁷. It should be observed that, in his notes, Leibniz thinks that substance is akin to a subject. Now, Leibniz comments: "For what does 'to be in itself' mean?"²⁸ I think that Leibniz is being ingenuous. Spinoza means that substance is independent, self-caused, unaffected by anything else. In short, God is "in itself" just as each monad is "in itself" – except for its dependence upon God. Indeed, Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz each agree that substance is that which is "in itself", but I think Spinoza departs from Descartes and Leibniz insofar as they view substance as similar to a subject.

Leibniz continues:

"Then we must ask: Does he relate 'to be in itself' and 'to be conceived through itself' cumulatively or disjunctively? Does he mean that substance is what is in itself and also that substance is what is conceived through itself? Or does he mean that in which both occur together, that is substance is both in itself and conceived through itself? But then it would be necessary for him to prove that whatever has one property has the other, while the contrary seems rather to be true, that there are some things which are in themselves, though they are not conceived through themselves"²⁹.

This is, of course, the crux of the issue between Spinoza and Leibniz, because Leibniz conceives of monads as substances "in themselves" but

²² LOEMKER, pp. 196, 200, 202, et. al. GP I, pp. 139, 143, 147.

²³ LOEMKER, p. 194. LEIBNIZ, *Mathematische Schriften*, ed. C. I. GERHARDT (Berlin und Halle, 1849–55), Vol. 4, p. 461.

²⁴ LOEMKER, p. 202. GP I, p. 146.

²⁵ B. SPINOZA, *Spinoza: Selections*, ed. J. WILD (New York, 1958), p. 94. Hereafter cited as WILD. B. SPINOZA, *Opera*, ed. C. GEBHARDT (1925; reprint Heidelberg, 1972), Vol. 2, p. 45: "Per substantiam intelligo id, quod in se est & per se concipitur: hoc est id, cuius conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei, a quo formari debeat." Hereafter cited as GEBHARDT.

²⁶ GRUA, p. 278: "*Substantia* est id quod in se est, seu quod non est in alio velut in subjecto (def. 3)." Emphasis added.

²⁷ LOEMKER, p. 196. GP I, p. 139.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

conceived through God. Leibniz thinks that only God is a substance "in itself and conceived through itself" as does Spinoza. But, for Spinoza, all of the arguments proving that there is a substance suffice to prove that substance is unique, singular, and absolutely infinite³⁰. Leibniz, on the other hand, believes that the unique and absolutely infinite substance creates an infinitude of other substances. For Spinoza, if one takes seriously the argument that substance is independent, or "in itself", and if one is to be consistent, it would be contradictory to assert that there are substances which depend upon God for their existence. If there is a substance in itself, it must be independent; that is, it must be conceived through itself. It must be self-caused, *sui generis*, complete, lacking nothing, and understood through itself. There could be no reason for there to be more than one absolutely infinite substance. Indeed, both Spinoza and Leibniz agree on the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles³¹. Spinoza uses this principle to show that there is only one absolutely infinite substance. If one accepts the principle that there cannot be two substances of the same nature or attribute, and if one substance is absolutely infinite-consists of an infinite number of attributes each of which is infinite in its own kind³², it follows that substance must be one. However, Leibniz uses the same principle to show that each of the infinitude of substances must be intrinsically different from every other substance. Spinoza uses the principle to simplify the universe, to reduce it to one; Leibniz utilizes the principle to multiply the universe, to make it bountiful and infinitely plural. For Spinoza, the only substance is God – being absolutely infinite.

For Leibniz, each monad is conceived to be a substance "in itself", but the complete concept of the monad is "in" God, or in something else through which it is conceived. That is to say, a monad, a simple substance, depends upon God for its conception as a creature, a created being, a finite being, a dependent thing. Now, this is Spinoza's definition of a mode – something which is conceived through, depends upon, or exists in, something other than itself³³. So, whereas Leibniz has finite substances, Spinoza has finite modes.

Leibniz' question about the relation of "in itself" to "conceived through itself" can be answered by saying that, for Spinoza, substance is

³⁰ WILD, pp. 94–108. GEBHARDT, Vol. 2, pp. 45–56.

³¹ Cf. WILD, p. 97. "In nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute." GEBHARDT, Vol. 2, p. 48.

³² WILD, pp. 94–95. GEBHARDT, Vol. 2, p. 45.

³³ WILD, p. 94. GEBHARDT, Vol. 2, p. 45.

that in which “both occur together”³⁴. Leibniz may well be correct in asserting that “men commonly conceive substances” as “in themselves”³⁵. The men who do so conceive substances are men who, in common with Leibniz and Descartes, are in the Aristotelian tradition. But, Spinoza was not in agreement with that tradition, nor did he agree with “the common man”. He was proposing a system based upon different definitions which he understood to be more clear and distinct. His substance is self-conceived, self-caused, absolutely infinite and singular.

Leibniz’ criticism proceeds:

“[Spinoza] continues: substance is that whose concept does not need the concept of another thing upon which it must rest. But there is also a difficulty in this, for he says in the next definition that an attribute is perceived by the intellect as belonging to substance and as constituting its essence. Therefore, the concept of attribute is necessary to form the concept of the substance. If you reply that an attribute is not a thing and that you merely mean that a substance does not need the concept of another thing, I answer that it is then necessary to explain what a ‘thing’ means, in order to understand the definition and see why an attribute is not a thing”³⁶.

One can clearly observe here that Leibniz views substance as a “thing” to which attributes “belong”. Furthermore, he argues, much like Descartes, that the concept of an attribute “is necessary to form the concept of a substance”. Again, Spinoza’s work does not correspond to this interpretation.

Spinoza does consider substance to be a “thing”, and attributes do characterize that “thing”. But, attributes do not “belong” to it. Spinoza does not argue that the concept of an attribute is necessary to form the concept of a substance. Indeed, the definition of substance precedes the definition of attribute and does not mention attributes³⁷. Consequently, we can form the conception of substance independently of the concept of an attribute. We understand the definition of substance as an adequate idea. It is, nonetheless, true that an attribute is an essence of substance as perceived by the human intellect, but this does not imply that the knowledge of substance *per se* depends upon a knowledge of an attribute. Perhaps that sort of knowledge acquired by reason might depend upon an inference from an attribute to the substance which it constitutes. Surely, intuitive knowledge, knowledge by means of a formal definition, does not require a previous acquaintance with an

³⁴ LOEMKER, p. 196. GP I, p. 139.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ WILD, p. 94. GEBHARDT, Vol. 2, p. 45.

attribute, nor does it require an inference from an attribute to some mysterious, underlying, unknown substratum which lurks behind the attribute.

We have noted above that the only substance recognized by Spinoza is singular and absolutely infinite. God is defined as "being absolutely infinite, or substance consisting of infinite attributes each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence"³⁸. So, God is the only substance.

The relation between substance, or God, and its attributes can be clearly seen in the definition of attribute: that which the intellect perceives as constituting an essence of God³⁹. It must be noted that both in the definition of attribute and in the definition of God, attributes constitute substance. They do not belong to it or inhere in it. Substance does not underly the attributes; it does not persist while they change. It is not a subject. Substance is "being absolutely infinite" and it consists of the attributes. It is just this conception of the relation between substance and attributes which is fundamental to understanding Spinoza and which Leibniz fails to comprehend.

Leibniz has, however, hit upon a crucial point. To understand Spinoza, we must understand both Spinoza's concepts of substance and attribute before proceeding into the corpus of the *Ethics* itself. Without a firm grasp of these definitions, one cannot appreciate the proofs. Leibniz comes close to a key distinction when he asks "why an attribute is not a thing"⁴⁰.

In an earlier work, *On God, Man, and his Well-Being*, Spinoza does assert that attributes are substances, or, in Leibnizian terms, "things". He says,

"As regards the attributes of which God consists, they are only infinite substances, each of which must of itself be infinitely perfect"⁴¹.

³⁸ WILD, pp. 94–95, Def. 6, Part I. GEBHARDT, Vol. 2, p. 45: "... ens absolutum infinitum, hoc est, substantiam constantem infinitis attributis..." Emphasis added.

³⁹ Translators usually give the definition of attribute: that which the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of substance. The Latin does not support the "the", and it seems that it would be more correct to assert that each attribute constitutes an essence itself of substance. The Latin reads: "Per attributum intelligo id, quod intellectus de substantia percipit, tanquam ejusdem essentiam constituens". GEBHARDT, Vol. I, p. 45. (Perhaps a better translation would be: "... as constituting an essence of the same (substance)".)

⁴⁰ LOEMKER, p. 196. GP I, p. 139.

⁴¹ WILD, p. 76. Emphasis added. "Aangaande de eigenschappen van de welke God bestaat, die zyn niet als oneyndige zelfstandigheeden, van de welke een ieder des zelfs oneyndig volmaakt moet zyn". GEBHARDT, Vol. 1, p. 44. Note that God consists of attributes here as in the *Ethics*.

He also says,

"... the attributes (or as others call them substances) are things, or to express ourselves better and more aptly (constitute) a being which subsists through itself and therefore makes itself known and reveals itself through itself"⁴².

Clearly, there is a close relation in Spinoza's early works between an attribute and the common conception of substance. But, contrary to that common conception, attributes constitute substance, they are not "in" substance.

Leibniz, however, seems captive to the common conception in trying to understand Spinoza. In his undated notes, Leibniz writes, "Attribute is an essential predicate, or necessary"⁴³. In his more complete criticism, he says,

"It is also obscure to say that an attribute is that which the understanding perceives about substance as constituting its essence. For the question arises whether he understands by attribute every reciprocal predicate⁴⁴, or every essential predicate whether reciprocal or not⁴⁵, or finally, every primary essential or indemonstrable predicate of substance"⁴⁶, ⁴⁷.

It should be noted that in all the comments above, Leibniz persists in conceiving of attributes as predicates, which, at least for him, inhere in or belong to a substance. This does not accord with Spinoza's account of attributes as constituting substance, as being essences of substance.

Spinoza says, that an

"essence of anything pertains to that, which being given, the thing itself is necessarily posited, and being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken; or, in other words, that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which in its turn cannot be or be conceived without the thing"⁴⁸.

Attributes are necessary and primitive both metaphysically and epistemologically. They are necessary for the knowledge of the existence of substance (at least by means of reason). Attributes require substance for

⁴² WILD, p. 79. "Wy hebgen nu al gezien dat eigenschappen, (of zoo andere die noemen, zelfstandigheeden) zaaken, of om beter en eigentliker te zeggen, een door zig zelfs bestannde wezen is, en der halven door zig zelve, zig zelfs te keenen geeft en vertoont". GEBHARDT, Vol. 1, p. 46.

⁴³ GRUA, p. 278.

⁴⁴ LOEMKER, p. 205: "one which mutually implies and is implied by the substance and is therefore complete enough to include the total meaning of the subject".

⁴⁵ LOEMKER, p. 205: "an essential predicate may be any component of this (total meaning of a subject)".

⁴⁶ LOEMKER, p. 205: "a primary essential predicate is one not further reducible".

⁴⁷ LOEMKER pp. 196–197. GP I, p. 139.

⁴⁸ WILD, p. 143, Def. 2, Part II. "Ad essentiam alicujus rei id pertinere dico, quo dato res necessario ponitur, & quo sublato res necessario tollitur; vel id, sine quo res, & vice versa quod sine re nec esse, nec concipi potest". GEBHARDT, Vol. 2, p. 84.

their conception, but substance can be apprehended by intuition without including the notion of attributes. Attributes constitute substance, and substance consists of attributes. The attributes are not "reciprocal" in Leibniz' terms, because "while each mutually implies and is implied by substance", none is "complete enough to include the total meaning of the subject"⁴⁹. All of the infinite number of attributes are required to give "the complete concept" of substance; each may suffice for "a concept" of substance, to use Leibnizian terminology. It might be said that each attribute "expresses" an essence of substance, or "constitutes" an essence of substance. They all constitute the total being of substance. The infinite number of attributes exhausts the total meaning and existence of substance; there is no substance other than the infinite number of attributes.

Spinoza himself seems to assert an identity of substance and its attributes when, in Proposition 4, Part I, he speaks of "substances or (which is the same thing by Def. 4) their attributes"⁵⁰. Substance does not differ from attributes in kind; it is not a substratum. Attributes and substance share the following characteristics: they are eternal, in themselves, conceived through themselves, *sui generis*, independent, self-caused, and infinite. But, no one of them is substance; all of them are substance. Thus, if one means by a "thing" something which is in itself and conceived through itself, etc., then each attribute is a substance. But, Spinoza proves that the only substance is God, and God is "being, absolutely infinite", whereas each attribute is infinite only in its own kind, in *suo genere*. Therein lies the only difference between substance and attribute, and I think it is a difference in degree, not in kind. Substance is more extensive, more pervasive than its attributes. Substance is "being absolutely infinite", and each attribute is "being, infinite in its own kind". One would think that Leibniz would be sympathetic to a distinction depending upon a difference in degree rather than kind.

In no sense whatsoever is an attribute inherent in a substance, or a predicate of a subject, or belong to a substance. The ultimate decomposition set of substance would be its attributes, with no unknown remainder. Thus, if substance was not identified with God, then it would be correct to assert that each attribute is a substance. But once Spinoza demonstrates that there is only one substance, and it is absolutely infinite, then each attribute differs from that substance because the

⁴⁹ LOEMKER, p. 205.

⁵⁰ WILD, p. 97. "... substantias, sive quod idem est (per def. 4) earum attributa, . . ."
GEBHARDT, Vol. 2, pp. 47-48.

attribute is infinite only in its own kind. Leibniz errs in his understanding of Spinoza because a substance is not a subject, or a particular thing composed of matter and mind alone, or an underlying substratum. It is identical with the sum total of its attributes in a way that Leibniz will not allow a subject to be identical with its predicates, or a substance to be identical with its attributes. This is because of his emphasis on the underlying concept containment theory of truth and its concomitant theory of attribute and predicate inherence in substance and subject respectively rather than the principle of identity.

One must, then, pay close attention to Spinoza's argument that the only substance is God. This depends upon two facets of Spinoza's work. Definition 6, states that God is "being absolutely infinite, that is to say, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence"⁵¹. Spinoza, in common with the other rationalists, believes that a definition is a clear and distinct, or adequate, idea and that it reveals the formal nature of the thing itself. But Spinoza also presents an argument for God, or substance, being absolutely infinite. After demonstrating that substance is unique and singular, he states that "the more reality or being a thing possesses, the more attributes belong to it"⁵². Attributes are essences, so the more real a thing is, the more attributes, the more essences, constitute it. If one defines God or substance as "being, absolutely infinite", it follows that it must consist of an infinite number of attributes each of which is infinite in its own kind. Furthermore, if attributes are essences, it must be true that the attributes, though different from one another and independent of one another, cannot be contradictory. If there cannot be two substances of the same nature or attribute, and if there is one substance which consists of all the attributes or natures, it follows that there cannot be any other substance but God or Nature.

Leibniz, on the other hand, believes that each substance can have only one essence or nature, so the difference between substances must be due to something other than the essence, or it may be that each substance has its own essence, each is an *infima species*. Leibniz cannot understand how there can be "two attributes which are conceived through themselves and yet can express the same subject"⁵³. Yet, he has no

⁵¹ WILD, pp. 94–95. "... ens, absolute infinitum, hoc est, substantiam constantem infinitis attributis, quorum unumquodque aeternam, & infinitam essentiam exprimit." GEBHARDT, Vol. 2, p. 45.

⁵² WILD, p. 102. "Quo plus realitatis, aut esse unaquaeque res habet, eo plura attributa ipsi competunt." GEBHARDT, Vol. 2, p. 51.

⁵³ LOEMKER, p. 198. GP I, p. 141.

difficulty in conceiving how a monad can express the entire universe from a particular point of view, nor does he falter in asserting that a monad has an infinite number of perceptions. Spinoza's substance is expressed by an infinite number of attributes, and this seems to be akin to Leibniz' view of the monad-perception relation. If one should argue that perceptions are predicates of the monad, the similarity becomes even more pronounced. I believe that Leibniz is again being ingenuous, and that he could resolve his supposed difficulty if he were to make an effort to more clearly understand Spinoza's concepts of substance and attribute. What convinces me of the truth of this assertion is Leibniz' remark on Proposition 9: "Meanwhile, I admit that if his meaning of attribute is accepted and attributes are supposed to be compatible, a substance is more perfect, the more attributes it has"⁵⁴. However, Leibniz insists on viewing attributes as predicates and substances as subjects. He only agrees to the truth of Proposition 9 because he conceives of God as an absolutely infinite SUBJECT conceived through itself.

The key to comprehending Spinoza's view of the substance-attribute relation is to divest oneself of the Aristotelian framework and to pay attention to Spinoza's definition of God as "being absolutely infinite"⁵⁵. Each attribute is a sort or kind of being, infinite in its own kind – being as extension, being as thought. One may approximate Spinoza's conception of this relation by considering each attribute as a member of a set of essences each of which is infinite, and the set itself as having the interesting property of being absolutely infinite⁵⁶. If one were to know all of the attributes, all of the different sorts of being which constitute Nature, one would know Nature exhaustively and completely. There would be no unknown remainder, no substratum, no underlying subject. Substance pervades the attributes insofar as each attribute is a being. Spinoza thinks that we can know substance, or being, *per se* by apprehending the commonality pervading the attributes and within each attribute. We can also know being insofar as it is expressed in thought by the laws of reason and as it is expressed in extension by the laws of physics.

For Spinoza, then, Nature, or God, or substance is constituted by its attributes; it consists of its attributes alone, as a subject is its predicates. His fundamental principle is one of identity rather than

⁵⁴ LOEMKER, p. 200. GP I, p. 144.

⁵⁵ WILD, p. 94. GEBHARDT, Vol. 2, p. 45: "Per Deum intelligo ens absolute infinitum . . ."

⁵⁶ I wish to thank Prof. James C. Anderson for this analogy.

inherence, containment, or belonging. Substance is its attributes; it is identical to the sum of its attributes.

The different conceptions of substance and attributes pervade the philosophies of Spinoza and Leibniz from the epistemologies and metaphysics to the ethics. Leibniz conceives of each person retaining identity through time, as a subject is distinct from its predicates and as a substance differs from its attributes. Something must remain the same in order to be morally evaluated. In short, finite things must be created substances, for Leibniz. He says:

“There is nothing so powerful for demonstrating not only the indestructibility of our soul, but even that it retains forever in its nature the indications of all its preceding states with a potential memory which can always be aroused, because the soul possesses consciousness or is familiar in itself with what every man calls ‘my self’. This renders it susceptible of moral qualities and of reward and punishment, even after this life. For immortality without memory would be useless”⁵⁷.

The notion of a continuing substance is central to Leibniz and is contradictory to Spinoza’s argument that the human being is a group of simple bodies or simple ideas connected by a *conatus*, a desire for persistence. The finite modes of Spinoza have a specific identity whereas Leibniz’ monads retain a numerical identity. Leibniz says:

“So, I do not accept Spinoza’s opinion that the individual mind is extinguished with the body, for the mind somehow remembers what has preceded, and this over and above what is merely eternal in mind – the idea of the body, or its essence”⁵⁸.

Later in life, Leibniz makes this even clearer:

“According to Spinoza . . . there is only one substance. He would be right if there were no monads, then everything but God would be of a passing nature and would vanish into simple accidents or modifications, since there would be no substantial foundation in things, such as consists in the existence of monads”⁵⁹.

The doctrine of inherence, then, is found in every aspect of Leibniz’ philosophy and is never abandoned. It is this doctrine which underlies his disagreement with Spinoza. It is an unchallenged presupposition, the framework for his philosophy, and it prohibits his understanding of Spinoza’s work. Consequently, his supposed “refutation” of Spinoza is not adequate or to the point. Perhaps the “obscurity” which Leibniz found in Spinoza’s philosophy is due to Leibniz’ inability to don the lenses made by Spinoza.

⁵⁷ G. W. Leibniz, *The Leibniz-Arnault Correspondence*, ed. H. T. MASON (Manchester University Press, 1967), p. 64. Leibniz, Vol. 2, p. 57.

⁵⁸ LOEMKER, p. 162. LEIBNIZ, *Leibnitiana elementa philosophiae arcanae de summa rerum* (Kasan, 1913), ed. I. JAGODENSKI, p. 110.

⁵⁹ LOEMKER, p. 663. Letter to Bourguet. GP III, p. 575.