

ESSENTIAL INDIVIDUALITY

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1. Some Good Reasons to Study Individuality

Each person is perceived by others and by herself as an individual in a very strong sense, namely as a *unique* individual. Moreover, this supposed uniqueness is commonly thought of as linked with another character that we tend to attribute to persons (as opposed, say, to stones or chairs): a kind of *depth*, hidden to sensory perception, yet in some measure accessible to other means of personal knowledge. This kind of depth is usually, although quite implicitly, felt to harbour the essence of a person as such – say, her « personality ». The uniqueness of personality is indeed regarded as the very basis of each person's uniqueness, at least within the pre-philosophical, commonsensical frame of thought governing both attitudes or social acts concerning persons, and ordinary speech about them. Personal reality, or personality, is usually thought of as (epistemologically) at least in part – maybe a very small part - accessible, and as (ontologically) *unshared*. Similar personalities are not supposed to allow for complete identity even in the case of (monozygotic) twins.

Uniqueness and depth are the main features of the notion of *strong individuality*, which is the ultimate subject of this paper. It is a notion – admittedly a quite implicit one – we make use of in a massive way when dealing with people (marrying a person, for instance, or falling in love with her/him, or being in mourning for somebody), but also when thinking of people (writing a biography, studying a historical character) or addressing to them (writing a letter, entertaining a conversation). From a phenomenological point of view strong individuality is more than an implicit commonsensical notion about persons: it is a basic phenomenon, a way in which our being manifests itself quite apparently, or an ontologically well-founded appearance. Each person shows a *physiognomy*, a visage and a dynamic style of her own, a global way of being there which is usually perceived as « just announcing » a personality. Physiognomy is usually felt to be the visible part of a whole that is not yet perceived. Not that it could be completely, not at least in the same way in which any object in space offers itself to further perception, namely, depending on our successive changes of point of view on it. Personality, or the reality of a person, is not accessible by further sensory perception, though it partially is by other ways of acquaintance,

such as conversation or, more generally, communication, patient observation, psychological insight and so on.

In short, the phenomenology of strong individuality is as well assessed in our everyday lives, as its notion is in our everyday thought. Even the term « individual » and related ones, as well as their equivalents in most European languages, are meant to refer to individuals in a pretty strong sense, and in fact are not customarily applied to chairs and stones or any other middle size particulars, but almost exclusively to persons. Qualifying this notion of individuality as « strong » would be pointless, except with reference to the much wider extension of the technical *philosophical* term, used as a synonymous of « particular », having so to speak the same range as the values of an individual bound variable.

But if this is the case, and if the notion of individuality is – in ordinary speech - commonly although implicitly linked to that of personality, it is surprising that contemporary philosophers have not philosophically or conceptually analysed such a strong notion in its peculiar strength, which implies much more than the weak notion of individuality that is current in philosophy, as we shall see. Such a silence is even more surprising within contemporary *philosophy of mind*, where it is the rule – with the relevant exception of some biologists or biologically minded philosophers¹.

For in ordinary language, as well as in common sense and ordinary perception, there is a kind of ontological watershed between «people» and «things», or, as philosophy often translates, «subjects» and «objects». To be sure, people appear to us not only as *objects* of possible causal events (bricks falling on their heads), or of possible knowledge (anatomical, for instance), but also as *subjects*: subjects of experience and passion, of thought, of consciousness, of decisions and actions. As it is well known, this apparent layer of being that is lacking in chairs, *subjectivity*, is the very centre of the debate about the naturalisation of the mind. It actually is the point at issue: is subjectivity an effective layer of *being*, or is it nothing but an appearance *founded on a completely different sort of things*? Is subjectivity a part of the ontological furnishings of the world, or is it nothing but an epiphenomenon? Should the language that describes it be granted full reliability, or just a mere methodological autonomy without ontological claims? Or should it simply be wiped out from a good scientific education, like astrology and alchemy?

Strangely enough, subjectivity seems to be the only notion taken into account by both “naturalizers” and their opponents, whereas strong individuality

1 Cf. E. Boncinelli, *Il cervello, la mente e l'anima*, Milano, 2000, pp. 60-61; F. Varela, “L’Individualité: autonomie du vivant”, in: P. Veyne a.o., *Sur l’individu*, Paris 1987, pp. 88-94. Is the notion of biological individuality strong enough to match what we call « strong individuality »? Such a question exceeds by far the limits of the present paper, even if some hints will be given for further inquiry.

ty is no less essential to the ordinary notion of a person, as opposed to that of a “thing”. Elsewhere² I argued that (strong) individuality is in a way the founding layer of personal reality, subjectivity being one of its appearances. On this basis, I argued that all the features by which people differ from other things – but most strikingly from inanimate material objects, such as chairs and computers - lead back to this one: people are *individual in an essential sense*, chairs and computers are not.

If I am right and individuality is indeed the foundation of subjectivity, it is not surprising that one should not succeed in rescuing subjectivity against physicalistic argument while ignoring individuality.

And yet a category of (strong) individuality, and more generally an accurate analysis of the different ways of being a particular (as a shadow, as an event, as a chair, as a tree, as a dog, as a person), is not easy to find within contemporary debates on mind, persons, personal identity. I just pointed out some good reasons to put an end to this state of affairs.

But what about the past? Addressing the history of the philosophical problem of individuality may be a preliminary stage in a theoretically oriented research on what we termed strong or essential individuality. Such will be my perspective in the rest of this paper, essentially aiming at one major case: G.W. Leibniz.

2. Leibniz on Essential Individuality

Even granting that individuality could be a matter of degree (there could be a scale that goes from the brick, or perhaps from the molecule of brick, to people, passing through cats and dogs), we are only considering here, for the sake of simplicity, two clear-cut cases: essential individuality, defining individuals in a proper sense, and non-essential individuality, defining the much wider class of particulars. We can find two criteria of essential individuality: one ontological, the other epistemological. By and large, they correspond to the common-sense features of uniqueness and *depth* that seem to distinguish such individuals as are persons (not only them, to be honest. Some personal works, such as works of art, seem to share these features according to common perception).

The ontological criterion is a gift from Leibniz. It is logically equivalent to, or at least derivable from, the famous definition of a substance he proposes in his *Discours de métaphysique*, 8:

2 R. De Monticelli, “Individuality and Mind”, in : Proceedings of the International Conference *The Emergence of the Mind* Fondazione Carlo Erba, Milano, 2000; R. De Monticelli, “Andrea o dell’individualità essenziale”, in: G.Usberti, (ed.), *I modi dell’oggettività, Saggi in onore di Andrea Bonomi*, Bompiani, Milano 2000.

“La nature d’une substance individuelle ou d’un être complet est d’avoir une notion si accomplie qu’elle soit suffisante à comprendre et à faire déduire tous les prédicats du sujet à qui cette notion est attribuée”³.

Among the “paradoxes considérables” logically following from this definition we find our ontological criterion of essential individuality, namely the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles, on which basis two things cannot differ *solo numero*: this is to say, if they are actually two, they cannot differ only by being two distinct exemplars of an identical essence, or structure, or set of characteristics; like for instance two molecules of water, or two atoms of oxygen. They must differ also in some *aspect of their essence*, some property or characteristic. In other words, there are no individual differences but *intrinsic* ones.

Let’s remind the reader of the obvious logical remarks usually going with commentaries of this famous principle. Let’s take “identity” as referring to the smallest possible equivalence relation, e.g. the one any individual x has to itself and to nothing else. Given such a characterisation, it is obvious that any expression such as “ $a = b$ ” is true iff “ a ” and “ b ” refer to one and the same object, however this object is described. Now one way to express this point is the thesis that

$$(P) (x) (y) ((x = y) \rightarrow (Px \leftrightarrow Py))$$

This is sometimes called the principle of indiscernibility of identicals and can be read as the the converse of Leibniz’ Law, which could hence be expressed as:

$$(P) (x) (y) ((Px \leftrightarrow Py) \rightarrow (x = y))$$

Now, this is in fact Leibniz’ Law only if the range of the predicate-variable “ P ” is limited to Intrinsic Properties. Without such a restriction, suppose “ P ” refers to “being located in place p at the time t ”: then the identity of x and y is just obvious, and this principle is logically no more problematic than its converse. It could be adopted as one of the axioms of a logical theory of identity. But it would no longer express Leibniz’ Law.

Leibniz’ Law is in fact not supposed to be a merely logical law. It is conceivable, and for most of us it is a fact, that there be *two* things perfectly alike in absolutely *all* (intrinsic) respects, that is sharing any property except for spatio-temporal location. Two or more than two: at any rate we perfectly conceive of things like molecules of the same stuff, atoms of the same substance, clones, non-variant tokens of the same type, and so on. Indiscernibility (relative to Intrinsic Properties) does not logically imply sameness.

Here comes the delicate question of the status of Leibniz’ Law. We are usually told: being no pure logical law, it is a metaphysical principle. And indeed, that is what Leibniz meant it to be. But this claim depends on its being

3 *DM*, § 8 (A VI, 4, B, 1540).

for him a thesis upon *substances*. That is, upon what ultimately and really *exists*, upon the fundamental layer of reality. Real things, or substances, are (according to Leibniz) those individuals which satisfy this principle.

In fact, Leibniz took this principle as analytic upon the concept of an individual (i.e., a substance), or, if we judge that the “definition” of section 8 is logically equivalent to the principle, as an alternative definition of an individual substance: an individual substance is whatever satisfies the principle. Therefore, Leibniz would have denied that things like molecules and atoms (which obviously *do not* satisfy the principle) could be individual *substances*; he actually denies that atoms in the classical sense of Democrite are more than chimeras:

“C’est pourquoi la notion des atomes est chimérique, et ne vient que des conceptions incomplètes des hommes”⁴

Atoms are chimeras, according to Leibniz, if they are held to be the ultimate constituents of reality. They are chimerical *substances*. They are in fact supposed to be indivisible: hence in a sense *individuals*. But they cannot be individuals. Why not? Because they were thought exactly as multiplicities of perfectly similar or indiscernible simple entities, hence by hypothesis they would not satisfy Leibniz Principle. They are chimerical, though, insofar as they are thought of as individual substances: ordinary, middle size divisible bodies are not chimerical, they are on the contrary *well founded phaenomena*. Well founded on what? This is an awkward point, and in fact the one, within Leibniz metaphysics, which will command doubt and revision till Leibniz death. Leibniz Law is indeed a pillar of Leibniz metaphysics: but a metaphysics conceived as a theory of substances, or of the ultimate constituents of reality, must account for the foundation of any apparent being, or phaenomenon, on real being, or substance. Now the nature of plain bodies, or material inanimated objects, is left open to doubt and questioning within Leibniz’ system. Close late works such as *Monadologie* (1714) and *Principes de la Nature et de la Grâce* (1714) present different solutions, probably because of the evolution in Leibniz’ thought which we can follow throughout the last part of the Correspondence with Des Bosses⁵.

From our point of view this state of affairs is not surprising. Leibniz’ Law need not be, in itself, a metaphysical principle, and hence pretend to express a universal truth, concerning directly or indirectly all existing things. It might be taken, as we tend to do, *just* as a criterion of essential individuality. We

4 *NE*, II.xxvii. 3 (A VI, 6, 230).

5 Whereas in his *Monadologie* Leibniz does not introduce the idea of a composed substance, but only of a “*composé*” (cf. *M*, § 2/GP VI, 607) he does in his *Principes* (cf. *PNG*, § 1/GP VI, 598). The idea of a composed *substance* is introduced in a Letter to Des Bosses (5 February 1712), with the notion of *Vinculum substantiale* (cf. GP II, 433-439).

might very well admit that *there are particulars of different sorts, or different ways to be a particular, and that some are individuals properly, or individuals in a stronger sense than others*. These things are provided with an *essential individuality*. An object has essential individuality if and only if it satisfies the principle of identity of the indiscernibles. Particulars not endowed with essential individuality are then allowed to exist in as many copies as they please. Individuals in the essential sense, on the contrary, are such that numerical unity implies uniqueness.

However, are there things of this kind, by essence or in principle not replicable, such that *two* identical ones *cannot* be given?

Let us take two machine-made bricks, or two glasses from the same set: apparently, they are distinguishable only extrinsically, for instance, by pointing a finger and saying: «I take this one, not the other one». Otherwise, they are so similar that they share all the properties or intrinsic characteristics. Since it is always possible after all to find a small intrinsic difference in two bricks or two glasses, one could be led to believe that there are a lot of individuals à la Leibniz. One could even think of creating such individuals, by simply singling out a token and imposing a tag upon it, as my name on my copy of *Sense and Sensibility*. Nevertheless, Leibniz's principle calls «individuals» two things that *cannot in principle* differ solo numero: consequently, they must be *necessarily*, not only *de facto*, intrinsically different. Hence bricks and glasses and marked tokens immediately fall off the class of Leibniz's individuals, like the molecules and the atoms that they are made of.

Are there true «Leibnizian» individuals? Well, we ourselves, persons, seem to be of this kind. In fact, suppose a clone perfectly identical to me was suddenly created from my rib. If this individual belongs to the same world I belong to, the one we call actual or real, then she will occupy a different point in space. Therefore she will have a different point of view from mine. In a person, however, the point that she occupies at time «t» becomes *a point of view* at «t», and a point of view, insofar as it determines her perceptive horizon and therefore the contents of her perceptions at time «t», is an intrinsic property of people, if people are subjects of experience and of memory. My clone and I would differ by the contents of our perceptions at «t0», and consequently by the contents of our memory at «t1», and consequently... here small differences can easily become huge. And yet for this argument minimal differences are enough, provided they are essential⁶.

6 This argument is a variant of the one by which P. Strawson tries to assess his anti-Leibnizian principle of individuation, by showing that *two* indiscernible individuals *are* conceivable. Take a world made as a chessboard : there always will be two symmetrical points of views, corresponding to leibnizian monads, which will be two and yet indiscernible. Yet this argument begs the question, because such a possible world *is not* a possible Leibnizian world, that is, one containing individuals ! [“Pour ne point dire que c’est plutôt par les choses qu’il faut discerner un lieu ou un temps de l’autre: car

3. Essential Individuality and Personal Identity

It might be very useful to conclude this inspection of Leibniz' Law by quoting its formulation in the frame of Leibniz' dialogue with Locke, i.e. the *Nouveaux Essais*. This will give us the opportunity to come back to the important difference between intrinsic and extrinsic properties, which some reader might question. The context of the discussion between Philalète, representing Locke, and Théophile, representing Leibniz is "the important question of identity and diversity". Philalète affirms:

"Nous ne trouvons jamais et ne pouvons concevoir qu'il soit possible que deux choses de la même espèce existent en même temps dans le même lieu. C'est pourquoi, lorsque nous nous demandons *si une chose est la même ou non*, cela se rapporte toujours à une chose qui dans un tel temps existe dans un tel lieu..."

Théophile replies:

"Il faut toujours qu'outre la différence du temps et du lieu, il y ait un *principe interne de distinction*, et quoiqu'il y ait plusieurs choses de même espèce, il est pourtant vrai qu'il y en a jamais de parfaitement semblables: ainsi, quoique le temps et le lieu (c'est-à-dire le rapport au dehors) nous servent à distinguer les choses que nous ne distinguons pas bien par elles-mêmes, les choses ne laissent pas d'être distinguables en soi. Le précis de *l'identité* et de la *diversité* ne consiste donc pas dans le temps et dans le lieu, quoiqu'il soit vrai que la diversité des choses est accompagnée de celle du temps ou du lieu, parce qu'ils amènent avec eux des impressions différentes sur la chose"

We learn from this exchange that what is at issue in Locke's quotation is a principle of individuality of things, much more than of identity. For as Locke will say a few lines below, spatio-temporal location does not work as a principle of *identity* for a living organism, even a plant, such being only the "organisation of the parts", persisting over the change of the parts. With persons, as it is well known, things gets even more complicated: Locke argues that spatio-temporal continuity of a body (or, for that matter, substantiality of a mind) is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for personal identity.

That individuality is what is at issue, is confirmed by Philalète-Locke himself just below:

"Ce qu'on nomme principe d'individuation dans les Ecoles, où l'on se tourmente si fort pour savoir ce que c'est, consiste dans l'existence même, qui fixe chaque être à un temps particulier et à un lieu incommunicable à deux êtres de la même espèce"

As to the the sarcastic tone, it depends on the fact that, as we shall see in the next section, Locke had officially dismissed this scholastic problem by adop-

d'eux-mêmes ils sont parfaitement semblables, mais aussi ce ne sont pas des substances ou des réalités complètes"(NE, II.xxvii.1/A VI, 6, 230). Moreover, it is untrue to one of the most important axioms of Leibniz, according to which universal truths concerning existing things are only hypothetically necessary, i.e. *necessary under the condition of the actual world being as it is*.

ting Okham's thesis that whatever exists, is individual, and that even if individuality and existence are only extensionally equivalent, individuality is a primitive notion. In this (nominalistic) frame, the real ontological problem concerns universality, not individuality, which is granted by default, as it were. At any rate, spatio-temporal location, declared inseparable from existence, *is* for Locke, *malgré* Leibniz, the only acceptable principle of individuation.

Here Leibniz confirms that the true principle of individuation is on the contrary, to his mind, that "internal principle of distinction" which allows genuine individuals to satisfy Leibniz' Law:

"Le principe d'individuation revient... au principe de distinction dont je viens de parler. Si deux individus étaient parfaitement semblables et égaux et (en un mot) indistinguables par eux-mêmes, il n'y aurait point de principe d'individuation; et même j'ose dire qu'il n'y aurait point de distinction individuelle ou de différents individus à cette condition. C'est pourquoi la notion des atomes est chimérique..."⁷

We learn one more thing from this comparaison. Locke's theory has the apparent disadvantage that individuality and identity over time fall apart in most cases, beginning with plants and ending with persons. What Locke calls "the unity or identity", e.g. that in virtue of which something stays "one and the same" over time (though going through partial changes), is in such cases different from what constitutes its individuality. For example, it would be absurd to say that Socrates stays one and the same throughout his life because of his spatio-temporal location, such location being on the contrary one of the things which keep changing over the time of his life. But even a plant stays the same, according to Locke, in virtue of its "form", i.e. of the persisting organisation of its changing parts, and not in virtue of its permanent location.

Yet if this falling apart may be tolerable in the case of a plant, it is much less so in that of a person. In the former case, we might admit that a plant should not have any other "unity or identity" than a *specific* identity, shared by any other plant of the same species. Remark that, even if not admissible by modern biological standards, it is a conceivable hypothesis, and it is in fact the one which is implied as well by Aristotle's "theory" of individuation by matter, if there is such a theory⁸. Anyway, a *shareable* "unity" of "nature" is what one is committed to by taking spatio-temporal relations as the only individuator of things: bare numerical difference is indeed allowed for by such a principle. But this is the very reason why this falling apart of individuality and identity is not acceptable in the case of a person. Socrates identity cannot possibly be shared by Plato. Humanity can, of course. Not personality, or not entirely.

7 *NE*, II.xxvii.3 (A VI, 6 ,229-230).

8 There is more than *one* theory in the Aristotelian corpus ; for individuation by matter see *Metaphysics*, I, 8, 1034a 5-8 ; V, 6, 1016b 32 ; VII, 10, 1035 b 27-31 ; XII, 8, 1074a 33; See also B. Pinchard : "Le principe d'individuation dans la tradition aristotélicienne", in: P.N. Mayaud (éd.), *Le problème de l'individuation*, Vrin, Paris 1991, pp. 27-45.

Locke does indeed provide us with a special theory for personal identity, which seems in fact designed to the purpose of avoiding shareability, i.e. of obtaining uniqueness:

“For the same consciousness being preserved, whether in the same or in different substances, the personal identity is preserved”⁹.

But this is a quite unsatisfying theory, in many respects. First of all because it does not solve the problem. Personal identity and individuality keep being apart, since a “personalizer” – a set of contents of consciousness and memory – can in principle be separated from an “individualizer”, that is from a particular body with its spatio-temporal location (as Locke’s amusing thought-experiments certify: the personality of a prince can be injected in the body of a cobbler and vice-versa). And indeed, after showing that mind as a substance is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of personal identity, Locke is forced to admit a form of dualism, although a functionalistic rather than an ontological one. It is on this basis that Locke’s theory is rejected by Leibniz. Actually, Leibniz theory of essential individuality provides automatically, as we shall see, *a non dualistic theory of personal identity* – which is no minor reason to approve of it.

It is no sheer chance that Hume, sharing the same “theory” of individuality as existence or spatio-temporal location, simply comes to scepticism about personal identity. Actually, much less than a persisting self is needed to provide people with identity cards! In fact, “personal identity” is a quite ambiguous expression, whose sense swings between “registry identity” and “personality”, two notions corresponding, respectively, to individuation by spatio-temporal location (place and date of birth and related circumstances) and identity of somebody over time. These two notions are logically and epistemologically independent. Yet according to Leibniz’ theory of essential individuality, *they are non-independent ontologically*. This revolutionary non-dualist theory, we claim, is the only good alternative to the Classic Triangle of Ontological Dualism, Functionalistic Dualism, Scepticism, which still haunts contemporary philosophy of mind and person. One side of this triangle – the Lockean-Humean side - is based on the spatio-temporal principle of individuation, which still is by far the favourite one among contemporary philosophers.

4. An Epistemological Criterion for Essential Individuality

In order to see how registry identity and personality are ontologically linked, we must first introduce what we called an epistemological criterion of essential individuality.

9 J. Locke (1690), *An Essay Concernin Human Understanding*, II.xxvii.13, Collated and annotated by A. Campbell Fraser, Dover University Press, New York 1959, vol. I, p. 454.

A particular has essential individuality if and only if its *identity* eludes sensory perception, as well as related (extrinsic) ways of individuation, such as space-temporal location, indexical pointing out, marking or tagging it etc.

A case in point is in fact the one we considered already: knowledge of a person's registry identity, or *personal identity in the weak sense*, is surely not (yet) knowledge of her personal reality – or personality, or *personal identity in the strong sense*: that by which Socrates is Socrates. More generally, that “knowledge” of somebody which consists in one's ability to tell him from another person is not (yet) knowledge of either person a such. It will take me a few minutes, maybe, to learn to distinguish Peter from Paul on the basis of sense perception of them; but no less than a few years to really get to some knowledge of either.

That such a criterion is really discriminating, is undeniable: take a pair of dishes from the same set, and you shall readily acknowledge that it would not make much sense, once I distinguished them or even marked my own for next usage, to inquire further into its real identity, in the same mood in which I could wonder, concerning Socrates: “But *who* is he, actually? *Which* person is he?” Even if I did wonder: “But *which* dish is this?” – I'd surely mean something different, as: “*Which one* is this dish? Is it really the one I marked?”. In short, in the first case I would be inquiring into the *nature* of Socrates, whom I had already physically identified, in the second one I would still be trying to physically identify or single out a dish among others.

On the other hand, the philosophical problem of personal identity is no artificial one for this very reason, that we do spend a lot of time wondering “who is this person?”. Just because there is a personal reality which *goes far beyond* the visible part of a person (which can be pointed to and assigned an identification mark), the philosophical problem of saying what is, in general, to answer this question, is a genuine one.

One may object that, given *any* material object whatsoever, its reality “goes beyond” the visible appearance of it. This is true, but not in the same way as it is with people. A person's reality “goes beyond” his or her visible appearance also *individually*. What is in question is in fact his or her *individual identity*. On the contrary, what I learn about a particular dish beyond sensory information (its chemistry, its physics etc.) is shared by any other similar dish.

The criterion we proposed, though not explicitly stated by Leibniz, is perfectly Leibnizian in spirit. Just recall the already quoted passage of the *Nouveaux Essais* :

“ainsi, quoique le temps et le lieu (c'est-à-dire le rapport au dehors) nous servent à distinguer les choses que nous ne distinguons pas bien par elles-mêmes [...]”

Actually, Leibniz does distinguish sensory and indexical “knowledge” of individuals, sufficient to tell one from another, from *intrinsic knowledge of their individuality* (which is in our fall always partial, and only subsists in God as a *complete* knowledge). Here we can also see why, though epistemologically

independent, extrinsic and intrinsic knowledge of individuality are *about ontologically non-independent features of one and the same individual*. “Ontologically non independent” means exactly what Leibniz means when affirming that any determination of a substance, included those commonly called extrinsic, such as “the individual circumstances of time, place and so on” is included in the complete notion of a substance¹⁰.

That *all*, visible or invisible, circumstantial or permanent, *necessary* and *contingent* features of an individual substance should be *constitutive of the identity of such a substance* (in short, the so-called Leibniz’ “super-essentialism”) is apparently among the most awkward and disputed theses of Leibniz’. It is, among other things, the one that, according to his critics, would ruin free will (it does not, but we won’t argue this point here). Yet in the light of essential individuality as a foundation of personal identity, the thesis seems to loose most of its repugnance. For would you not think that a big deal of a person’s identity, even in the strong, non-registry sense, is made up by the contingent features of her existence, starting from the physical aspect one happens to have? Would you not think that, though going *beyond* this visible appearance, this visage, this way of smiling or walking, and the contingency of his birth’s and life’s circumstances, Prince James’ *individual reality* is *not* separable from all that? I certainly would, and would definitely not be satisfied with meeting in another life Prince James’ personality in an Irish cobbler’s body – whatever this might mean. But, more interestingly, Leibniz himself would definitely share this persuasion¹¹.

5. Individuality: Ontology and Epistemology through History.

Surprising as it may be, both the ontology and the epistemology of individuality are very weak throughout our traditions, since Aristotle’s times and up to contemporary philosophers¹². In fact, most great thinkers seem, in their own ways, to be as unable to account for strong individuality as Locke is.

What follows is a rational more than a historical reconstruction of the Problem of Individuation, as it has been addressed at least since Aristotle and up to scholastic philosophy until Leibniz (whose *Disputatio metaphysica de*

10 LA, GP II, 49.

11 See his criticism of Locke’s dualism, *NE*, II.xxvii.14 (A VI, 6, 240): “Les âmes selon mes hypothèses ne sont point *indifférentes* à l’égard de quelque portion de matière que ce soit, comme il vous semble; au contraire elles expriment originairement celles à qui elles sont et doivent être unies par ordre”(Leibniz’ emphasis).

12 I shall only refer to some well-known thinkers of the analytic tradition, such as P. Strawson, D. Wiggins, N. Goodman; yet a very similar remark could be proved to be true concerning most well-known philosophers in XXth century “continental” tradition, to the exception of the Phenomenologists we refer to below.

principio individui of 1663¹³ owes very much to the last vigorous synthesis of the problem-and-solutions' history, namely F. Suarez' *Disputatio V – De unitate individui eiusque principio*, in *Disputationes Metaphysicae* (1597)¹⁴. In spite of its apparent vanishing throughout modern philosophy, the topics keeps been discussed, often under different headings, up to our times.

Recent scholarship has very well cleared up the different questions that have been raised under the label of the Problem of Individuation, more or less until Leibniz and after him, but particularly within contemporary analytic philosophy¹⁵. I shall propose a somewhat simplified view of the matter, without making any of the above mentioned scholarly sources responsible for it.

The Problem of Individuation comprises at least two questions. The first and more basic one of individuality, namely what it is *in objects* that makes them individual objects, or that *individuates* them. This is an ontological question, by far the most important one in medieval scholastics and Leibniz (or Wolff, for that matter¹⁶). The second question is the epistemological one, which comprises at least two more questions: how do *we* manage to single out individual objects, and to *distinguish* from each other? Is there any further knowledge of them, going beyond "individuation" in *this* sense?

Now the most striking thing, from a historical point of view, is that modern and contemporary philosophy, except for Leibniz and his followers, seem to have perceived the ontological question as pointless, so that, differently from their ancient and medieval predecessors, modern philosophers concentrate rather on some version of the epistemological question. This may be done quite systematically, as it is the case for Descartes, announcing in the opening paragraphs of his *Meditations* that he will suspend belief in the existence of anything not known with certainty – and therefore, in particular, of most apparent individual objects. The ontological question on the nature of individuality is more explicitly dismissed by empiricists. The problem to which Suárez had devoted about 150 pages in 1597 seems to have vanished: it does not take Locke, Berkeley, Hume more than a single sentence to dispose of it:

13 *Disputatio metaphysica de principio individui* (1663), A, VI, 1, pp. 3-19. A French translation by Jeannine Quillet is available in *Les Etudes Philosophiques*, Janvier-Mars 1979, pp. 79-105. An English translation is provided by L. B. McCullough, see note 15.

14 F. Suarez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, Hildesheim 1965, I, V, pp. 145-201.

15 L. B. McCullough, *Leibniz on Individuals and Individuation*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 1996; J.E. Gracia, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages*, Philosophia Verlag, Munich 1988, 2nd ed.; K. F. Barber and J.E. Gracia, *Individuation and Identity in Early Modern Philosophy*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1994.

16 C. Wolff, *Philosophia prima, sive ontologia* / ed. et cur. Johannes Ecole, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1962, Caput II, *De ente Singulari et Universali*.

“All things, that exist, being Particulars [...]”¹⁷

“But it is an universally received maxim, that *every thing which exist, is particular*.”¹⁸

“’tis a principle generally receiv’d in philosophy, that every thing in nature is individual”¹⁹.

Individuality is no longer a problem according to this tradition, because it is just a primitive notion, and one which is thought to be equivalent to that of existence. Existence, in its turn, is only known through sensory experience. A different epistemological criterion of ontological respectability, yet no less severe than a cartesian one.

The epistemological turn seems to have put aside the ontological question, though allowing for some quite particular instances of it. Yet, as we have seen, part of the ontological question comes back, since Locke, under the new label of the Problem of Identity (through time), and in particular, of Personal Identity. But the highly problematic, or rather aporetic Lockean solution of this problem shows that the dismissal of the general ontological question about individuality is far from being a wise move. So does Hume’s scepticism about personal identity. Both issues show that the notion of individuality which is supposed to be an obvious and primitive one is extremely weak, far too weak as to account for the difference between, say, a particular shadow and the person projecting it, as far as their individuality is concerned. Both would be equally good examples of “individuals” according to the empiricist theory. As P. Strawson has it:

“For instance, in mine, as in most familiar philosophical uses, historical occurrences, material objects, people and their shadows are all particulars; whereas qualities and properties, number and species are not”²⁰.

In fact, adopting the notion of an individual as a primitive one does not, by itself, amount to giving up any ontological *theory* of individuality, even if it does make the ontological *question* pointless. It amounts to adopting a very

17 J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, III.xxvii.3, ed. by P.H. Niddich, Oxford Clarendon Press 1975, p. 409.

18 G. Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, in A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, *The Works of George Berkeley*, London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948, 2, p. 192.

19 D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I.i.7, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, London, Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 19.

20 P.F. Strawson, *Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, Anchor Books, Garden City (N.J.) 1963, p. 2. In the same spirit of tolerance, Nelson Goodman denies that any of the ontological criteria of individuality proposed by the classics, medieval or modern, is in fact a necessary condition: “An individual may be divisible into any number of parts: for individuality does not depend on indivisibility. Nor does it depend on homogeneity, continuity, compactness, or regularity” (N. Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance*, Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht 1977). More recently, J.J. Garcia has revived the whole topics, see next footnote.

weak notion of individuality, or a theory that we shall see represented par excellence by W. Ockham, whose nominalism is at the very root of the empiricist tradition. This theory holds that the necessary and sufficient condition for being an individual (or a particular, these two terms being synonymous in this theory) is numerical identity, allowing for any number of tokens of the same type of particular: copies, clones, twins. So defined, numerical identity *does not* imply uniqueness or non-replicability (two individuals *can* differ *solo numero*), but it does imply non-instanciability, as J.J. Garcia would say²¹. As we have seen, this theory is opposed to Leibniz’.

Hence, even theories which apparently dismiss the ontological question in favour of the epistemological one do have an ontological layer. Reminding this point seems to be necessary in view of such quasi-kantian assertions as Strawson’s, according to which the aim of an essay on individuals is

“To exhibit some general structural features of the conceptual scheme in terms of which we think about particular things”²².

In Locke’s Essay a very tolerant notion of a particular does not account for identity over time, thus producing a need for a general theory of identity (and for a special one concerning personal identity). The same need seems to be put forward by D. Wiggins, in a passage which sounds like a retort to Strawson:

“It would appear that a theory of individuation must comprise at least three things: first, an elucidation of the primitive concept of identity or sameness; second, some however abstract account of what it is for something to be a substance that persists though change; and third... the beginnings of some lifelike description, however schematic, of what it is for a thinker at one time and then another to single out the same substance as the same substance”²³.

Locke’s theory of individuality is in fact a classic version of a model which I shall refer to as the Dominant Model (DMI), and which is actually the most popular of two opposed models of individuality. It can be shown to be the one

21 J.J. Gracia, “Individual as Instances”, *The Review of Metaphysics*, XXXVII (1983), pp. 37-60 ; *Individuality: an Essay on the Foundations of Metaphysics*, State University of N.Y. Press, Albany (N.Y.) 1988.

After close scrutiny of five traditional criteria of individuality (Indivisibility, Numerical Distinction, Capacity to divide the species, Identity over time, Impredicability) Gracia comes to the conclusion that none of them can be a necessary and sufficient condition of individuality, except for a special reading of “Indivisibility”, which makes the term synonymous of “Incommunicability” in the sense in which Aquinas and Suarez use it, namely, non-instanciability (i.e. not being a Universal, a Species or a Type). This criterion confirms the plain empiricistic equivalence between individuality and existence, thereby allowing for a notion as weak (and extensionally wide) as Strawson’s or Goodman’s.

22 Strawson., *Individuals* cit., p. 2.

23 D. Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1980, p. 1, emphasis original.

adopted not only by most contemporary philosophers in the analytic tradition, but even by most (or the most influential) thinkers in ancient and medieval times. An influential instance of this model is the theory of individuation by matter, attributed to Aristotle and more or less supported by his corpus²⁴; another is its cunning refinement by Thomas of Aquinas' theory of *materia signata*²⁵.

Let's try to describe the the core-intuition on which all versions of the DMI are based. A thing's individuality has nothing to do with the thing's nature or essence, no matter whether one thinks that individual things *do* have a nature (like Aristotle or Aquinas), or that they do not (like Ochkam, most Empiricists and, apparently, P.Strawson): for in any case what is meant by "nature" (or essence) is thought of as something common (a "universal"), referred to (or even replaced by) a general or "sortal" concept. *Individuality is a matter of contingency*, closely bound to a thing's existence; more exactly, to the *circumstances of its existence*, such as the time, the places, the portion of matter that are taken up by its existence. So for example, Socrates is a man, and he necessarily enjoys all properties characteristic of that nature, or implied by that concept. But this represents exactly what Socrates shares with others men, as opposed to the set of his *accidental* properties – in the Aristotelian general sense of belonging to other categories than substance – which distinguish him from other individuals of the human kind: and particularly the "matter" in which the human form is actualized, the places and the times of this actualization, from birth to death. If we try to extract the very core of this intuition, we come across the old saying: *individuum ineffabile*. I.e., an individual is a *tode-ti*, a *this one here*, that is anything wich can only be pointed at or anyway referred to by an indexical expression, such as « the note sounding *now* ». This is an epistemological (or *quoad nos*) rather than an ontological criterion: yet it is founded in the intuition of existing as *instanciating* (from « *instans* ») whatever is signified by a verbal or conceptual *description*, which is thereby *common* to many things. According to this intuition, individuality is actually characterized as *non-instanciability*, or non « communicability »²⁶, also in the sense of *ineffability*. Individuals are beyond thought and language: not because of a transcendence of some sort, but just in that they are given to the senses²⁷. They are only "knowable" by sensible know-

24 See note 8. For a classic defense of individuation by form in Aristotle cf. L. Robin, "Sur la notion d'individu chez Aristote", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologique*, t. XX, 1931.

25 Thomas Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, II, 4: "*Materia signata quantitate*" can be read as "matter occupying this determined portion of space".

26 "Unum autem numero seu singulare aut individuum dicitur, quod ita est unum ens, ut [...] non sit communicabile multis" (Suarez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae* cit., I, V, p. 146).

27 In so far as XIX century continental philosophy depends on Kant, it does no exception to the dominance of the DMI. Singularity is not thought otherwise as through an episte-

ledge, which is in fact no knowledge by classic or modern standards, but at most “evidence” for empirical knowledge. For from Aristotle to Strawson, there is no science of the individual.

In the preceding sections, we pointed out the limits of a theory belonging to the DMI. One should add its inability to account for individuals either existing but not in space or time, or just possible. Such as God and the angels, but also poems and numbers on one hand, fiction characters on the other hand. In fact, most pre-modern theoreticians of this model hold a separate theory for the individuality of “separate substances” – individuation through form. Yet no new or different idea distinguishes this theory, for individuality is granted to form, once more, through non-instanciability, which in turn depends, quite *ad hoc*, on lack of matter. Angels, for example, are according to Aquinas identical with their *infima specie*, or individuated by it²⁸.

Strange as it may appear, a *really* coherent alternative model of individuality is not easily available throughout the history of philosophy. Yet there are at least three (and quite probably more than three) major exceptions, namely, Duns Scotus, Leibniz and, in more recent times, the “realist” phenomenologists of Munich and Goettingen, in particular Jean Hering²⁹. Whereas nothing will be said in this paper about the latter, we shall be naturally led to a comparison between Duns Scotus and Leibniz on the nature of individuality.

For two things immediately strike the reader of both *Disputatio metaphysica de principio individui* (Leibniz 1663) and *Ordinatio II, Distinctio 3, Pars I, De principio individuationis* (Duns Scotus, end XIIIth century). The first one is the crucial thesis of *Intrinsic or Essential Foundation of Individuality*, which is shared by both theories and opposes them to practically all other known theories. The second one is Leibniz’ rejection (in 1663) of Scotus’ notion of *haecceitas*, which is on the contrary referred to in quite a sympathetic attitude in 1686, in the celebrated paragraph 8 of the *Discours de métaphysique*³⁰. Yet one feels that this homage lately paid to his great predecessor is

mological criterion of a kantian kind (the “multiplicity of empirical intuition”). This is particularly evident in Hegel’s *Phenomenologie des Geistes*, see the Section *Bewusstsein*, the dialectics of Sensible Certainty.

28 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I Prima, Q. 50, Art. 4.

29 J. Hering, “Bemerkungen über das Wesen, die Wesenheit und die Idee », *Jahrbuch für philosophie und phaenomenologische Forschung*, IV (1921). The idea of individual essences was in fact circulating among phenomenologists of the first generation, in particular those among them who worked at the foundations of a personology – and of the regional ontology appropriated to it. We find relevant insights on the ontology, as well as on the epistemology of essential individuality in Max Scheler’s and Edith Stein’s works. Cf. R. De Monticelli (ed.), *La persona: apparenza e realtà. Testi fenomenologici 1911-1933*, Cortina, Milano 2000.

30 “Dieu voyant la notion individuelle ou *hecceité* d’Alexandre, y voit en même temps le fondement et la raison de tous les prédicats qui se peuvent dire de lui véritablement [...]”(DM, § 8; A VI, 4, B, 1540-1541).

more a way to acknowledge a proximity of purpose than a real reject of his own position of 1663. For in spite of his intellectual ripening, which comes to a first quite accomplished result in 1686 with the *Discours*, Leibniz' intuition as to the nature of individuality stays strikingly the same from the beginning to the end of his admirable career.

Scotus and Leibniz seem to share the core of this intuition. They also seem to be the only two really great philosophers to do so. Moreover, this intuition lies at the very heart of their systems. What is then the real, probably persisting, point of their divergence on individuality? This is an exciting question for anybody sharing their concern about (strong) individuality and the different ways to be a particular, and an answer to it should help us to understand the virtues and virtualities of what I shall baptise the *Essential Individuality Model*.

6. Scotus on Essential Individuality

Let's examine Scotus' argument. It is a pretty long one, developed through the seven Questions *De principio individuationis*. But its structure is extremely clear. Scotus starts from the weak point of Aquinas theory: the individuality, or personal distinction, of angels. But this question will be first officially asked and answered as the last one of the seven. This way of proceeding corresponds to the purpose of presenting a general theory, valid for material and non-material substances alike.

The structure of the whole proceeding can be described as a tree, having its root in the First Question: Whether any material substance is by itself, i.e. by its own nature, individual³¹. The affirmative and the negative answers make up the first bifurcation of the tree, the affirmative constituting a branch ready for Ockham's nominalism. For if material substance has no common *nature*, then the whole problem of what individuates it, « reducing » common nature to a particular instance of it, is explained away. This will be, as we have seen, the point of departure for the British Empiricists as well.

There are good reasons for a negative answer, that we can only hint at here. Given any particular, for exemple this stone, a positive answer would imply that one can never see *a* stone, but just *this one*. If the problem of individuation is explained away, on the other hand that of a (phenomenological) foundation of generality becomes insoluble. In any case, Scotus argues in his own terms for the negative answer, which leaves the problem of individuation open to different solutions and gives rise to the second and really crucial bifurcation, or Question Two:

31 Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio II, Distinctio 3, Pars 1, De principio individuationis*, in: D. Scotus, *Opera Omnia*, VII, Q. 1, Civitas Vaticana, Roma 1973, pp. 391-392.; "Utrum substantia materialis ex se sive ex natura sua sit individua vel singularis".

« Whether any material substance is individual by something positive and intrinsic (or not) »³².

Here we find the dividing line between the Dominant and the Essential Model of Individuation. The opposition intrinsic-extrinsic is the opposition between theories proposing an individuator in the category of substance, and theories looking for it elsewhere, among the accidents, and particularly among the circumstances of instantiation of some nature. Only in the first case an individuator will « add something » to the common nature of a thing, which Scotus expresses by qualifying the individuator as « positive ». In the other case the individuator will be « negative », or adding nothing to the nature of the individuated thing, but its instantiation, or existence. A current negative characterization of individuality consists in *double negation*. We can express it traditionally, in terms of non communicability (or indivisibility, or non-instantiability), by saying

NIND1 An individual is NOT instanciable by any other

NIND2 An individual is NOT instanciable by itself³³

On the line of the negative answer to Question Two (no *intrinsic* foundation of individuality, hence no *positive* individuator) we find all foundations of individuality that Scotus rejects, i.e. *existence* (Third Question: Whether any material substance is individual by its actual existence)³⁴; *quantity* (Fourth Question : Whether any material substance is individual by quantity)³⁵; *matter* (Fifth Question : Whether any material substance is this one and an individual one by its matter)³⁶.

Finally, on the positive branch of the main question (intrinsic foundation of individuality, positive individuator), we find a more precise description of that “something positive and intrinsic” in the Sixth Question:

« Whether any material substance is individual by some entity determining nature to singularity »³⁷.

32 *Ivi*, Q. 2, p. 410: “Utrum substantia materialis per aliquid positivum intrinsecum sit de se individua”.

33 An easier reading, also represented in Scotus’ argument, is: a) No individual is different from itself; b) No individual is identical to any other.

34 *Ivi*, Q. 3, p. 418: “Utrum substantia materialis per actualem existentiam sit individua vel ratio individuandi aliud”.

35 *Ivi*, Q. 4, p. 421: “Utrum substantia materialis per quantitatem sit individua vel singularis”.

36 *Ivi*, Q. 5, p. 458: “Utrum substantia materialis sit haec et individua per materiam”. This thesis is attributed by Scotus not to Aristotle, but to Thomas of Aquinas: it is in fact his theory of *materia signata quantitate*, i.e. matter as taking up such portion of space, or matter of such size and location.

37 *Ivi*, Q. 6, p. 463: “Utrum substantia materialis sit individua per aliquam entitatem per se determinantem naturam ad singularitatem”.

Whereas a negative answer to this question is reduced to one of the already rejected thesis, the positive answer constitutes Scotus theory of *haecceitas* (the term is not his own). There is, so to speak, a certain way (*modum aliquem realem*), essential to an individual as such, to “interpret” a given nature, and this constitutes its individuality. This individuality is not accidental, that is extrinsic to the thing’s very essence, since it is “part” of it: it’s individuating part. Individuality is in the category of substance. An individual is by no means an accidental instance of a common nature, “adding nothing” to that nature. Individuality is actually the only “perfect”, or complete determination of a nature, without which a nature could not be individually instanciated. Hence, no nature exists but in particular things (as all versions of the DMI maintain), but, moreover, *no nature is instanciated by an individual without being interpreted by it*. Natures cannot, for this very reason, be dismissed (as they will by Ockham and his followers), for without them there would be nothing essential to the individual, and this latter would again be reduced to the accidents of its existence (time, place, portion of matter occupied).

What *haecceitas*, or essential individuality, adds to instanciated common nature, according to this theory, is most exactly two features: depth and uniqueness.

Depth corresponds to the positive character of the individuator, « adding something » to the common nature, as the personality of Socrates to common humanity. That this something be at least partially knowable to the finite intellect, is not asserted by Scotus. He just maintains that it is knowable in itself or to God.

As for uniqueness, the intrinsic character of the individuator implies it : a thing cannot be numerically one and the same without being *intrinsically discernible* from another, even if very similar. Yet one may wonder whether *embodied* existing, taking up some space or time, necessarily means *being an individual* according to Scotus. And the answer seems negative, for neither existence nor embodiment nor size, measurability, duration are individualiators.

In short, embodiment is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for individuality, because it depends on the common nature of a thing, whether a thing is or is not embodied, and therefore whether its individuality is *also* a particular way to be embodied. On the other hand, embodiment definitely *does not prevent individuation* : surely Scotus’ theory implies no spiritualism at all.

To see this point, take two extreme cases. Take an angel, or if you don’t like them, take a fictional character, for exemple King Lear. It is obvious that neither could *possibly* exist (no more than a man without a definite size, or a general triangle) *but* as an individual: a particular angel, or a particular character. And this quite apart from the necessity, which might well be granted,

of a material support for their *manifestations in space and time* (apparitions or performances). We may well conceive of their individuality apart from their existence in *actual* space and time, as Scotus writes³⁸.

Take a stone. It very much depends on the (common) nature of a thing, how much any token of that kind of things can differ from others. Should a nature be just that of a bit of (biologically unorganised) matter (and not that of an embodied « form »), it would be quite possible for any token of it to be divided into quite similar ones. This would exemplify the case of a nature which is *instanciated without individuation*. The original stone could be « divided » by fragmentation. Instanciation and fragmentation would in this case reduce to the same operation, because nothing should be « added » to common nature of a stone to « restrict » it to a particular (piece of) stone. The fragments of a stone would be stones (as opposed to a dog: no bit of it would be a dog). So, even a stone, *if* it is an individual, is such “by something positive and intrinsic”, for example its shape, not because of any of the rejected principles, such as matter, place and time of existence: on *that* account, on the contrary, a stone could be perfectly like another, without the slightest bit of essential individuality – of personality, so to speak. It would not *really* be an individual³⁹.

Depth and uniqueness, as two essential features of true individuals : this is exactly what is obviously, though implicitly required by common sense in the case of persons. Let come the sceptic and say: I don’t very much see what you mean by “a nature”, and even less what you mean by an « individual nature ». I do see the person, but I don’t see the personality. This sceptic *would* seem to us – or at least to me - afflicted by some sort of blindness. But if a dualist were to come and say: “Well, in what sense a personality is individuating? Take Socrates’s personality and put it in the body of Alcibiades: the result is that *that* individual, Alcibiades, will have changed of personality, not that he will be another individual!”. This remark would be even more unintelligible to us – or at least to me.

On the other hand a body, a visage, a smile, a way of walking do appear to be part of the personality of somebody : that « visible » part of it that we call physiognomy, and that seems to introduce us, though quite fallibly, to the « invisible » part of it. But this truth of the life-world, so to speak, is also implied by Scotus’ theory, which is in no way a dualist one, as Descartes’ will be. For one cannot interpret a *common nature* without *interpreting whatever constitutes* it – and embodiment does, in the case of finite persons.

38 *Ivi*, Q. 3, II, Opinionis improbatio, pp. 418-19.

39 Scotus admits this possibility ; cf. *ivi*, Q 6, p. 473: “licet substantia materialis non sit esse divisa in partes eiusdem rationis, tamen ipsa de se non est indivisibilis in tales partes”.

7. Which Theory is the Best One ? A Conclusion

What is wrong with this apparently excellent theory, according to Leibniz ? To see this last point and come to a conclusion, we shall examine the structure of Leibniz argument in the *Disputatio* of 1663, comparing it to the structure of Scotus' treatise⁴⁰.

Leibniz' argument too is neatly arranged in the perspicuous form of a tree. Yet the first Scotistic alternative, whether or not things are individuated by themselves, has disappeared. This is not surprising, for on one hand, Leibniz does not believe that anything should be added to the nature of a thing to get an individual : things are indeed individual by themselves⁴¹. This is what is usually called his « nominalism »⁴². But on the other hand, contrary to a nominalistic general opinion, he does hold (with Suarez) that a thing is individuated by its *essence* (which is only mentally separable from its existence)⁴³. Here are the two sides of an intuition of essential individuality which the short *Disputation* expresses against the background of all traditional alternative theories, and which Leibniz won't stop to pursue all over his life. Here is the first wording of this idea : «*Omne individuum sua tota Entitae individuat*»⁴⁴. The formula marks the main bifurcation of Leibniz' tree, whose branches are concisely presented by Leibniz :

« The principle of individuation is taken to be either the *whole entity* (1), or not the whole entity. Less-than-whole-entity is expressed either by *negation* (2), or by something positive. Concerning the positive sense of less-than-whole-entity, one may take one of two views : (3) there is a physical part of the individual that terminates its essence, *existence* ; or (4) a metaphysical part which terminates species, *haecceity* »⁴⁵.

40 Leibniz does not quote Scotus but several Scotists. It seems quite probable that his knowledge of Scotus theory is only indirect.

41 *Disp. Metaph.*, § 4 (A VI, 1, 11-12).

42 A "nominalistic" attitude is frequently attributed to Leibniz at an early stage of his career (for a recent exemple, see McCullough, *Leibniz on Individuals* cit.), and described as a rejection of common natures as separate existing entities. Yet Scotus, "realist" as he was about natures, did *not* think that natures could *actually exist* otherwise that *in rebus*, and in particular in individuals (granting common natures a reality *extra mentem* does *not* imply granting them a *separate existence*). On the other hand, Leibniz holds on his criticism of those "monsters" as separate existing common natures, or Incomplete Entities such as General Triangles or Neither-Odd-Nor-Even-Numbers until his death, so that he should be called a Nominalist throughout his life, if this rejection were a sufficient condition to be one. But of course he also came to believe in a quite Platonic realm of Ideas (in the divine mind), representing all possible and not actualized worlds and supporting Necessary or Eternal Truths.

43 *Disp. Metaph.*, § 13 (A VI, 1, 14-15)..

44 *Ivi*, § 4 (A VI, 1, 11).

45 *Ivi*, § 3 (A VI, 1, 11). English translation by McCullough, *Leibniz on Individuals* cit., p. 23 ; Leibniz' emphasis.

Branch (1) is Leibniz' theory. It amounts to defining individuals as a kind of *wholes*. It is the first version of a thesis we find in almost every philosophical writing in Leibniz' mature work, namely, that any determination of a substance, "included those commonly called extrinsic", is included in the *complete* notion of a substance. As we saw above (Section 4) "extrinsic" (that is, in fact, contingent) properties are ontologically non-independent parts of an individual's *whole being*. All contingent circumstances of an individual's existence are included in its individuating essence, beside the necessary characters of the species which the individual belongs to.

Consequently, all theories that Leibniz rejects are on the other side of the main alternative. Since only general theories are taken into account, and no special ones restricted to either embodied or separate substances, Aristotle's and Aquinas' theories of individuation by matter or by form are not represented by the tree. Double Negation (which is in fact the real nominalistic principle) is criticised on the side of negative principles, whereas existence and its circumstances are ranged on the side of positive principles, on account of Leibniz' thesis that existence is not really distinct from essence.

Scotus position in this tree is represented as belonging to the class of all theories identifying the individuator not with the whole, but with a part of an individual's being. Formally, the opposition between the two theories is pretty clear. But what difference does this opposition actually make in the nature of individuality? How does Leibniz' intuition of it differ from Scotus'?

An answer is provided by the first argument presented by Leibniz in favour of (1), running as follows: « That by which something is, is that by which something is numerically one ». This premiss is presented as a rewording of the scholastic sentence, that Unity does not add anything to Being. But in fact *numerical*, that is *individual*, unity is not really meant by the old sentence, unless one interprets it exactly in the sense of Leibniz Law : *numerical unity is founded intrinsically or essentially* (so that *two things cannot differ solo numero*).

This argument puts forward the other idea we find in all mature Leibnizian textes on individuality, next to the one of whole entity : that of unity.

« ... Ce qui n'est pas véritablement *un* être n'est pas véritablement un *être* »

« Mais quant aux substances, qui ont en elles une véritable et réelle unité substantielle, ... elle demeurent parfaitement *le même individu*... »⁴⁶.

We have seen that individuals are wholes of some kind, according to Leibniz. The just quoted textes (and others) provide a clear answer to the question : what kind of wholes ? Summarizing Leibniz' development on substantial unity Arnauld provides us with a condition of non-individuality :

46 NE, II.xxvii.4 (A VI, 6, 231-232).

« Tout corps qui peut être divisé chaque partie demeurant de même nature que le tout, comme les métaux, les pierres, le bois, l'air, l'eau et les autres corps liquides, n'ont point de forme substantielle »⁴⁷.

A mere bit of matter is an aggregate, yet not all aggregate are bits of matter : for exemple a community of persons, a flight of swallows, a machine are further Leibnizian exemples of aggregates having an even looser accidental unity than a stone. To sum up : all the wholes whose immediate constituent parts are (potentially or actually) ontologically independent have no substantial, but only an « accidental » unity. Hence « indivisibility » must be thought of as ontological non-independence of parts.

Individuals are in this sense indivisible wholes, or wholes whose parts are ontologically non-independent : that is, « moments » and not « bits », to apply a distinction familiar to mereology.

Let's apply this idea to our paradigm case : that of persons. How does the idea of a whole provided with substantial unity affect it ? It prevents Circumstantiality and Essence, Extrinsic and Intrinsic Properties to fall apart. This seems a deep advantage for a theory of individuality. For it makes it possible to save the precious core of the DMI within an alternative and more adequate model. This core is the irremissible link between individuality and contingency. This link is not all the story, but surely part of it. Socrates personality is not really separable from Socrates physiognomy, the circumstances of his birth or of his death, the time and place of his life – although it is not *reducible* to all that. Individual *nature* cannot be denied in favour of pure contingency of existence, as the DMI would do, thereby being unfaithful to our intuition that Socrates' personality definitely *is* different from Alcibiades', even in case both were just fictional characters. What we need to do justice to this intuition is *a being capable to transform contingency into nature* – to internalize contingency, so to speak. Once it becomes part of an individual *nature*, contingency is so to speak absorbed within the possible, and actual existence is just a case of possible existence.

Such a being is quite exactly a Leibnizian individual, defined as dynamic point of view on the world. *Given* the world as it is (contingency), any spatio-temporally situated point of view will be *necessarily* different from any other, and so will the inner sequence of world's aspects produced by any individual's life. Hence every individual will necessarily be unique – thereby satisfying Leibniz Law, and the Leibnizian notion of conditional or hypothetical necessity.

Maybe we are now closer to a better understanding of Leibniz' theory of Essential Individuality. But we have not yet made it clear how exactly it differs from Scotus'. How do we know that the two theories are not just verbally

47 LA, GP II, 85.

different ways to do justice of the same (right) intuition ? How can we judge which is the best one ? After all, if the capacity of transforming contingency into nature could be a definition of «mind», in the sense of « personality », it surely would be a radically non-dualistic one. No *such* mind could avoid to be embodied. But as we have seen, Scotus' theory too prevents any dualism from being even *possible* in the case of *human* nature. Moreover, no doubt Leibniz is wrong concerning his « realism » : Scotus does *not* admit of any separate existence for common natures. Is Leibniz distance from Scotus not strongly reduced by these remarks ?

Yet there is a substantial difference corresponding to Leibnizian principle of individuation by whole entity, if this *totality* means not just that, given two actual individuals, there are *at least some* properties that are not shared by both, but that *no property at all* is shared by both. In this case an individual is unique not just in the sense that some properties are unique to it, but in the much stronger sense that *all* properties are unique to it.

Leibniz' emphasis on the opposition between his own theories and all the other ones would then be justified : yet one could wonder whether the price to pay for such a distinction is not too high : would such a theory be plausible?

Let's think of an example. Most of us have experienced joy, at some time of our lives, and « being joyful » is a predicate shared in different times by many individuals. Yet is the corresponding *property* the same for everybody ? Or is joy a state which cannot be instanciated *but individually* ? Upon reflection, the latter imposes itself as the right answer. How can an experience exist otherwise than as somebody's experience, tinted as it were by the very individuality of the person enjoying it ? Shouldn't this state of affaires be generalized ? A way of walking, a way of being a king, a way of loving – aren't all this common predicates highly individualized as soon as they are exemplified by « true », or essential individuals ? Yet this is in no way true of *any* particular. Given two tiles in the same roof, we do not see any reason to suppose that their ways of being red should differ because of the nature of each tile.

Now we can see exactly how Scotus' and Leibniz' theories differ. The very strong uniqueness of a Leibnizian individual seems to follow very straightforwardly from the « whole entity » principle. It is much less obvious that it may follow from the hecceity principle as well – although we do think that Scotus would be happy if it did.

A light note might be welcome at the end of this journey across the somewhat dry landscape of ontology. Leibniz's *Disputatio* ends with seven corollaries, six of which are quite homogeneous to the preceding paragraphs. The seventh is a curious philological hypothesis, questioning the authenticity of the Letters attributed to Phalaris, Agrigentum's Tyrant (VIth century b.C.), and at first sight one wonders what on earth it has got to do with the treatise. But then, of course, Leibniz' smiling genius wins the reader over : a philological refutation of a fake on the basis of its greek text being apparently Attic instead

of Doric and hellenistic more than VIth century style - could there be a more telling exemple of *essentially individuating circumstances*, or a more convincing application of Leibniz' theory ?

VAKAT