

Reply to Brandon Look

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Look raises some short but challenging questions concerning a topic that runs like a red thread through my *Leibniz: Metaphilosophy and Metaphysics, 1666-1686*: the view that drawing parallels with Strawson's conception of a descriptive metaphysics can help to bring out some often overlooked features of Leibniz's early metaphysics. I will try to give some short answers.

Is the concept "descriptive metaphysics" too vague to be useful for my purposes? Strawson gives the following characterization (and, as far as a general characterization goes, not much more than this): "Descriptive metaphysics is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world, revisionary metaphysics is concerned to produce a better structure" (*Individuals*, 1959, p. 9). There is something very clear to the *contrast* Strawson has in mind. Obviously, descriptive metaphysics is meant to be a kind of conceptual analysis. But not any kind of conceptual analysis can go as descriptive metaphysics. Only the analysis of our ordinary thought about the world qualifies. Not the analysis of concepts that are part of a purely hypothetical way of thinking. Thus, the analysis of the concept of person goes as descriptive while the analysis of the concept of universal active intellect (presumably) doesn't. *How* analysis relevant for descriptive metaphysics is done, and how many varieties of analysis there are is another question. In this respect, the concept of descriptive metaphysics indeed is vague. I don't think that there is anything like *the* method of descriptive metaphysics, in Strawson or in Leibniz. But why should there be one uniform method applicable to concepts with different logical roles (e.g., some allow of degrees, others don't; some depend on examples, others don't; some function as criteria, others don't)? I have tried to portray some of the analytic strategies that the early Leibniz applies. In my view, various forms of analysis can fall under the heading of descriptive metaphysics, as long as they bring out something that (explicitly or implicitly) is contained in our ordinary way of thinking about the world and the mind.

Did I give any thought to where the later Leibniz stands with respect to the descriptive/revisionary distinction? In *Der logische Aufbau von Leibniz' Metaphysik* (2001), I undertook to disentangle the revisionary and descriptive strands in Leibniz's later metaphysics. I don't suggest that a theory such as the *vinculum substantiale* doctrine should count as descriptive. I also agree with Look that due

to the continuities between Leibniz's early and later metaphysics it would be a strong argument against searching for a significant descriptive strand in the early metaphysics if the later metaphysics were to be understood as mainly revisionary. But I do think that there is a significant descriptive strand in Leibniz's later conception of activity, identity, and unity, as well as in his conception of truths of reason. Indeed, it was a concern somewhat symmetric to Look's that motivated writing *Leibniz: Metaphilosophy and Metaphysics*: Due to the continuities between the early and later years, it would have been a strong argument against searching for a significant descriptive strand in the later Leibniz if the early work were mainly to be seen from the perspective of a revisionary metaphysics.

Can the concept of descriptive metaphysics be meaningfully applied to the early Leibniz? Again, I'm not claiming that *everything* in Leibniz's early metaphysics is descriptive. For example, his theory of emanative causation in my opinion isn't. But some strands of his thought are. Let me illustrate this point with a passage that came to my attention only after I sent off the book manuscript. Famously, Strawson holds that Aristotle, like himself, is mainly concerned with describing the most general features of our everyday conceptual scheme. Likewise, the early Leibniz writes, when he discusses his own dislike of hypotheses in natural philosophy: "Therefore I do not think that the different plan of Aristotle should be criticised, who strenuously cared not to show a weak side and, avoiding conjectures as far as possible, often preferred not to say anything, or only to explicate the notions that we have of things distinctly (which is certainly of immense utility), rather than to incur the danger of error." According to Leibniz, Aristotle in the *Physics* and the *De anima* "said hardly anything that does not follow from the terms, accurately considered" (A VI, 2, 301-302). Similarly, in many places in his early notes on the mind and matter Leibniz tries to explicate relevant everyday concepts. Strikingly, this is a goal that he, like Strawson, believed to share with Aristotle.

Yet, whether or not one finds the parallels helpful, I could have made every point I made about Leibniz's metaphilosophy without drawing them. Still, my Leibniz would have been very different from the speculative, dogmatic metaphysician as which he is often understood.

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