

Dennis Plaisted, *Leibniz on Purely Extrinsic Denominations*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002. Pp. 128.

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There is something undeniably puzzling, difficult, about relations. Socrates is a fine individual substance, and his paleness a fine accident; but what of his being taller than Simmias? If to our eyes Aristotle is working no harder in chapter seven of the *Categories* than in chapter eight,¹ to medieval eyes things were messier there—or at any rate sufficiently unsettled to yield an extended and hotly disputed controversy than which only the question of universals is knottier. Leibniz evidently managed no better than Aristotle, which scarcely counts against him: there were of course more medieval thinkers offering their glosses on Aristotle on relations than there are Leibniz scholars, but those of the latter who've thought they had something helpful to say about Leibniz on relations would agree that things are unsettled, and maybe even hotly disputed. Readers can gain some sense of this from Dennis Plaisted's excellent but sadly under-reviewed contribution to the debate in *Leibniz on Purely Extrinsic Denominations* (Rochester, 2002), which represents the most extended and detailed attack on broadly "reductionist" readings of Leibniz on relations to date. For reasons owing more to divine intervention than creaturely freedom, the present review is delinquent in a way that discussion of Plaisted's work should not be.

I

I'll give an unfairly course-grained statement of the current dispute here, for purposes of context to be noted shortly. On the one side, beginning with a reductionist strain that Russell (1900: 9, 14-15) saw in Leibniz as surely *there* but in the end hopeless, are those who read Leibniz's texts on relations as inclining toward one or another view about the reducibility of relational sentences, propositions, predicates, and/or accidents to non-relational ones (Rescher [1967], 70-79; Mates [1986], 209ff; Cover [1989]; Sleigh [1990], 75-78, 175-76; Mugnai [1992]; Rutherford [1995], 145-46, 183-84; Cover & Hawthorne [1999], 58ff). On the other side—or sides: there are a couple ways consistently to mix and match—are the non-reductionists (Hintikka [1972]; Ishiguro [1972a]; Ishiguro [1990], 126ff; D'Agostino [1976]; Kulstad [1980]; Wong [1980]; McCullough

[1996] 172-77), with whom Plaisted has staked his claim in urging that Leibniz's denial of purely extrinsic denominations, "far from being a claim about the reducibility of extrinsic denominations, is actually an assertion that extrinsic denominations are genuine properties of the things they denominate"(p. 1). On this reading of Leibniz, the extrinsic denominations 'taller than Simmias', 'father of Solomon' and their kin express genuine irreducible properties or concepts corresponding to relational individual accidents in substances.

The passing context I want is historical and faintly methodological—the second drawn from the first. In *Leibniz' Theory of Relations*, Massimo Mugnai (1992) provided a masterful exposition of the scholastic and late-scholastic nominalist background to Leibniz's texts, and succeeded better than anyone before him in clarifying those aspects of Leibniz's logic and philosophy of language that have given rise to some of the most difficult interpretive challenges.² Different from that approach largely in emphasis, if not consistently with all its verdicts, is this: when it came to relations, my Leibniz was a metaphysician. It could be that Leibniz himself was not, but was something else—'something else' in the charitable sense that some have been pleased to read Aristotle as closer to a conceptual analyst when laying out the categories, or St. Thomas as privileging language over the world when deriving the predicaments in the *Commentaries*, or Leibniz as motivated chiefly by semantic concerns in his many declarations on the predicate-in-subject (P-in-S) and complete-concept (CC) doctrines. Aristotle identifies relations as one of the ten *summa genera*, and in the seventh chapter of the *Categories* strives mightily to distinguish that category from the others but especially from substance, quantity and quality. (We'll revisit that triad presently, where I'll assume as familiar what Aristotle and Leibniz's scholastic predecessors say about quality.) In what he represents as faithful to Aristotle's project, Thomas at least makes clear enough that diversity in the order of predication depends on a prior diversity in the *modi essendi* themselves:³ meanwhile, on the business of relations in particular, Thomas no more than Aristotle or any scholastic commentator is tempted to suppose that falling under the linguistic genus of *ad aliquid* (Aristotle, *pros ti*) predicables suffices alone properly to mark a joint in nature.⁴ The metaphysical details matter first. And here—in addition to recording the moral(s) just sketched—it is worth noting three facets of the scholastic story about relations. (1) First, although in possession of the concept of what we might call "relations *simpliciter*" (say, a doubly-unsaturated dyadic property, likened by them by analogy to an *inter-vallum*⁵), no medieval philosopher I'm

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aware of acknowledged anything in extramental reality answering to it—for most, the nature of substance and accident rendering each unfit for joint ownership, for Ockham and the Mutakallimun, ontological-economic and epistemological grounds respectively ruining their keep. (2) Second, consistently with this view, scarcely any medieval thinker (not even the nominalists) would have supposed that facts like Socrates being taller than Simmias were dependent upon some activity of the mind. Denying that for every distinct kind of concept there is a distinct kind of entity, they were realists enough to grant that dyadic concepts could be answered by non-dyadic pairs in the world: what is truly expressed in the grammatical form of ‘*xRy*’ will have some pair of individual substances *a* and *b*, and some pair of accidents F and G, as its in-the-world truthmaker, its “foundation”. (3) And it is precisely here that the medievals divided on how to conceive such accidents: one camp, on one or another basis of ontological parsimony, exegetical advantages in glossing Aristotle, and/or accounting for relational change, identify what is expressed by extrinsic denominations—nowadays so-called relational (if one-place) predicates—with humdrum monadic categorial accidents (Simmias’ height, Socrates’ height) that serve as foundation; the other camp, in large measure on the conviction that relational facts about substances are quidditatively different from ordinary categorial accidents or even pairs of them, treated F and G as *sui generis* accidents.⁶ The metaphysical tenor of (1) - (3) collectively recommend the moral recorded earlier, but they’ll figure explicitly in what follows.

II

One can, giving metaphysics second place, succumb too quickly to the temptations of superficial grammatical form, mistaking Leibniz’s “there are no purely extrinsic denominations” for the invitation to draw some deeply important adverb-dropping inference: there are GFs even if there are no H-ly GFs (flat table-tops even if no absolutely flat ones). One way in which Plaisted could render his hunch that Leibniz “referred to extrinsic denominations as such because they were extrinsic to, or out of, what they denominate” (p.12) consistent with his fundamental thesis that according to Leibniz all true extrinsic denominations of S are in S’s individual concept and so properties of S (p.11) is by modifying the hunch in that adverbial way. Linguistic salvages aside, it remains largely true that reductionist interpreters of Leibniz have tended toward a deflationary accounting of

the grammar and language, finding little substantive weight (for example) to anti-reductionist reminders of how frequently Leibniz speaks of grammatical constructions of the form ‘_Ry’ as both “relations” and “predicates.” That was a terminological commonplace for the scholastics and late neighbors such as Jungius (1587-1657, in his *Logica Hamburgensis*), even for those who identified relations with their run-of-the-mill categorial foundation. Being responsible for those bits of secondary literature to which (judging from the index) Plaisted devotes the most energy and space, I will be forgiven for briefly posing my Leibniz the metaphysician against Plaisted’s Leibniz—who seems to me rather too willing to float on the linguistic surface of our topic. The richness of issues figuring in Plaisted’s book will I hope be appreciated better by engagement than by description.

In doubting the relevance to our topic of Leibniz’s familiar claim that relations are *entia rationis*, Plaisted is surely right in his first chapter to note a distinction that Leibniz, “though not in so many words, draws between relations *simpliciter* and relational accidents” (p. 7). But it is helpful to see in this lack of so many words what Plaisted does not acknowledge, namely Leibniz’s witting endorsement of a first step in giving a metaphysical account of relations, (1)-style: following (to my knowledge, all) his predecessors, Leibniz is granting that whilst we are in possession of doubly-unsaturated concepts, nothing in the world answers to such grammatical expressions as __R__, reckoning such reality as they have the work of the mind (and sometimes, if importantly as troublesomely, even the divine mind). And here my Leibniz will press the moral further: one can’t read the deep metaphysics off of either the language or their conceptual contents. Extending his critical line to a positive proposal, Plaisted urges that in Leibniz’s oft-quoted “two lines L and M” passage, contrasting the doubly-unsaturated predicate ‘__twice as long as__’ with the relational predicate ‘__half as long as M’, Leibniz’s willingness to associate the second with “that accident which philosophers call ‘relation’”(G VII 401 to Clarke) “appears to be nothing less than a straightforward statement that certain relations can be accidents” (p. 7). I can’t speak for appearances, save perhaps to doubt them as guides to reality. Like every philosopher before him, after taking that first (1)-style step, Leibniz was realist enough to grant the (2)-style point that we’re left to acknowledge *accidents* as answering to the relational predicates. There is nothing in the text, in the history of our topic, or in the good sense of a metaphysician to recommend letting the thievery of superficial grammar trump the honest toil of step (3), still

unfinished. Yes: there are accidents corresponding to relational predicates. The question concerns the nature of those accidents, which no appearances of language can answer.

I cannot claim to know much about the nature of accidents. They're one-legged, alright, and probably modally selfish (fitting just one possible individual shoe). Doubting my grip on the anti-reductionist's claim that relational predicates such as 'taller than Simmias' correspond to irreducibly *relational accidents* in simple perceiving substances, I once asked: "...are we to believe that [Leibniz] rejects accidents with one leg in one substance, the other in another, but welcomes accidents with one leg in one substance and a full-nelson hug around another?" Charitably enough, Plaisted took me for gesturing at an argument, and fairly enough couldn't find anything persuasive (pp. 8, 36-42). The point of the question was not to argue — not, in particular, that since the concept *Simmias* is contained in the concept *taller than Simmias*, then since this concept is contained in that of *Socrates*, by transitivity *Simmias* is included in *Solomon*. (Readers can learn much about extensional analyses of concept-inclusion from Plaisted's rejection of this argument. The upshot by his lights—that individual concepts are not included in extrinsic denominations — leaves unanswered the crucial question of exactly how *Simmias* [not *Plato*, and *not contingently*] could figure in the content of extrinsic denominations expressed by relational predicates such as 'taller than *Simmias*' but not 'taller than *Plato*'.) The point of the question was to ask a question — to ask for some (3)-style metaphysical story about the nature of relational accidents, which anti-reductionists have—still—failed to provide. What sort of accident, in simple perceiving substances, could *be* this *taller than Simmias*? Details please.

Reductionists about Leibnizian relations have offered detailed stories: the one to which (for better or worse) I am closest said that 'taller than *Simmias*' is a fine predicate to which no *taller than Simmias* accident corresponds, there being none. *Simmias*' contribution to this relational fact about *Socrates* is made not by crawling into any accident (or sending in a haecceitistic proxy on his behalf) possessed by *Socrates*, but by simply *existing*, with his height—though of course all of that is either artificial or unfinished business, simple perceiving substances having no height in any straightforward way. Such "containment" of *Simmias* by *Socrates*' accidents as Leibniz permits will be *objective*, not *formaliter*, and such representation as this requires is secured in the distinctive if familiar Leibnizian way, by the harmony-theoretic correspondence of universal expression.⁷ Thank God: that latter business was His in creating such substances as He did to unfold their in-

trinsic states in agreement (cf. G VII 263; G II 95-6), not the business of the superficial grammar of predicates. There are the mind-like substances and their intrinsic monadic qualitative states and God's "arrangement" (cf. G II 95-6), and that's it, full stop.

It is unbecoming of us to suppose—still permitting the artificial example Leibniz inherited from Aristotle on down through the schools—that in addition to creating Socrates with his six-foot height and Simmias with his five-foot, God could secure the fact that Socrates is taller than Simmias only by gracing Socrates with the further accident of *taller than Simmias*, even if we could explain what such an accident was. But never mind what we think God needs, and consider what Leibniz needs. He needs, or at any rate surely wants, these intrinsic perceptual states to be fully determined by the individual substance's own inner nature. Fully, I say, else we make hash of the world-apart doctrine (cf. *Discourse* §14). Plaisted (following D'Agostino [1976], 99) objects by claiming that this doctrine is irrelevant, since causal isolation between substances leaves room for logical dependence between accidents. Here again, details please. The syntactic pleadings of 'taller than Simmias' are of course clear, but shallow: how are we to conceive of internal states of substances, all of which "are only the consequences of our own being" (DM §14) "as though only God and it existed in the world" (to Arnauld at G II 57), to suffer or enjoy such logical dependence as is here required for relational accidents? (Whilst I plead guilty to endorsing a minority position on Leibnizian modality, which is a short step away from becoming relevant here, I remain happy to take seriously Leibniz's reply to Des Bosses' complaint that Leibniz must say God cannot create Socrates without creating Simmias: "He can [too] do it absolutely; he cannot do it hypothetically, because he has decreed that all things should function most wisely and harmoniously" [G II 496]. Put otherwise, my Leibniz's hypothetical necessity of the "agreement" between intrinsic monadic accidents of simple substances is weaker than Plaisted's logical dependence requirement between *b*'s relational accident *Ra* and *a*.)

Plaisted acknowledges the reductionist flavor of various texts, including those in which Leibniz says that the paradigmatically relational *place* (spatial location) "is not a bare extrinsic denomination; indeed, there is no denomination so extrinsic that it does not have an intrinsic denomination as its basis (*intrinsecam pro fundamento*)" (G II 240). This and similar texts can be glossed as Plaisted does—by reading Leibniz to have used 'extrinsic denomination' to pick out not what is expressed by a relational predicate but to pick out relations *simpliciter*, and then

requiring of them a foundation in relational accidents (pp. 10, 69ff). While I am doubtful that ‘taller than’ itself is sufficiently in the post-(1) game at all to get such attention, and am doubtful that what looks to be a truthmaker conception of *fundamento* has ready application to relations *simpliciter*, it is worth noting how Leibniz characterizes the intrinsic foundations. First, that which has a place is said “to express place in itself,” and hence “really involves degree of expressions” (c. 1696: C 9)—inviting at least our earlier perceptual-accident story, for the monadic bits of which I think there is good evidence. Second, Leibniz goes on to say that “when thinking about the categories (*praedicamentis*) I used to distinguish, in the accepted manner, the category of quantity from that of relation”—adding quickly that when he had considered the matter more carefully, he saw that position, quantity, and relation alike do not constitute any intrinsic denomination per se but are all of a sort, demanding “a foundation derived from the category of quality, that is, from an intrinsic accidental denomination.”⁸ There is little hope of finding, in the category of quality, accidents of Plaisted’s relational sort answering to the syntactic structure of relational predicates. Looking beyond *relationes secundum dici* to some metaphysical basis for the *relationes secundum esse*, Leibniz found intrinsic monadic qualities in individual substances.

Anti-reductionists may, as Plaisted does (pp. 76-81), wish to say that facts of place correspond to different relational accidents (of position)—thus securing the truth of the Identity of Indiscernibles (PII). Never mind that Leibniz’s calling such foundations of position “accidents” (cf. p. 79) is consistent with the reductionist story that for any relational difference there is an intrinsic monadic difference: calling it quits with different relational predicates true of putatively indiscernible *a* and *b* renders puzzling why, instead of invoking the trivially easy route to PII via their satisfaction of distinct open sentences (‘five feet from *a*’ [cf. p. 78] true of *b* but not *a*, ‘distinct from *b*’ true of *a* but not of *b*), Leibniz should have undertaken to argue for PII from the Principle of Sufficient Reason (to Clarke: G VII 364). Indeed, that argument of Leibniz’s—essentially of the form “If ours were a world *W* in which there are distinct indiscernibles *a* and *b*, there would be a numerically distinct world *W** in which *a* and *b* are spatially ‘switched’ such that God could have no sufficient reason for preferring *W** over *W*”—makes little sense on the proposed account.

Early on in his book, Plaisted very nicely lays out five lines of argument that reductionists have pursued in their reading of Leibniz on relations. To its credit, critical engagement with all five drives the larger part of the content of this vol-

ume, and my aim in the remarks above is to illustrate by sampling (not quite all) the themes and tenor of Plaisted's replies. Alas it is just illustration by sampling, with a predictable edge: I applaud the book, and wish for it the attention its arguments deserve.⁹

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Notes

¹ Though, witness how *Categories 7* ends: "It is hard to make firm statements on such questions without having examined them many times. Still, to have gone through the various difficulties is not unprofitable" (8b22-24).

² See Cover (1995) and Mugnai (1995) for a discussion of some of these.

³ See *In V Met.*, lect 9, n. 890. Eyeing the moderns, note that even after reducing the modes of being to four kinds, negation/privation and generation/corruption/motion are basically set aside as having too weak a claim on being, leaving his third and fourth as the familiar *per se* (substance) and *per accidens* (accident) divide familiar to later medievals and Leibniz (see *In IV Met.*, lect 4, n. 587: "...illa scientia non solum est considerativa substantiarum, sed etiam accidentium, cum de utrisque ens praedicetur...").

⁴ Thus would Aristotle struggle with two definitions of relation in the *Categories* (cf. 8a29-35), and the medievals would take license to adopt just his second, distinguishing between relations merely according to speech (*relationes secundum dici*) from the proper relations according to being (*relationes secundum esse*): see for example Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.13, a.7, ad 1.

⁵ Cf. Albert the Great, *Liber de praedicamentis*, A. Borgnet, ed. (Princeton, 1984), p. 241a-241b, and Thomas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.28, a.4, obj. 5.

⁶ Aquinas, in claiming that relations must be in their foundations *in radice* (*In V Phys.*, lect. 3, n. 8) is evidently claiming that (i) what is expressed by the relational predicate and (ii) the foundation or truth-maker are formally different while their *esse* is identical (here see Henninger [1989], 13-28).

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⁷ It is to this doctrine of universal expression that Leibniz refers so often in “no extrinsic denominations” texts when associating it with “the inter-connection of all things” (see eg. NE II.xxv.5). Having now laid off the medieval themes, which are unfortunately absent from Plaisted’s discussion, I’ll just note here the relevance of this latter aspect of Leibniz’s account to the *esse-in / esse-ad* features of scholastic treatments: see Cover & Hawthorne (1999), 65-6,76-7.

⁸ Here’s the relevant text (C 9): Ita que cum aliquando deliberarem de praedicamentis, distingueremque more recepto praedicamentum quantitatis a praedicamento relationis, quod quantitas et position (quae duo hoc praedicamento comprehenduntur) . . . re tamen accuratius considerata vidi non esse nisi meras resultationes, quae ipsae per se nullam denominationem intrinsecam constituent, adeoque esse relations tantum quae indigeant fundamento sumto ex praedicamento qualitatis seu denominatione intrinseca accidentali.

⁹ My thanks to Dennis Plaisted for his patience, and to Jeff Brower for his help with the medieval literature.

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