PROSPECTS FOR NOTHING:
REPRESENTING NONBEING AND THE METAPHYSICS OF INTENTIONALITY IN AQUINAS, SPINOZA, AND LEIBNIZ

by
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Abstract

This dissertation is not a monograph but an exhibition of three independent articles I published as a doctoral student:

- "On the Causal Role of Privation in Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics," *European Journal of Philosophy* 28 (2020): 306-322.
- "Spinoza on Relations," in *A Companion to Spinoza*, edited by Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021).
- "Brandom's Leibniz," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 102 (2021): 73-102.

The papers concern, respectively, Thomas Aquinas's views on privation and causation; Baruch Spinoza's views on relations; and contemporary philosopher Robert Brandom's interpretation of Gottfried Leibniz's metaphysical account of perceptual distinctness. In an introductory essay, I explicate the respective content of my three papers, bringing out the philosophical potential of viewing them together. I reflect on their orientation around a common theme: the possibility of thinking about what does not exist—of representing nonbeing. As I reveal, however, one message we can take away from my papers is that Aquinas, Spinoza, and Leibniz are attuned to a more specific problem: how we can represent what cannot be *represented as* existing. My chief aim in the introduction is to examine our thinkers' perspectives on this question with reference to the content of my articles. The introduction concludes by suggesting how the purposeful juxtaposition of three such independently conceived, topically self-contained pieces of research can be philosophically validated.

Primary Reader and Advisor: Yitzhak Melamed

Secondary Reader: Michael Della Rocca

To the inimitable Dr. Glenn Treisman and his peerless residents

> *All actions that follow from affects related to the Mind insofar as it understands* I relate to *Strength of character*, which I divide into Tenacity and Nobility. For by *Tenacity* I understand *the Desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to preserve his being.* By *Nobility* I understand *the Desire by which each one strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship.*
>
> —Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* Part 4, Proposition 59, Scholium

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Each of the three articles compiled in this dissertation was spurred by extraordinary mentorship and teaching. The paper on Aquinas grew out of an independent study on Aquinas's thought with Stephen Ogden. It is a testament to his teaching ability, knowledge, and enthusiasm that I was able to come out of his tutorial with a vehement interest in Aquinas's philosophy having never seriously studied it before. "Spinoza on Relations" was commissioned by Yitzhak Melamed for a magisterial *Companion* to Spinoza's thought that he was editing. Yitzhak's generosity in including me in this enterprise and his intuition that relations would be a topic that would excite me gave the whole basis of the project a positive vibe. My ideas for "Brandom's Leibniz" originated roughly a decade ago in a seminar on Leibniz's philosophy taught at Yale by Michael Della Rocca. It was at that time that I discovered Brandom's brilliant and largely neglected article on Leibniz's notion of degrees of perception. I'd thought about the article periodically ever since, returning to it earnestly in an independent study on Brandom's inferentialism I took with Steven Gross at Johns Hopkins. Steven's incisive comments on an earlier draft of the paper helped bring my ideas to fruition.

Hopkins has been my intellectual home since I entered as a college student too long ago for me to feel comfortable revealing. I'm indebted to Richard Bett, Eckart Förster, Steven Gross, Dean Moyar, Elanor Taylor, Nandi Theunissen, and Michael Williams, whose pedagogical and scholarly example have revealed the riches and rewards of a serious commitment to philosophy (and in some cases, swayed me toward the discipline itself).

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I could thank my family for their "love and support" and my partner for her "patience" while I worked on this project, as is so often done (in some form), but this wouldn't do justice to them and to what they've made possible. Suffice it to say that my parents, Dov and Celia; my siblings, Mori and Fay; and my spouse, Emily, and our two feline children, Bun Bun and Molly, are my ultimate sources of *Amor* and *Laetitia.* My uncle, Cliff, and late grandfather, Allan, have been personal and intellectual role models for me over the years. I am deeply grateful for their unconditional willingness to read and discuss my work and for their special role in my upbringing.

Finally, to my committee members. Each of them is important to me beyond their capacity as my dissertation supervisors.

I was introduced to Michael Della Rocca through his work—namely, his first book on Spinoza. As a newcomer to Spinoza when I read it, I saw instantly the level of insight and the depth of synthesis that could be drawn from Spinoza's texts. My own ambitions as a Spinoza scholar—notwithstanding the motley subject-matter of this dissertation—have been set by Michael's work ever since. Michael has made an even greater impact on me as his student (as he has with so many others). His disarmingly down-to-earth demeanor and wry sense of humor belie the magnitude of his philosophical genius and the formidable combination of clarity and creativity of his thinking, qualities which show through the minute you engage him in conversation.

Justin Bledin was one of the first individuals to make me feel excited and welcome upon returning to Hopkins. In the years that followed I became enthralled by his intellectual energy and impressive originality—both as a teacher and as a scholar. He is the most gifted—and compassionate—teacher of logic I have ever had. It has been a pleasure thinking through Spinoza with Justin, whose uncompromising demand for clarity and precision, keen eye for detail, and ability to see the deeper and subtler issues at stake helped me become a better reader of Spinoza's texts.

Lastly, there is Yitzhak Melamed, my primary doctoral advisor as well as undergraduate mentor. I hope that my future scholarship and comportment as a human being live up to the standard Yitzhak has exemplified for me throughout the many years I've had the blessing of knowing him. There's too much to say about what Yitzhak means to me, so I'll content myself for now with that line from *Pirkei Avot*: *Aseh lecha rav, knei l'cha chaver.*

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Introduction[1]

This dissertation is not a monograph but an exhibition of three independent articles I published as a doctoral student:[2]

- "On the Causal Role of Privation in Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics," *European Journal of Philosophy* 28 (2020): 306-322. [Henceforth, "CR"]
- "Spinoza on Relations," in *A Companion to Spinoza*, edited by Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021). [Henceforth, "SR"]
- "Brandom's Leibniz," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 102 (2021): 73-102. [Henceforth, "BL"]

The papers concern, respectively, Thomas Aquinas's views on privation and causation; Baruch Spinoza's views on relations; and contemporary philosopher Robert Brandom's interpretation of Gottfried Leibniz's metaphysical account of perceptual distinctness. Each paper illuminates the thought of the historical figure with whom it deals textually and in relation to present-day philosophical issues and ideas.[3]

In this introductory essay, I explicate the respective content of my three papers, bringing out the philosophical potential of viewing them together. I reflect on their common orientation around a specific theme: the possibility of thinking about what does not exist—of representing nonbeing. As I propose in the first part of this introduction, however, Aquinas, Spinoza, and Leibniz are attuned to a more specific problem: how we can represent what cannot be *represented as* existing. My main objective in this first part is to unpack this idea and to show how it organizes their thinking. This prepares the way for the bulk of my presentation in parts 2-4. Here I examine our protagonists' perspectives on this question, cued to the content of my articles. I conclude, in section 5, by briefly giving voice to the Leibnizian insight motivating me to present my selection of these articles as driven by a *principle.*[4]

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[1] Note: Readers may want to look at the present essay only after reading the three independent articles that comprise the main part of this dissertation. As a reflective synthesis of major parts of these articles, the present essay goes beyond their content and develops a relatively independent and substantive line of thought. If one wishes first to gain one's own purchase on the constituent articles before reflecting on their combined philosophical significance, then reading them first is a good option. Alternatively, if one wishes to experience the articles as informed by larger considerations from the start – and to grasp the methodological considerations that justify viewing them as connected in this way – then this opening essay is the right place to begin.

[2] This dissertation contains preprints of these articles. Hyperlinks to the published versions are provided in the list below.

[3] Abbreviations of titles of the works of Aquinas, Spinoza, and Leibniz referenced in this introduction are provided before the bibliography and correspond to the methods of citation used in CR, SR, and BL. Abbreviations for specific editions are listed among the secondary sources in the bibliography.

1. Thinking about What Cannot Be Thought of as Existing

Our ordinary and philosophical ways of speaking and thinking about non-existent objects are ubiquitously couched as talk and thought about *things* that do not exist.[5] We have names for *people*, *places*, and *particular objects* that do not exist; *properties* that do not exist; *events* that never occur; *facts* or *states of affairs* that never obtain; *things* that have been genuinely supposed to exist but do not; *objects* mistakenly thought to exist by those who are hallucinating; fictional *characters*; *objects* of fantasy and imagination; and so on.

As the items on this list reveal, the scope and nature of our thought about non-existing objects is resolutely based on the way in which we think about existing things. This reveals an assumption endemic to philosophical—and ordinary—discourse about the nature of the objects of thought: for something even to *be* an object of thought, it must be capable of being *represented* as existing.[6]

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[4] My elaboration of these issues in the main body of the introduction will be fairly impressionistic, being intended to prompt association and reflection. Heavier textual corroboration and engagement will be kept mostly in the notes.

[5] The list below is derived from Crane 2013, 14-15.

[6] Philosophically, this view might be traced to (or identified with) the assumption that all thinking must refer, which relies on the basic dual presuppositions of quantification. When we quantify, we quantify over *objects* in a domain: to be, is to be the value of a bound variable. And we must presuppose that *all* such objects are *something*, that they exhaust the relevant domain: everything is something. For this point, see Caston (1999, 164), who situates it in historical perspective. See also Crane 2013, 16-17.

Aquinas, Spinoza, and Leibniz are not consumed by this way of thinking. They believe that we can have an idea *I* of an object φ which includes the representation of φ *as* something that essentially cannot be represented as existing, i.e., which essentially cannot be represented as having a referent *at all*. For Aquinas, φ could be a *privation*; for Spinoza, it could be a *relation*; and for Leibniz, φ might initially seem like it could be *itself* an idea, namely, the idea of unconscious perception.[7]

Underlying this notion of an *I*-type idea[8] is the view that it is not fundamentally a fact about *objects* of thought that determines whether we conceive of them or not: it is mistaken to assume that an *object* which is not capable of being represented as existing cannot be an *object of thought*.[9] Rather, it may be the case that the *mental act* by which we form an idea of an object might not include *forming a representation of* the object's existence.[10] *I*-type ideas, that is, owe their content to the way they are *formed*. We can illustrate this with the notion of 'privation'. An absence, pure and simple, is nothing at all—it does not exist. But a privation is a constitutive absence or lack. The idea of a privation such as an individual's blindness is the idea of a *particular* absence—in this case, the absence of sight—*in* a particular subject or individual.[11] So, the idea has an object, namely, an absence (or absent feature) that inheres in an actual thing (which is such as to otherwise possess whatever feature is absent). The representation of a privation is therefore not the representation of absence, pure and simple. Still, a privation is a lack, and there is no way of forming the idea of a privation that could bring it about that *it*—the privation, rather than the subject that instantiates it—could be represented as existing.

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[7] Ideas of impossible or self-contradictory objects (such as that of a square circle or of a chimera) might also fit the description, but such ideas arguably lack what I will exhibit as the explanatory potential of ideas of relations, privations, and an idea like that of unconscious perception. They may, however, be a source of edification about the kinds of things we can have ideas of. It is worth noting here that Francisco Suárez, whom I quote just below, distinguishes relations and privations, as beings of reason that have a foundation in reality, from impossible or self-contradictory beings (such as chimeras and imaginary space) as 'negations', or beings of reason which, though they help us explain impossibility and negation as such, are entirely fabricated. See Suárez, *Disputatio Metaphysica* 54, §4, 10 (Suárez 1995, 97).

[8] With the notion of an *'I*-type idea' I intend the word *idea* quite generically, granting the immensely rich and varied connotations of the term *idea* as espoused by, or applied to, the three philosophers I am discussing. I am trying to illustrate a theme or general concept here, not to seriously investigate the epistemology, psychology, and philosophy of mind of each of our thinkers. This being so, some attention to technicality in the term 'idea' will become relevant in my discussion of Leibniz. Note that for Aquinas, the relevant term would not be *idea* but *intelligible species*, i.e. "a form in accordance with which the intellect understands" (ST Ia, q. 85, a. 2). For Spinoza, an idea (*idea*) is "a concept of the Mind that the Mind forms because it is a thinking thing" (E2d3) and whose content is a judgment or affirmation that is identical to the idea itself (2p49ff.). On Leibniz's notion of an idea see below. Among the numerous studies in English of the theories of representation of Aquinas, Spinoza, Leibniz, the following are among the most useful and recent: Stump 2003 and Brower and Brower-Toland 2008 (for Aquinas); Della Rocca 1996 and 2003, and Primus 2021 (for Spinoza); and Simmons 2001 and Jorgensen 2019 (for Leibniz). For a general discussion of the term 'idea' in the seventeenth-century context, see Yolton 1975 and McRae 1965.

[9] Here modifying a sentence from Thomas Reid mentioned in Prior (1971, 118).

[10] Geach (1957, 1) distinguishes objects conceived as *things* from what may be regarded as the *accusatives* of mental acts (which can include things which do not exist), calling the latter 'object expressions'. Geach's distinction is minimally compatible with my conception of the sort of object referred to or expressed by an *I*-type idea (although here I emphasize the way the 'accusative' of an *I*-type idea is generated from the way in which the idea is *formed.*

The notion of an *I*-type idea can be captured more broadly by observing that merely *how* we think *adds nothing* to existence, to the furniture of reality. Consider next this passage from Francisco Suárez (1548-1617), a late-scholastic proponent of Aquinas's views and a significant influence on Spinoza and Leibniz:

> [T]o be seen or to be known is not some real being added to things, nor does it formally consist in a relation of reason, but in a denomination growing out of the act of seeing or of knowing, on the basis of which the intellect can construct a relation of reason, if it compares [*conferat*] one [act] with the other.[12]

Here, Suárez identifies three crucial points stressed by Spinoza in his early writings, and which I emphasize in SR: that (a) the *act* of apprehending what exists—including the act of apprehending 'what exists in the mind', or the contents of our thoughts—does not contribute any being to things

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[11] To say that a privation is an absence that is 'in' a subject invokes the notion of *inherence*, a traditional concept relied upon heavily by Aquinas, Spinoza, and Leibniz (among many other historical figures). In my explanation of Aquinas's views in particular, I will invoke inherence, or the *in*-relation, but without attempting to explain or analyze it, as is impossible in the short space of this introduction. On the *in*-relation in Aquinas and in Spinoza, respectively, see Klima 1993 and Garrett 2018.

[12] *Disputatio Metaphysica* 6, §6, 10; quoted in Shields 2012, 66. On the notion of a 'relation of reason' see *Disputatio Metaphysica* 54, §6, 1: "a relation of reason can be generally defined in a positive manner as a relation which the intellect fashions like a form ordered to something else, or a form relating one thing, which in fact is not ordered to related, to some other thing" (Suárez 1995, 116-17). Suárez is not saying here that the posed relation is strictly fictitious, but rather that the 'order' posited by the relation is *produced by the mind.* In the passage above Suárez says that a necessary condition of forming relations of reason is that there be a comparison between our *own* acts of apprehension; more fundamental than what features of reality we compare is the fact that we are comparing our own apprehension of those features (on some individual basis).

(does not provide reality with further "fixtures,"[13] as it were);[14] (b) what arises from an act of apprehension ("seeing," "knowing") is simply an extrinsic relation (as Suárez puts it, "denomination") of a mind to an existing thing;[15] (c) relations among things are perceived when the mind compares acts of apprehension, as when (to use Spinoza's example), I derive a conception of *time*, as a measure of duration, by comparing my apprehension of the specific motion of one body with my apprehension of the specific motion of another.[16] *Time qua* measure is not something found in what exists, but rather arises from the way I relate my various acts of apprehending what exists. The (*I*-type) idea of a relation thus arises through the comparison of mental acts. Such comparison in no way augments the inventory of existing *things*, just as any mental act cannot be regarded as producing any being beyond what can be ascribed to a mere orienting of the mind toward its subject matter. For Aquinas and Spinoza, the mental act of forming the representation of a relation or a privation does not bring about, and thus does generate a representation of, the existence of the relation or the privation.[17]

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[13] A whimsical aside: perhaps what mental acts produce can be thought of, not as fix*tures*, but as fix*ings*, in both the American and British senses of the term, namely as (respectively) extra items that embellish or complement something (as many of our thoughts do, and, as we shall see, relations and privations do in some sense), or items (like nails and screws) which serve to fix things such as furniture together (which also represents the function of relations and privations).

[14] See CM I 5 | G I/245/1-16.

[15] See CM I 1 | G I/233/30-35.

[16] See CM I 4 | G I/244/24-32.

[17] As I mention below, for Spinoza mental acts are modes of thought; insofar as they are conceived as such, they possess the same ontological status as existing physical beings (they are "contained" in God's attributes). But the strictly *representational* correlate of a thought (or the representational output of an idea) contributes no *additional* being to its (or its object's) reality. For Spinoza, ideas are essentially "volitions," namely, affirmations (or negations) (E2p49ff.), as well as causes (e.g., E2p7s), and so Spinoza would, I think, be amenable to speaking about the "representational output" of mental acts. Although such mental acts or ideas are themselves modes that inhere in the mind (and in substance), the *content* "affirmed" by these ideas is, minimally, merely "comprehended in God's attributes" and only "exists" otherwise insofar as it is given duration by virtue of *being thought* (cf. E2p8ff.). In E2p5d, Spinoza further states that "God can form the idea of his own essence, and of all the things that follow necessarily from it, solely from the fact that God is a thinking thing, and *not* from the fact that he is the *object* of his own idea" (G II/88/25-28; my emphases). We may take away from this statement the point that a representation does not need in anyway to *furnish* the objects that it represents, i.e., to manipulate or be responsible for the structure of reality in any way that would go beyond its capacity *merely* to represent it. Della Rocca (1996, ch. 3) offers an account of this as a general feature of Spinoza's theory of representation.

Yet another way to flesh out the notion of an *I*-type idea is to note how for all three of our thinkers, to exist is to enjoy a basic sort of *independence*.[18] But nothing about the formation of representations of relations and privations causes us to represent *their* independence. (And likewise, Leibniz might be thought to maintain, nothing about the way we could form the idea of unconscious perception causes us to have such an idea independently of our having the idea of *conscious* perception.) To form a representation of a relation or a privation, in particular, is to form the representation of something that is irremediably *dependent on* something independent (or on more than one such thing).[19] Relations and privations, more precisely, are counterfactually dependent on existing (particular) objects—that is, there must be an individual in which privations inhere, or individuals whose features may be the objects of comparison—but relations and privations only shape the way the *mind's activity* is oriented toward its object(s).[20] Leibniz shares this assumption at least about relations.[21] But regarding the sort of mental act involved in forming the idea of unconscious perception, the consideration is special: Can there be *any* mental act resembling the formation of the idea of unconscious perception, given that we cannot *consciously* represent what an *unconscious* perception is like?[22]

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[18] That is to say, what exists (primarily, or exclusively) is that which is properly independent, namely, 'substance'. Thus Aquinas: "it is proper to an individual substance to exist by itself" (QDP 9.1c [Aquinas 1952]); Spinoza: "A substance cannot be produced by anything else (by E1p6c); therefore it will be the cause of itself, i.e. (by E1d1), its essence necessarily involves existence, *or* it pertains to its nature of exist" (E1p7). Leibniz: "we must say that there is nothing in things but simple substances, and in them, perception and appetite" (letter to de Volder, June 30, 1704, AG 181), and it is "necessary that these simple substances exist everywhere and that they be self-sufficient (with respect to one another)" (letter to de Volder 1704/5, AG 181).

[19] In his recent book, *The Parmenidean Ascent*, Michael Della Rocca (2020, 189) argues that the view that "things or facts of various kinds are fundamentally loose and separate … makes whatever relation these things or facts happen to enjoy arbitrary and ungrounded." Another way Della Rocca could describe how the arbitrariness of relations or of relatedness results from such espousal of 'discreteness' would be to say that the view treats relations themselves as "loose and separate" things, implying problematically that the connection relations establish between and among other discrete things is accomplished by way of superaddition. This might make for something like a match-stick ontology where the distinction between what counts as a feature of the ontological edifice (which we may imagine as a structure built out of matchsticks) and what links such features is elided (all we have is a structure built *of match sticks*, i.e., a structure which has no internally distinguishable features). A view on which relations are the products of mental acts but cannot themselves even be *represented* as existing independently (like ordinary objects) would push against the tendency to treat relations as discrete 'items'. This might prevent relations from being implicated as "loose and separate" things, the ontological primacy of which Della Rocca keenly challenges (for all cases, including those of things, facts, and beliefs).

[20] Another way to put this is that relations and privations are not compatible with the nonexistence of the objects in which (respectively) they inhere or they relate. But it is in virtue of the mind's activity, not of independent facts about the subject in which a privation inheres or the relata of a relation, that determines whether a privation or a relation is an object of thought (involving such a subject or such relata).

[21] Leibniz thinks that "relations arise spontaneously the moment when at least two objects with their modifications or properties are thought together" (Mugnai 1992, 111). It is unclear, however, the extent to which Leibniz talks about

Such a worry might not seem unique to Leibniz, however. Concerning *I*-type ideas in general we can ask: How could it be possible to know anything about a mental act by which we represent something which we cannot represent as existing? How, indeed, could it be possible for an *I*-type idea to inform how we do represent the way things exist? My essays elucidate these two questions by shedding light on their conjunction: Is it possible to understand something positive about the content of an *I*-type idea *by* understanding the way such an idea may inform how we represent, or conceive of, the way things are? In what follows, I discuss how this twofold question operates in my analyses of Aquinas's concern with whether we can have an idea of the causal role of privations; Spinoza's attempt to articulate the ontological status and cognitive and explanatory function of relations; and the problem, highlighted by Brandom, of the questionable intelligibility of the idea of unconscious perception in Leibniz. Let us turn to the essays.

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privations in terms of the products of mental acts. Neither Spinoza nor Leibniz have as much to say about privation as Aquinas does. But all three philosophers minimally, or in some respect, follow Aristotle in treating the *notion* of privation as that of the contrary of some form of possession. (For Aristotle, this definition governs every sort of metaphysical contrariety; see *Metaphysics* I 4, 1055a33 ff, and Bogen 1992). Aquinas, Spinoza, and Leibniz, in a general vein, associate privation with limitation of *perfection*, or being, with Aquinas and Leibniz marshalling this notion specifically with respect to the topic of evil. (Spinoza, critical of the notion of 'evil' itself, appeals, like Descartes, to the notion of privation in discussions of knowledge, defining *falsity* as the privation "that inadequate knowledge of things, *or* inadequate and confused ideas, involve[s]" [E2p35d]). Although all three of our thinkers teach us about the meaning of having an idea of that which cannot be represented as existing, it should be emphasized that they do not all see eye-to-eye concerning the natures of privations and relations specifically. Below I flag some of the instances in which their conceptions diverge. For two accounts of Leibniz's views of privation (specifically in the context of his discussions of the metaphysics of evil), see Antognazza 2014 and Newlands 2014. For an older treatment of Spinoza's views on privation, see Demos 1933.

[22] I say "*resembling* the formation": for Leibniz, ideas are not *formed*; they are innate and permanent dispositions and are the objects of *thoughts* which we form. Leibniz firmly rejects the view that ideas are mental *acts* ('*actions*') (see NE 52). So the question would be better stated as whether unconscious perception is an actual idea that we can, in principle, form the thought *of*. See the discussion of Leibniz below.

2. Aquinas on Privation

Aquinas would have recognized the notion of an *I*-type idea in the guise of what he identified as a 'being of reason' (*ens rationis*).[23] Suárez, whom I quoted earlier, helpfully defines the notion of an *ens rationis* in his *Metaphysical Disputation* 54: "[W]hat is normally and rightly defined as a being of reason is *that which has being only objectively in the intellect* or is *that which is thought by reason as being* [ut ens]*, even though it has no entity in itself* [in se entitatem non habeat]."[24]

Much of the force of this definition is contained in Suárez's phrase, 'being objectively in the intellect' (*esse objective in intellectu*), which helps bring out the connection between the notions of a being of reason and an *I*-type idea. For Aquinas—and standardly for scholastic and early modern philosophers—the 'objective being' of an idea refers to what, essentially, we now call its intentional content—what an idea is *about*. The definition I quoted from Suárez does not mention a further notion, present in both Aquinas and Suárez, that has to do with how concepts are *formed*.[25] This aspect of a concept embodies the *basis for* a concept's having a certain content objectively. On this (scholastic) picture, concepts are formed in such a way as to "terminate" in a given representation or objective content. In the case of representations of privation, as we will see, summing or conglomerating actual states of affairs, while applying background knowledge about essences and natural kinds, may *lead us* to represent that a particular subject is lacking a certain feature which it should have. In short, the 'objective' aspect of a concept concerns *that which* the concept represents, whereas the way a concept is formed concerns *that by which*—i.e., the mental activity through which—the concept represents what it does.[26]

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[23] Two *loci classici* of Aquinas's conception of a 'being of reason' are II *Sent* 34, 1, 1 and *In Meta* 5, 9, n.896; see Klima 1993, 26. The concept of a 'being of reason' is philosophically and historically rich and has been fairly neglected as a topic of study by historians of western philosophy. Those who do pay attention to it often treat it as denoting a representation that is 'merely in the mind' (often implicitly or explicitly stressing the 'merely'), a description generically apt for ontologically denigrated entities like universals, relations, and chimeras. I cannot explore the many historical and philosophical facets of the notion of a being of reason in this introduction, but I do aim to put it and some of its rich philosophical implications on center stage. Aside from Aquinas, Suárez has the most richly elaborated theory of beings of reason (to which he devotes *Disputatio Metaphysica* 54), and I draw largely on Suárez to frame my discussion of this topic. For a helpful treatment of the notion of a being of reason in 'Baroque scholasticism' (including Suárez), see Novotný 2013.

An important question, which I do not take up here but which the reader should keep in mind as we go along, is whether the notion of a being of reason, as I document it and as it is characterized independently by thinkers like Suárez and Aquinas, is perfectly coextensive with my notion of an *I*-type idea.

[24] Italics in original; the full Latin reads: "Et ideo recte definiri soletens rationis esse illud, *quod habet esse objective tantum in intellectu, seu esse id, quod a ratione cogitatur ut ens, cum tamen in se entitatem non habeat*" (*Disputatio Metaphisica* 54, §1, 6; Suárez 2009, vol. 2, 1016; English translation in Suárez 1995, 62). For helpful discussion of this passage see Shields 2012, 64-65.

[25] The distinction I am characterizing between the objective being of a concept and the *way* in which (or that by which) the concept is formed (what Suárez terms the 'objective concept' and the 'formal concept', respectively; see the quote in the next note) should not be directly conflated with the distinction, familiar to most of us from Descartes, between the 'objective being' and 'formal being' of an idea. Descartes's own definition and elucidation of the latter distinction shed light on its difference from the distinction between the objective being and what we might call the *formative* element of 'ideas' (more properly, for Suarez, 'concepts' and for Aquinas 'concepts' or 'intelligible species'). In a

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famous passage from his Replies to the First Set of Objections to the *Meditations*, Descartes sets forth his conception of the distinction between the objective and the formal being of ideas as follows: "'Objective being' in the intellect will not here mean 'the determination of an act of the intellect by means of an object', but will signify the object's being in the intellect in the way in which its objects are normally there. By this I mean that the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect—not of course formally existing, as it does in the heavens, but objectively existing, i.e. in the way in which objects normally are in the intellect." Descartes immediately goes on to insist that the basis for his characterization of the distinction is his concern with the cause of the objective being of an idea, not insofar as it is the product of the mind's *operations*, but insofar as the "intricacy" of an idea is concerned (Descartes 1984, 75). He thus compares the complexity of a machine—the intricacy of the design of a machine insofar as it exists extramentally—and the objective complexity of our idea of the machine, saying that the structural intricacy possessed by the former must be the 'cause' of whatever degree of intricacy our representation or idea of the machine possesses. What *causes* the content of our idea or representation to have the content that it does is not some mental act that contributes to our understanding of the machine but is somehow a consequence of the *relation* between the content of our idea and the structure of the machine itself, which contributes to that (imperfectly resembling) content.

On the other hand, what I am calling '*I*-type ideas' and am likening generically to beings of reason are best viewed as ideas *of* the output of structured mental activity (summing and incorporating actual states of affairs, in Aquinas's account of privations, and comparing observable features of distinguishable objects so as to represent them *as* distinct, in Spinoza's account of relations) whose content thus invariably relies on the *operations* of the mind. A major theme here is that, *pace* Descartes, such operations—through their "terminating in" or giving rise to ideas of things, like privations and relations, which cannot be represented as existing—*inform* our understanding of extramental reality by contributing to our *conception* of its structure without depending for their content on an existing relation between the structure of extramental objects and the mind's representations. For three helpful studies of Descartes's views on objective and formal being particularly in relation to Aquinas's and other scholastics' theories of representation, see Brown 2007, Hoffman 2009, and Normore 1986.

[26] See Aquinas, ST Ia q. 85, a. 2c (Aquinas 1948, 1: 434): "[T]he likeness of the thing understood, that is, the intelligible species [sc. the 'objective content', in Suárez's terminology], is the form by which [*quam*] the intellect understands. But since the intellect reflects upon itself, by such reflection it understands both its own act of intelligence, and the species by which [*qua*] it understands." And Suárez, *Disputatio Metaphysica* 2, §1, 1: "That thing or nature which properly and immediately is known or represented through the formal concept [*conceptum formalem*] is called 'objective concept' [*Conceptus obiectivus*]. For example, when we conceive of a human, that act [*actus*] which we effect in the mind in order to conceive of the human is called 'formal concept'. But the human known and represented by that act is called 'objective concept', conceived indeed through extrinsic demoniation by the formal concet (through which [*per quem*] its object is said to be conceived) and therefore rightly called 'objective'. For the concept is not conceived as a form intrinsically terminating [*intrinsece terminans*], but as the object and matter [*obiectum et materia*] to which [*circa quam*] the formal concept is directed and to which [*ad quam*] the formal concept is directed [*versatur*] and to which the eye of the mind directly extends [*directe tendit*]…" (trans. Sydney Penner, < http://www.sydneypenner.ca/translations.shtml#dm >.)

Spinoza and Leibniz follow Aquinas (and other medieval philosophers) in recognizing the basis of beings of reason in how certain ideas are formed.[27] In regard to Aquinas, Suárez's definition of a 'being of reason' captures the essence of an '*I*-type idea' in the following way. We may grant, for example, that Homer would exist, but not with sight, whether there were any minds to perceive this. Without a mind, however, nothing could *bring* the state of affairs described by the statement *Homer is not sighted* to entail the state of affairs described by the statement *Homer is* un*sighted*. Homer is not sighted, but, *qua* human—as opposed to *qua* rock or *qua* mole—he *should* be. So when the mind 'incorporates' the representation *Homer is (qua human)*, with *Homer is not sighted*, we form the further, summed or incorporated representation of Homer as—by virtue of his humanity—*lacking* sight or as *unsighted* (as opposed to merely *not* sighted).[28] This summation or incorporation, a structured mental activity, brings about the *I*-type idea of a particular privation in Homer, *blindness*. Reason ascribes 'being' to this representation as the output of the relevant type of structured mental activity, giving us a *being of reason*.[29] A being of reason, such as the representation of privation, is, as Suarez's definition states, "thought by reason as being [*ut ens*]," even though the privation—e.g., the representation of a lack of sight in an individual—is not itself an "entity" (*entitas*). In this way, the notion of a being of reason corresponds to the notion of an *I*-type idea—the idea of something which cannot be represent as existing, where the representation of *non*existence arises from the way in which the idea is formed.

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[27] *Modulo* Leibniz's view that thoughts, not ideas, are formed.

[28] Cajetan, in his commentary on Aquinas's *On Being and Essence*, illuminatingly describes ideas of privations as formed from a process or operation of summation of (actually indifferent) states of affairs by incorporation of these states of affairs into a proposition formed by the mind (where the absence of a feature in actuality is rendered a predicate term of a proposition and attached to a subject term denoting an actually existing being). For illustrative and historical purposes, it is worth quoting the relevant passage in full: "Although Socrates may be blind without any intellect considering this, and does not become more or less blind because an intellect does consider it, yet blindness has no being (*esse*) in Socrates when an intellect does not consider it; for both of these propositions are true at the same time. This is explained thus. For Socrates to be blind as such is not for Socrates to have any substantial being (*esse*), as is clear, nor accidental, because Socrates is blind by the sole absence of visual power, and this adds nothing to Socrates; whence blindness adds no being (*esse*) whatever to Socrates. Thus, because the power of vision is lacking in Socrates without the consideration of any intellect, Socrates must be blind without any intellect considering it. A question arises here because one does not correctly see that to be blind is not to be something, but to lack the power of vision. For example, a ship is without a pilot, and no intellect considers this. The absence of the pilot does not give the ship any substantial or accidental being (*esse*), whence for the ship to be without a pilot is not to be something outside the soul, but not to be piloted. For privations and negations acquire being (*esse*) and become beings because the intellect, conceiving (*intelligens*) privations through positive properties (*habitus*) and negations through affirmations, in some way forms in itself some sort of image of the thing lacking. For example, when the intellect forms in itself a kind of image of a ship without a pilot, which is this mental proposition, the ship is without a pilot, the non-presence of the pilot, which is nothing outside the soul, becomes a being in the soul because the intellect makes it the term of a proposition; and since this being (*esse*) is in the soul and it has no other being (*esse*), the result is that negations and privations of this kind are not beings except in the soul objectively. Thus their being (*esse*) is nothing else than to be thought of (*intelligi*), the only manner in which all beings of reason have being (*esse*)" (Cajetan 1964, 64-65; quoted and discussed in Klima 1993, 29).

A telling passage from Aquinas's *De veritate* profoundly elicits this comparison.*[30]* In it, Aquinas considers and rejects the view that 'non-existence' can *cause* the intellect to form negative propositions—propositions *about* the nonexistence of certain things—whose representational content, by virtue of being formed in this way, is veridical, i.e., true *of* what is 'non-existing'. He writes:

> Non-existing is not the cause of the truth of negative propositions in the sense that it causes them to exist in the intellect [*in intellectu*]. The soul itself does this by conforming [*conformans*] itself to a nonbeing outside the soul [*extra animam*]. Hence, this non-existing outside the soul is not the efficient cause of truth in the soul, but, as it were, its exemplary cause [*... non est causa efficiens veritatis in anima, sed quasi exemplaris*]. The difficulty is based upon the efficient cause.[31]

The main reason that Aquinas denies the possibility, mentioned in first sentence of the passage, about the causality of nonexistence on the mind is that, for him—and plausibly—what does not exist cannot have causal properties. His alternative to this view is suggested in the two sentences that follow: "The soul itself does this [i.e., causes negative propositions to exist in the intellect] by conforming itself to a nonbeing outside the soul. Hence, this non-existing outside the soul is not the efficient cause of truth in the soul, but, as it were, its exemplary cause." These statements pertain to the question of how we can have ideas of privations given the "nonbeing" of privations and given the fact that ideas of privations—the ideas of nonbeings—cannot be efficiently caused to exist in the mind. The answer turns on the very nature of an *I*-type idea.

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[29] See Suárez, *Disputatio Metaphysica* 54, §1, 16.

[30] I analyze this passage at length in CR, pp. 312-15.

[31] QDV 1.8; CR, p. 312.

To understand how, consider the notion of "conformity" that Aquinas appeals to in this passage in saying that the intellect causes negative propositions to exist in the intellect by conforming itself to a nonbeing outside the soul. Such "conformity," Aquinas thinks, exists between a "negative proposition" about a privation (such as blindness) inhering in an actual subject, and the object to which it applies, namely (what it represents as) the actual absence of sight in that subject. Such an inhering lack would be what Aquinas calls "a nonbeing outside the soul." We can grasp Aquinas's notion here through the following intuitive example.

In basic photography, negative versions of an image will allow us to produce positive prints of that image. But the negative versions wouldn't allow us to do this if they were not structural inversions of the positive prints produced from them. (In CR, pp. 313-14, I use the notion of 'negative space' in drawing to illustrate this point.) We might think of Aquinas's notion of "nonbeing outside the soul" as referring to the complementary, "negative version" of an object in actuality, the latter corresponding to the "positive print" in our example. This "nonbeing outside the soul," or the "negative version" of an actual object, is what presents the mind with an "exemplar" of the actual object by (inversely) delineating its form. Just so, we may say that the thought of Homer's blindness, like the negative version of a photographic print, delineates the positive form of Homer insofar as it is actually the case that Homer does not exist with sight. To slightly adapt Gyula Klima's apt formulation: for Homer's blindness (to be represented) 'to be', is for Homer's sight (in actuality) 'not to be'.[32]

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[32] See Klima 1993, 30.

In forming the idea of a particular individual's blindness, what the mind represents as "outside" it—i.e., what it represents as inhering the individual—is something that is absent or does not exist—a nonbeing. This absence, or nonbeing, exists "outside the soul" insofar as it constitutes the negative correlate of a feature which an existing being has in actuality, and in this sense the absence "informs" the existing being. But precisely insofar as the relevant absence is definitively the negative correlate of an aspect of a thing's actual form, the absence cannot be represented *as* an actual being. Aquinas's odd phrase, "nonbeing outside the soul," is thus uniquely elucidated by the notion of a privation as an *I*-type idea.

A key take-away message from the *De veritate* passage above—and from CR—is, then, that for Aquinas it can be a relation of conformity through constitutive contrast, rather than strictly a relation of efficient-causal influence, that accounts for how thought latches onto actuality. The notion of an *I*-type idea, specifically, the idea of privation, provides us with insight into the character of thought's relation to actuality, into how things stand between these two. Indeed, the notion of an *I*-type idea reveals *what stands between* thought and actuality, viz. *nonexistence* insofar as it inheres in something actual, but corresponding to which there would be no *truth* were it not for the mind's activity in representing that which cannot be represented *as* existing. This unique explanatory role of *I*-type ideas exhibits their peculiar nature. Here we have one demonstration that it is possible to understand something positive about the content of an *I*-type idea by understanding how such an idea informs the way we represent how things are.

My central line of argument in CR—which subsumes the foregoing reflections—provides additional proof of this result. I argue that Aquinas thinks that we can understand something substantive about the nature of privation by examining the role that privations play in determining how and under what conditions causal agents can produce certain effects. Homer's blindness, for example, delimits the kinds of actions he can perform and the causal relations he can enter into. But Homer's blindness, as a lack or absence, is not the sort of thing that can bring it about that Homer *does* perform any of these actions or enters into any of these causal relations. Because it does not follow from Homer's *blindness* that he performs certain actions and enters into certain causal relations, it cannot be on account of his blindness that Homer affects things other than Homer.

Importantly, these are all truths about blindness in Homer that we can *know.* We *know*, for example, that the statement 'Homer stumbled because he is blind' is false—to the extent that Homer's blindness prevents him from counting as the efficient cause of effects either in himself or in others—*because* we can form an *idea of* a privation—*blindness* in this case. Homer not existing with sight—in actuality—is a condition of its being true that he has limited efficient-causal capacities, but what accounts for its *being a truth* that his causal powers are limited in this way is something that can be established only by synthesizing the state of affairs of Homer (*qua* human) existing, on the one hand, with the state of affairs of Homer not existing with sight, on the other. This synthesis is reflected (partly) in the understanding *that his* status as an efficient cause is thereby limited—in our grasp *that* the relevant limitation applies *to Homer*, the human being.[33] And this understanding is based on the *formation* of the (*I*-type) idea of *Homer's blindness*—of *Homer's* lacking sight.

Thus, according to Aquinas, that Homer is blind can be importantly true. We can use this knowledge to draw conclusions about Homer and about the way Homer can or cannot enter into causal relations. The proposition that Homer is blind may also ground other predications of Homer (true or false), such as that Homer stumbled because he is blind. Yet, however we apply the *I*-type idea of the privation referred to as *Homer's blindness*, we will have failed to assert or represent a truth about the existence of the privation, recognized simply as a lack. As Aquinas's analysis of the causal role of privation reveals, then, the relation of privation to truth and inference is consistent with the status of ideas of privation as *I*-type ideas. In this way as well, the argument of CR provides an answer to the twofold question with which we began.

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[33] See ST I, q. 87, a. 3c; QDV 2, 2 ad 2; 10, 9 c; and QDV 1, 9, c.

In the next section, we observe variations in how Spinoza and Aquinas view beings of reason as ideas of the ways in which certain representations are formed as well as the output of those ideas; how privations (for Aquinas) and relations (for the early Spinoza) fill out the profile of an *I*-type idea, or *ens rationis*, in distinctive ways; and another means—Spinoza's—of putting *I*-type ideas to epistemic use, and the epistemic limitations that attend this use.

3. Spinoza on Relations

SR explores various aspects of Spinoza's early views about relations. It centers on two early texts: the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* (henceforth, "KV") which Spinoza began composing c. 1660; and the *Metaphysical Thoughts* (henceforth, "CM"), an appendix to Spinoza's *Principles of Descartes's Philosophy*, a commentary, published in 1663, on Descartes's own *Principles of Philosophy* of 1644. In this section I consider how, for Spinoza in these early works, relations are *I*-type ideas. In the first subsection, I elucidate Spinoza's conception of ideas of relations as *entia rationis* by juxtaposing it with Aquinas's views on ideas of privations. In the second, I touch on the issue, broached in SR, of whether for Spinoza *all* ideas of relations are *I*-type ideas.

3.1. Spinoza and Aquinas: Relations vs. Privations

Spinoza explicitly conceives of relations under the guise of *entia rationis.* He writes in KV I 10:

> Some things [*dingen*] are in our intellect and not in Nature [*in ons verstand ... niet in de Natuur*], so that these are only our own work, and they help us to understand things distinctly [*onderscheidelijk ... verstaan*]. Among these we include all relations [*betrekkingen*], which have reference to different things. These we call *beings of reason* [*Entia Rationis*].[34]

Following Aquinas (and Suárez), Spinoza considers negations, privations, and relations to comprise the essential list of representational contents (along with mental acts that produce them) the ideas of which we refer to as beings of reason.[35] Hence, both Spinoza and Aquinas view privations and relations within the framework of *entia rationis.* In this framework, a first, elementary point about the difference between ideas of relations and ideas of privations concerns the structure of the operations which forming them involves. Recall that for Aquinas ideas of privations are the output of structured mental acts by which we incorporate the representation of a particular individual, as a member of a given natural kind (say, 'humanity'), with the representation of the absence of a feature in that individual which it duly possesses *as* a member of that kind. In this context, a being of reason is formed through the *incorporation* or *summation* of certain representations. By contrast, for Spinoza, as we glean from the KV passage quoted above, to form the idea of a relation involves *distinguishing*, or viewing respectively (*onderscheidelijk*), the observable features of objects (*dingen*) in empirical reality so as to *understand* (*verstaan*) or (as he writes in CM) to be able to "retain, explain, and imagine"[36] those objects *as distinct*.

Representations of relations and of privations, on Spinoza's and Aquinas's respective views of them as *entia rationis*, also differ in how they relate to the actual, or real, objects upon which they depend. A privation, as an absence of due *form*, inheres in the intrinsic nature of a given object. This enables a privation such as *blindness*—the idea of which denotes the lack of sight in something that is supposed to see—to be predicated of Homer on account of his membership in the class of human beings, a class of beings whose nature includes the normative ability to see. It is ultimately due to Homer's particular instantiation of the essence (or substantial form) of 'humanity' that the proposition that Homer is blind can be both referential and true.

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[34] KV I 10 | G I/49/5-8.
[35] See G I/234/25–28; I/245/1; I/234/27; SR 180.
[36] CM I 1 | G I/233/32.

Concerning ideas of relations and beings of reason generally, Spinoza takes a contrary view. For him, beings of reason and, more specifically, representations of relations have no tie to necessary or possible conditions which would invariably make them true.[37] In CM, Spinoza illustrates this by observing that "love cannot be called true or false, but [only] good or bad."[38] *Love* is a relation, and it cannot be "true or false" for a variety of reasons.[39] One reason could be seen to stem from this relation's formal features. *Love* is a non-symmetric relation: it is logically possible for it to be true that *Sally loves Bill* yet at the same time be false that *Bill loves Sally*. Replacing 'Sally' with 'Bill' in the statement '*x* loves *y*' changes the statement's truth value. It follows that no statement made about things standing in the *love* relation will be true about those things by virtue merely of their standing in that relation. The idea of *love* thus diverges from the notion of *blindness*, insofar as Homer's actually or possibly not existing with sight *would* verify the idea that Homer is (or could be) *blind*.[40] More characteristic of Spinoza's discussion of relations in the CM and KV is the contention that anything we would call a "truth" about *loving* will ultimately be based on what we desire, i.e., with what we judge—altogether independently of what is possible or necessary—to be "good" (when it is present) or "bad" (when it is absent).[41] It follows that whether there is a given instance of *love* will depend on whether we judge it to be present in a particular circumstance.

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[37] "So it is evident that these modes of thinking [i.e., beings of reason] are not ideas of things [*rerum*], and can not in any way be classed as ideas [*ideas*]. So they have no object that exists necessarily, or can exist [*ideatum, quod necessariò existit, autexistere potest*]. Moreover, the reason why these modes of thinking are taken for ideas of things is that they arise from the ideas of real beings so immediately that they are quite easily confused by them by those who do not pay very close attention" (CM I 1 | G I/234/28-I/235/3). In part of this passage Spinoza puzzlingly suggests that beings of reason are not ideas *at all* (they "can not in any way be classed as ideas"). Such a contention would banish beings of reason entirely from Spinoza's mature ontology, insofar as beings of reason are considered modes of thought. For Spinoza says in E2a3 that: "There are no modes of thinking, such as love, desire, or whatever is designated by the word affects of the mind, unless there is in the same Individual the idea of the thing loved, desired, etc. But there can be an idea, even though there is no other mode of thinking." Here Spinoza implies at least that *every* mode of thought is (or minimally presupposes) an idea. Further, in E1p8s2, Spinoza says that "we can have true ideas of modifications which do not exist" insofar as these modifications can be conceived through modifications that do exist. How can a being of reason not be an idea if it is a mode of thought? The apparent conflict here can be resolved if we simply take Spinoza to be committed, not to the view that beings of reason cannot classed as ideas, full stop, but that they cannot be classed as ideas of *things which exist possibly or necessarily.* And this view is borne out by the rest of the passage from CM.

It is also worth noting that unlike Aquinas, for whom ideas of privation are forged by the intellect, Spinoza takes privations (he mentions blindness) to be formed by the imagination (CM I 1 | G I/234/25-27). In the passage from KV I 10 quoted above, by contrast, Spinoza seems to speak of beings of reason generally as products of the intellect. In CM, Spinoza describes beings of reason as *aids* to the imagination (G I/233/32). See SR 186.

[38] CM I 1 | G I/235/18-19.

[39] Interestingly, in the *Ethics* Spinoza *defines* love as part of his list of definitions of the affects, thus indicating that 'love' is an object which has an essence and that we can make adequate and inadequate judgments about it. See G II/192/20-193/5.

Considering the idea of a relation like *love* thus illustrates the difference in Aquinas's and Spinoza's thinking concerning the ability of privations and relations, as beings of reason, to ground true statements about actually (or possibly) existing objects. A closely related issue concerns the ontological status of such relations and of beings of reason in general. Here the two philosophers differ as well. Aquinas maintains that *entia rationis* like privations, understood as beings in a 'secondary' sense, have a kind of reduced or soft being in comparison with actually existing beings, beings understood in a 'primary' sense.[42] By contrast, Spinoza regards representations of relations, insofar as the mind *thinks* them, to be particular existing things, finite 'modes of thought' that are just as real, and have the same ontological status, as any other type of mode or particular thing—for example a physical body or mode of extension.[43] Construed as modes of thought, then, representations of relations are in no way ontologically deficient in relation to other modes.

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[40] In this light we can compare the notion of *love* with another non-symmetric—in this case, asymmetric—relation, *being to the north of*: if Boston is to the north of New York, then New York is to the south of Boston. Here, the relation between Boston and New York expresses a *logical* necessity, not a metaphysical one. Insofar as they help us "retain, explain, and imagine … things we have understood," logically necessary relations might count as beings of reason. This leads to the question whether, for Spinoza, there can be *relational truths*. Perhaps a logically necessary relation can express a truth even if its relata are not objects of ideas that, by virtue of the relation (or in themselves) "exist necessarily, or can exist. Cf. KV I 1 | G I/15/10, where Spinoza seems to suggest that necessary *internal* relations *constitute* the essence of a thing which necessarily or possibly exists. He writes: "Whatever we clearly and distinctly understand to belong to the nature of a thing, we can truly affirm of that thing," clarifying: "Understand the definite nature, by which the thing is what it is, and which cannot in any way be taken from it without destroying it, as it belongs to the essence of a mountain to have a valley, or the essence of a mountain *is* that it has a valley [my emphasis]. This is truly eternal and immutable, and must always be in the concept of a mountain, even if it does not exist, and never did" (note a).

[41] See, e.g., CM I 6 | G I/247/23-28.

[42] See DEE 1.4-13; CR 309; Klima 1993, 36.

Thus, although Aquinas and Spinoza respectively regard ideas of privation and ideas of relation as beings of reason or *I*-type ideas, their conceptions of how these ideas fall under the latter category richly diverge. Yet for both philosophers—as I bring out independently in CR and in SR—the representational characteristics of beings of reason fulfill a unified epistemic function: they reveal to us how the world is structured or ordered *by us*. In this regard, an important question affects both their accounts: Does the irreducibly subjective character of beings of reason or *I*-type ideas undermine their explanatory potential?

Above, I illustrated how for Aquinas ideas of privation can serve as "exemplars" of the structure of actually existing beings, giving these ideas a unique role to play in grasping that structure. Thus, for Aquinas the autonomous formation and inbred content of ideas of privation do not impugn the 'objective' or genuine explanatory value of these ideas.

In SR, I argue for a similar conclusion on Spinoza's behalf. However, the result we get with ideas of relations is different: representations of the relations between things can be clearer than our representations of the *natures* of their relata, in contrast to the way in which privations (for Aquinas) help us understand those natures. The epistemological significance of relations, as Spinoza describes them in KV and CM, consists in how they allow us to situate particular existing objects, through their observable features, within a specific empirical *circumstance.*[44] Such empirical contextualization—which can be more or less fine-grained—gives us clarity about way the world *is* (or, perhaps, is laid out) in a different manner than does the cognition of essences.[45] The *clarity* that ideas of relations achieve through bringing about this circumstantial awareness is compatible with ignorance, or confusion, about the essences of the things our mind poses as related.[46] To capture this insight more formally: given the nature of relations as beings of reason, we cannot make the inference from the fact that S conceives that Rxy to the fact that S conceives of x or of y (and vice versa), where to conceive of x or of y means to conceive of them through their essences.

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[43] In CM, Spinoza implicitly criticizes Aquinas and scholastic philosophers generally for their espousal of a distinction between 'being' and 'non-being', in which latter category they place beings of reason. He writes: "Being is badly divided into being and being of reason. … [T]he division of being into real being and being of reason [is improper]. For they [scholastic philosophers] divide being into being and nonbeing, or into being and mode of thinking" (CM I 1 | G I/235/3-6). For a helpful account of Spinoza's response to Aristotelian scholasticism, specifically in the CM, see Costa 2021.

3.2. The Univocality of Spinoza's Account of Relations

Two important issues discussed but left open in SR pertain to the theme of relations as *I*-type ideas in Spinoza. One issue concerns whether relations are all of a kind for Spinoza—i.e., are all relations *I*-type ideas? Another consideration has to do with the distinction between relations and universals. One of the chief aims of SR could be stated as the goal of figuring out whether, for Spinoza, universals function as *I*-type ideas in the way that relations appear to. In what follows, I focus on the univocality of his thought about relations.

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[44] On the connection of relations to circumstances, see TIE 101. In SR, I illustrate this point with the example of the relation defined by the concepts of *laying an egg* and *an egg hatching.* According to Spinoza, my representation of this relation will be clearer if it is tied to the representation of a female bird parent laying an egg and the egg hatching *in a certain setting*, say in a nest in a tree in the North End of Central Park. On this picture, the more precisely a relation is imagined as holding between objects in a certain (empirical) circumstance, the more valuable and effective is its heuristic function, revealing how and to what extent features of existence may be organized and elucidated by us. According to Langton (2000), Locke presents a similar picture of the epistemic function of relations.

[45] Nevertheless, at TIE 55 Spinoza acknowledges an analogy between the way in which the essence or the existence of a thing can be related to the essence, or the existence, of another thing depending on how generally the first thing's essence or existence is conceived. Thus, he writes: "[T]he same difference that exists between the essence of one thing and the essence of another also exists between the actuality or existence of the one thing and the actuality or existence of the other. So if we wished to conceive the existence of Adam, for example, through existence in general, it would be the same as if, to conceive his essence, we attended to the nature of being, so that in the end we defined him by saying that Adam is a being. Therefore, the more generally existence is conceived, the more confusedly also it is conceived, and the more easily it can be ascribed fictitiously to anything. Conversely, the more particularly it is conceived, then the more clearly it is understood, and the more difficult it is for us, [even] when we do not attend to the order of Nature, to ascribe it fictitiously to anything other than the thing itself" (II/20/17-II/21/1).

[46] Aquinas would accept our relative ignorance of the essences of particular things; I think he would, however, deny that the *clarity* of representations of relations is compatible with such ignorance.

In the early works, as we have seen, Spinoza talks explicitly about how we may understand things better by comparing their observable features without nevertheless grasping their natures. Such comparison yields ideas of relations between, for instance, the good and evil traits of things, or between the certain and determinate motions of distinct bodies.[47] In the *Ethics*, however, Spinoza appeals fundamentally to relations, chiefly *being conceived through*, *being caused by*, and *being 'in'*,[48] which underwrite how we grasp that, and in virtue of what, two or more things have a certain *nature* in common such that they can be understood through, or in terms of, one another.[49] Is it possible for Spinoza to combine his perspectives on these two grades of relationality?[50]

I think that it is. My belief is inspired by *Ethics* Part 1, Proposition 4 and its demonstration. The proposition reads: "Two or more things are distinguished from one another, either by a difference in the attributes of the substances or by a difference in their affections [i.e., modes]." Spinoza concludes in the demonstration that "there is nothing outside the intellect [*extra intellectum*] through which a number of things can be distinguished from one another except substances, or [*sive*] what is the same (by 1d4), their attributes, and their affections."[51]

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[47] On "good" and "evil" as "respects" in which one evaluates the usefulness of things, see KV I 10 | G I/49/10-20. On "what we call time" as the result of determining the duration of a thing in comparison with "the duration of other things which have a certain and determinate motion," see CM I 4 | G I/244/24-32.

[48] There is a vast literature studying the nature of and connection among these relations. See, e.g., Della Rocca 2008, Laerke 2011, Morrison 2013, Melamed 2013, Newlands 2010.

[49] This is at least a fundamental way in which Spinoza puts these relations to use. E1a1 distinguishes the natures of substance and modes by stipulating that "Whatever is, is either in itself or in another"; E1a5 appeals to the *conceived through* relation to indicate that things with different natures cannot be "understood" (*intelligi*) through one another. E1p2 and E1p3 between them appeal to the *in*-relation, the *conceived-through* relation, and the *caused-by* relation to establish the sufficient conditions under which two things have "nothing in common."

[50] This is not quite the same as the question whether the *ideas* of causation, conception, and inherence or being-in are *I*-type ideas. But exploring the compatibility of Spinoza's early views about relations as *entia rationis* and his later employment of relations in the *Ethics*, particularly concerning the respective epistemic roles of these types of relations within the context of his ontology, does give us initial purchase on the former question. Making such an initial attempt to explicate this compatibility is all that I propose to do here.

[51] The passage reads in full:

A peculiar feature of E1p4d is its twofold reference to what lies "outside the intellect" (*extra intellectum*). Spinoza uses this phrase in the above-quoted conclusion to this demonstration. He also uses it in the demonstration's only premise: "Whatever is, is either in itself or in another (by E1a1), that is (by E1d3 and E1d5), outside the intellect there is nothing except substances and their affections." Here, Spinoza is relying on Axiom 1 of Part 1—"Whatever is, is either in itself or in another"—along with the definition of 'substance' (E1d3) as (in part) "what is in itself" and the definition of 'mode' (E1d5) as (in part) "what is in another,"[52] to infer that "outside the intellect" there are only substance and modes. The next sentence of the demonstration concludes that substances (and—we are now told—their attributes) and modes are the only basis "outside the intellect" on which "a number of things can be distinguished from one another."

What, exactly, is the intellect doing in E1p4d?[53] There are several reasons to think that reference to the intellect *doesn't* belong in the demonstration.[54] First, the intellect is not mentioned in Proposition 4 itself, so its role and significance in the demonstration are unanticipated. Second, the phrase "*extra intellectum*" is formally redundant—the demonstration of E1p4 would go through without needing to appeal to it. Finally, the phrase may also be *substantively* redundant;

> E1p4: Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another, either by a difference in the attributes of the substances or by a difference in their affections.
>
> Dem.: Whatever is, is either in itself or in another (by 1a1), i.e. (by 1d3 and 1d5), outside the intellect there is nothing except substances and their affections. Therefore, there is nothing outside the intellect through which a number of things can be distinguished from one another except substances, *or* what is the same (by 1d4), their attributes and their affections, q.e.d.

[52] The full definitions of 'substance' and 'mode' read respectively: "By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed" (E1d3); "By mode I understand the affections of a substance, *or* that which it in another through which it is also conceived" (E1d5).

[53] We might similarly ask: what is the intellect doing in Spinoza's account of *entia rationis*? Is there evidence that Spinoza truly privileges the intellect in accounting for relations as beings of reason, and if so, why? Spinoza clearly mentions memory and imagination in this context; how does the intellect relate to these? Is the intellect more fundamental? Do imagination and memory play distinct, perhaps auxiliary roles? Do these latter play a distinct role in the formation, or the content, of beings of reason? A relevant stretch of text to consult is CM I 1 | G I/234/1-28.

[54] For an illuminating discussion of this issue, see Silverman 2016, sect. 5, from which the following suggestions are derived.

Spinoza speaks of modes and substances being the only basis on which distinct things can be distinguished outside the intellect, but if whatever is *in* the intellect is itself a mode,[55] then in terms of the mode/substance distinction, whether something is "inside" or "outside" the intellect is irrelevant.

Given these considerations, it is reasonable to suppose that Spinoza is implying a broader message through his use of the phrase "*extra intellectum*" in E1p4d. On my reading of Proposition 4 and its demonstration, Spinoza is, among other things, identifying the intellect as part of his ontology while making clear that it is not *that* part of the ontology that generates or dictates the fundamental distinctions that structure the ontology itself, i.e., the distinctions (and by extension, relations) between substance (and its attributes) and its affections (i.e., modes).[56] Thus, Spinoza affirms that the intellect, *qua* mode, is itself in the realm of things existing outside the intellect,[57] while denying that its representations, even though "true" (see E2p41[58]), are by themselves *responsible* for the distinctions (and relations) obtaining among things "outside the intellect," i.e., distinctions (and relations) between substances (and their attributes) and modes.[59]

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[55] See E2a3.

[56] On these points see Gartenberg 2020.

[57] Spinoza also affirms this in Letter 9: "... the intellect, thought infinite, pertains to *natura naturata*, not to *natura naturans*" (G IV/45/33). Cf. E1p31ff.

[58] What is true or adequate about the intellect's representation derives precisely from its being part of the infinite intellect of God; hence what is true about the representations of the intellect is precisely that they are *modes of thought* (and hence of substance). (In this sense we might take the "truth" of the intellect's representations to consist in their "authenticity" as modes of thought.) Thus, in E2p11c, Spinoza writes: "when we say that the human Mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing but that God, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is explained through the nature of the human Mind, *or* insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human Mind, has this or that idea." *But* this fact is compatible with the representations of the mind themselves being partial or inadequate, as Spinoza goes on to say. This happens insofar as "God has this or that idea, not only insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human Mind, but insofar as he also has the idea of another thing together with the human Mind …" (G II/94/32-II/95/5). Here Spinoza provides a precise explanation of how the intellect's representations—specifically insofar as it has representations that *relate* to the representations of other things—can be confused or inadequate, and hence liable to represent distinctions among things in a confused and partial manner. Crucially, the explanation is *in terms of* the intellect's status as a mode of God.

[59] These are grounded in the *one* distinction between what is 'in' itself and what is 'in' another. Cf. Ep. 4: "Except for substances and accidents, nothing exists in reality, *or* outside the intellect [*extra intellectum*]."

Combining this lesson about the place of the intellect and its representations in Spinoza's ontology with Spinoza's conception of ideas of relations as beings of reason in CM and KV yields a provocative meta-ontological view. Thinking about things in terms of their dependence on one another—in terms of how one thing is caused by another, inheres in another, or is conceived through a another—constrains in a fundamental way the options we have for thinking of those things. Viewing things as dependent on each other in this way allows us, according to Spinoza, to know that (e.g.) insofar as one thing has the essence of being a physical thing—i.e., is a mode of extension—it cannot be caused by, inhere in, or be conceived through something that has the essence of being a mental thing—i.e., a mode of thought.[60] But the conceptual regimentation of reality in terms of such dependence, Spinoza's early views would seem to suggest, is compatible with apparent arbitrariness in empirical existence.[61] *How* we evaluate the usefulness of two objects we encounter and represent as distinct based on a comparison of their observable features, for example, does not itself determine whether both objects are physical items, or both mental items, i.e., whether both are modes of the attribute of extension, or both modes of the attribute of thought.[62] This brings us back to the theme, emphasized by Spinoza in his early works as well as by Aquinas and by Leibniz, that *how* we think does not in itself *produce* being or independently *procure* its structure.[63]

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[60] See, e.g., E2p6. For a classic analysis of this point, Della Rocca 1996. As Della Rocca has expressed the idea, *thinking about* thought will not tell us about how to *think about* body, and thinking about body will not tell us about how to think about thought.

[61] In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza richly portrays how such arbitrariness in human perception and belief is manifested, specifically at a social level.

[62] Consider the ambiguity in this respect represented by artifacts. Can *we* decide based on the causation, conception, and inherence relations whether the identity conditions of a statue, for example, are physical or mental?

[63] As we are about to see, Leibniz makes this point in terms of the distinction between thoughts, which *we form* adventitiously and on certain occasions, and ideas, which are immutably and perennially in us and which correspond to or reflect the ideas in God's mind.

Yet it is just for this reason that ideas of relations *qua* beings of reason are also epistemologically suspect—as Spinoza emphasizes in CM. Such ideas present us with the opportunity to misrepresent the mind's proper place within Spinoza's ontology, for we are prone to view their content as *accountable* for the structure of this ontology. In succumbing to this error, we fail to appreciate what E1p4 reveals as the ontologically relegated role of the intellect's representations, a failure which amounts, on the view Spinoza puts forward in his early works, to confusing beings of reason with real beings. Spinoza emphatically warns us of this liability in CM:

> [W]e should carefully be on guard in the investigation of things, lest we confound real beings with beings of reason. For it is one thing to inquire into the nature of things, and another to inquire into the modes by which things are perceived by us.[64]

In explicating Spinoza's early views on relations and beings of reason in SR, then, one of my main goals is to provide a basis for detecting continuities between features of the metaphysical perspective we find adumbrated in the early works and the more fully articulated metaphysical picture presented in the *Ethics*. In my view it is the topic of *relations* that ultimately undergirds this connection.

Let us now turn to our remaining case study in the metaphysics of intentionality underlying *I*-type ideas—the case of Leibniz. Examining how he grapples with the idea of unconscious perception reveals limits to the notion of an *I*-type idea.

4. Leibniz on the Idea of Unconscious Perception

In Aquinas and in Spinoza, the notion of an *I*-type idea presupposes that such an idea can be formed based on some feature of actuality whose character is known to us. But can we have a representation of an object that we cannot represent as existing, as in an *I*-type idea, if we lack the wherewithal to base this idea on any reality of which we are familiar? This problem confronts Leibniz in his metaphysical account of perceptual distinctness.

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[64] CM I 1 | G I/235/30-37.

Robert Brandom (1981) highlights this problem in his reconstruction of this account. BL broadly addresses two issues: (i) the role of unconscious perception in Leibniz's larger theory of representation; and (ii) the problematic status of unconscious perception as itself an object of thought. The focal point of the essay is Margaret Wilson's astute allegation that the particular problems surrounding (ii) are evoked by the notion of 'inference' that Brandom appeals to in his interpretation of (i).

Leibniz, in his late metaphysics, famously maintains that monads, or individual substances, all perceive, or express, their own bodies and the entire universe: this is true for unconscious monads (e.g., trees and micro-organisms) as much as it is for conscious monads (e.g., sentient animals and sapient, self-reflective human beings). There is an infinity of degrees of distinctness among the perceptions of monads arrayed in a hierarchy from those which are conscious to those which are not; while not all monads do so consciously, all perceive themselves and their world with some degree of distinctness. Thus, in the *Monadology*, Leibniz writes: "Monads are limited, not as to their objects, but with respect to the modifications of their knowledge of them. Monads all go confusedly to infinity, to the whole; but they are limited and differentiated by the degrees of their distinct perceptions."[65]

Brandom analyzes this doctrine of degrees of perceptual distinctness via the idea that the more distinct a perception is, the more complex is its inferential structure, i.e., the potential of a monad's perception to enable us (i.e., external observers) to make inferences from the internal structure of the perception to the perception's ability to correctly discriminate properly individuated features of the monad's (physical) environment. Perceptions that enable us to do this are correspondingly more distinct than perceptions that don't, and this principle applies equally for monads which lack consciousness altogether. But Brandom sometimes slips into language suggesting that monads *themselves* can experience their perceptions as more or less distinct, and this seems inconsistent with the case of "bare" monads which are constitutively unconscious, themselves lacking all form of what we would recognize as 'experience'. Wilson charges that this language renders the doctrine of degrees of distinct perception incoherent, since we cannot have any idea of what *unconscious* perception is *like* (i.e., how it might be experienced). And so, attributing representational 'experiences' to bare monads conflates the distinctions between confused/distinct perception and unconscious/conscious perception.[66]

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[65] M 60, AG 221.

As I point out in BL, however, Brandom is aware of a difficulty in this domain. He writes critically, concerning Leibniz's claim in the *New Essays on Human Understanding* (1704) that we have an innate idea of perception,[67] that

> we cannot say, '… [unconscious] perceptions are just like the ones which we are conscious of, only unconscious,' and claim thereby to have expressed an idea (clear or distinct) as one might say, 'unobserved elephants are just like observed ones'; for … when mental states are at issue awareness is the only feature that matters. … [I]t is clear that we cannot make the notion of unconscious perception distinct merely by invoking a plenum of degrees of perception intermediate between those of which we are aware and those of which we are not.[68]

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[66] Wilson writes: "Leibniz's distinction between *distinct* and *confused* perception cannot just be read as a distinction between *conscious* and *unconscious* perceptions, since it has to be applicable *within* the realm of wholly unconscious monads. For similar reason, it cannot be identified with a distinction between perceptions that do possess internal intensionality, and those which merely 'express the many in the one' in a way that allows external inference from the 'perceiver' to the 'perceived'. For (I am supposing) bare monads do not *experience* representationally any more than they experience consciously. The question, then, is whether anything can be made of the distinction between distinct and confused perceptions that does not trade on either internal intensionality or the distinction between conscious and unconscious perceptions" (Wilson 1999, 343; BL 77).

[67] NE 51.

[68] Brandom 1981, 459; BL 89.

Brandom here expresses something akin to Wilson's worry through the observation that we cannot have a 'distinct' conception of unconscious perception—'distinct' here being used in Leibniz's sense as meaning a perception or thought the distinguishing features of whose content we can separately enumerate. We could not recognize a *case* of unconscious perception if we were confronted with it precisely because, Brandom suggests, this would involve recognizing the distinguishing marks of a *mental state* whose marks, *qua* mental state, are inherently unobservable.

What Brandom calls "the notion of unconscious perception" has the *form* of what I have regarded as the object of an *I*-type idea. This putative object of an *I*-type idea is *itself* an idea—what Leibniz regards as an innate, archetypal or paradigmatic representation that underlies our thinking or capacity to have thoughts about things.[69] In the cases of privations and relations, the question was how we can represent that which cannot be represented *as* existing. With the idea of unconscious perception, by contrast, we are questioning the possibility of a putatively innate representation *to be available to thought,* or to be recognizable *as present 'in us'*, in the first place. Since it is not our *having* unconscious perceptions that is at issue—there is no doubt in Leibniz's mind that we have them—but rather the intelligibility of our having the very *idea* of unconscious perception, we must examine what it means for there to be an *I*-type idea *of* an idea.

Once we ask whether it is possible to have an *I*-type idea of an idea, the question of the properties of ideas becomes more urgent.[70] Leibniz defines perception reductively as the representation of a multitude in a unity (from a certain point of view, namely, that of a monad or simple substance); apperception, or awareness, and unconscious perception fall respectively within the purview of this definition.[71] Under the genus of *perception* Leibniz includes *ideas* and *thoughts*. The difference between thoughts and ideas is that ideas are always 'in us', whether we apperceive them or not. Ideas are in turn the *objects* of thoughts; when we apperceive an idea on a certain occasion, we think *of* it.[72] Whereas ideas are abiding "dispositions" or "potentialities," thoughts are discrete or episodic *mental acts* occasioned in all cases by some stimulus, either sensory or introspective.[73]

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[69] In "What Is an Idea?" (1678) Leibniz writes: "That the ideas of things are in us means … nothing but that God, the creator alike of things and of the mind, has impressed a power of thinking upon the mind so that it can by its own operations derive what corresponds perfectly to the nature of things" (L 208).

[70] I make this statement about the present context, of course. It would be no understatement to say that understanding the nature of ideas in general was *the* chief epistemological—and one of the chief metaphysical—preoccupations of early modern philosophers, for Spinoza no less than for Leibniz (and stemming most directly from Descartes and his followers). A large segment of Spinoza's own theory of intentionality deals with what he calls "ideas of ideas" (see, e.g., E2p21s). Spinoza regards the mind as itself an idea (see E2p13). Primus (2021) argues convincingly that an idea *of* an idea should be construed as an idea *of the mind*, where the former idea is simply an aspect of the mind itself with which it is "one and the same," and which is expressed as a kind of immediate self-awareness. If so, then the conclusion I reach below that it is impossible to have an *I*-type idea *of* an idea would apply literally to Spinoza's doctrine of ideas

According to Leibniz, we become cognizant of certain among our ideas through reflection as opposed to the prompting of an external stimulus.[74] These "intellectual" ideas are implicated in *any* act of perceiving, conscious or unconscious. Intellectual ideas cannot be derived from sense experience and are a necessary condition of any act of perception involving a certain kind of content. The very perception of an existence external to us, for example, presupposes the innate idea of *being*, which each individual antecedently embodies, and which may be drawn out and itself apperceived by individuals capable of conscious reflection.[75] Leibniz writes: "…intellectual

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of ideas. How to fit the notion of an *I*-type idea—and by extension that of a being of reason—within his broader epistemology and philosophy of mind is a very interesting and of course much larger issue.

[71] "The passing state which involves and represents a multitude in the unity or in the simple substance is nothing other than what one calls *perception*, which should be distinguished from apperception, or consciousness .... This is where the Cartesians have failed badly, since they took no account of the perceptions that we do not apperceive" (M 14, AG 214).

[72] "I distinguish ideas from thoughts. For we always have all out pure or distinct ideas independently of the senses, but thoughts always correspond to some sensation" (NE 119).

[73] "[A]n idea is an immediate inner object, and … this object expresses the nature or qualities of things. If the idea were the *form* of the thought, it would come into and go out of existence with the actual thoughts which correspond to it, but since it is the *object* of thought it can exist before and after the thoughts. Sensible outer objects are only *mediate*, because they cannot act immediately on the soul. God is the only *immediate outer* object. One might say that the soul itself is its own immediate inner object; but that is only to the extent that it contains ideas, i.e. something corresponding to things. … (NE 109). "This is how ideas and truths are innate in us—as inclinations, dispositions, tendencies, or natural potentialities, and not as actions" (NE 52).

[74] "[S]ome simple ideas are perceived through reflection … The mind must at least give itself its thoughts of reflection, since it is the mind which reflects" (NE 119).

[75] For a helpful account of Leibniz's notion of self-reflection, see Perkins 1999.

ideas, or ideas of reflection, are drawn from our mind. I would like to know how we could have the idea of *being* if we did not, as beings ourselves, find being within us."[76]

Crucially, Leibniz lists *perception* among (the objects of) these *sine qua non* intellectual ideas:

> [C]an it be denied that there is a great deal that is innate in our minds, since we are innate to ourselves, so to speak, and since we include Being, Unity, Substance, Duration, Change, Action, Perception, Pleasure, and hosts of other objects of our intellectual ideas? And since these objects are immediately related to our understanding and always present to it (although our distractions and needs prevent our being always aware of them), is it any wonder that we say that these ideas, along with what depends on them, are innate in us?[77]

Notice the statement here that what is innate in us is not only these intellectual ideas themselves, but what "depends" on them. Leibniz is speaking of further ideas as well as truths about them that are implicit in the intellectual ideas in question. Dependent on the innate idea of *perception*—conceived here in the reductive terms we saw Leibniz give above, namely as the expression or representation of a multiplicity in a unity—is the further *idea* of apperception and the innately derived *truth* that not all perceptions are apperceived.

If we can represent the truth that not all perceptions are apperceived, does this mean that we have an *idea* of unconscious perception? There is some evidence that Leibniz would say that we cannot have a (distinct) idea of *wholly* unconscious perception. If true, this would show the idea of unconscious perception to resemble privations and relations in being something that cannot be represented as present in actuality—or in this case, presented to thought—and thus to be the appropriate type of object for an *I*-type idea. Let us briefly explore this possibility.

The last of Leibniz's commitments I surveyed above concerned the dependence of the idea of apperception and the truth that some perceptions are unconscious on the innate, intellectual idea of perception in general. This understanding implies that when we reflect on the idea of perception within us, what we perceive are the *sufficient conditions* on perception, embodied in the general definition of perception Leibniz provides.[78] This indicates that we can have an idea of unconscious perception insofar as we can have the idea of what is sufficient for perception in general. But what exactly *is* the idea of unconscious perception? Leibniz clearly holds that we can have the idea of there being *such a thing* as unconscious perception. Yet it does not appear to follow that we can have an idea of an unconscious *mental state*, as Brandom points out in the passage from his essay I quoted above. Plausibly, our idea of an unconscious perceptual state is simply the idea of the *least* conscious perceptual state. Yet any state which we call the *least* conscious has a determinate degree of consciousness, and there could presumably be a state of lesser consciousness than that. It would seem, then, the idea of *wholly unconscious* perception is impossible. Leibniz appears to follow this line of reasoning with his example of the idea of 'the most rapid motion' in "Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas" (1684):

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[76] NE 85-86.
[77] NE 51-52.

> Suppose that a wheel turns at a most rapid rate. Then anyone can see that if a spoke of the wheel is extended beyond its rim, its extremity will move more rapidly than will a nail in the rim itself. The motion of the nail is therefore not the most rapid, contrary to hypothesis. Yet at first glance we seem to have an idea of the most rapid motion, for we understand perfectly what we are saying. But we cannot have any idea of the impossible. ...That we do not always at once have an idea of a thing of which we are conscious of thinking, the example of most rapid motion has shown.[79]

As Leibniz says here, we can *think* of something of which we lack an idea. This point dovetails with the specific proposal that we can have an idea of the sufficient conditions on something's *being* a perception, and so *think* broadly *of* perception, without having an idea of what is *necessary* for something to be an *unconscious* (as opposed to conscious) perception. The above passage thus provides *prima facie* and, albeit, limited evidence that Leibniz would agree that we cannot have the idea of a wholly unconscious perception.

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[78] Aside from the condition that perception consist in the representation of the many in the one from a given point of view, the remainder of the jointly sufficient conditions on perception are supplied by Leibniz's notion of 'expression' (or representation in general). Leibniz offers multiple definitions, or characterizations, of 'expression', one of his most notable being from "What Is an Idea?": "That is said to express a thing in which there are relations [*habitudines*] which correspond to the relations of the thing expressed" (L 207). For two helpful accounts of Leibniz's notion of expression, see Kulstad 1977 and Swoyer 1995.

[79] L 293.

In Leibnizian terms, then, insofar as the *I*-type idea *of* the idea unconscious perception would be regarded as the idea of something that cannot be represented as existing, it (the putative *I*-type idea) should be regarded instead as the *thought*—not the *idea*—of unconscious perception. Yet—and this is the crucial point—there are more general grounds for believing that there is no such thing as the *I*-type idea of the idea of unconscious perception, and indeed that there can be no such thing as an *I*-type idea of another (first-order) idea. For to have such an *I*-type idea would automatically entail that the first-order idea is something which, as the object of an *I*-type idea, could not be represented as *existing qua* something that is *in us* (i.e., 'innate' in Leibniz's sense). And if an idea is not—or is not capable of being represented as—*in us*, then it cannot be referenced at all (even as the object of an *I*-type idea). Further, an idea, for Leibniz, is a representation of something possible or actual (this is true of ideas insofar as they are in us and insofar as they exist in God's mind).[80] An *I*-type idea, then, could never represent the *content* of another idea, let alone the idea of unconscious perception. For the *I*-type idea would have to represent something that either is or can be represented as existing, as something which cannot be represent as existing. This is contradictory.[81]

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[80] NE 109.

[81] Can truths be the objects of *I*-type ideas, or must we think of truths as always derived from such objects? (Correspondingly we might ask whether truths can stand as the 'accusatives' of *I*-type ideas.) Leibniz seems to think that the latter is the case; in "What Is an Idea?" he writes: "Although … the idea of a circle is not similar to a circle [sc. in that the former, not the latter, is a modification of the mind], truths can be derived from it which would be confirmed beyond doubt by investigating the circle" (L 208). For Leibniz, whatever truths are derivable between an idea and its object—and whatever that object may be—will exist in virtue of, and in fact will be constituted by, the expression relation that holds between them (a relation which Leibniz also describes in this same context). Recall, also, that in my discussion of Aquinas I suggested that truths (such as that it is not the case that Homer stumbled because he is blind) are things we derive from the objects of *I*-type ideas (such as the idea of Homer's blindness, i.e. that of *blindness* in Homer).

Leibniz's case relates in a more roundabout way to the narrative we have been unfolding concerning our authors' preoccupation with the idea of thinking about what cannot be represented as existing. For one thing, the notion of an *I*-type *idea* is somewhat foreign to Leibniz's metaphysics because whereas *I*-type ideas owe their content to how they are formed, ideas are never *formed* for Leibniz: they reside perennially in us and are the objects of conscious thoughts, which are formed. Such a stance is reflected in Leibniz's conception of beings of reason. Relations, for example, though formed by our mind insofar as we think them on any given occasion—as when we compare the observable feature of two objects—are not inherently the *product* of mental acts, as they ultimately are for Spinoza in his early works. For Leibniz, *any* relation we could conceive is *already* represented in God's mind as part of God's knowledge of the pre-existing arrangement of substances and their infinite interconnections.[82]

Yet we learn much about *I*-type ideas, and the limits associated with them, from the Leibnizian case. The view that ideas cannot be the objects of *I*-type ideas, as extrapolated from Leibniz's model, applies equally to Aquinas's views on privation and to Spinoza's views on relations. An underlying consequence of their pictures is that even for there to be (*de re*) thought there must be a relation of thought to actuality: the *relation* must be there even if an object is not—or cannot be—presented. But as the example of Leibniz especially brings out, an idea itself embodies characteristics that constitutively prevent it from *failing* to be represented to exist by another idea in the way permitted for anything which could stand in relation to thought but which is not itself an idea.[83] The notion of an *I*-type idea, when applied to other ideas, appears self-defeating. And this reveals something special about the nature of ideas considered *as* objects of thought.

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[82] NE 227.

[83] Or mode of thought, to put it broadly and in Spinozistic terms.

5. The Art of Combination

One might question the philosophical motivation for investing significance in the connection posited here among Aquinas, Spinoza, and Leibniz, whose precise grouping might otherwise seem arbitrary. The link might seem further fortuitous for being presented under the pretext of showcasing three independently conceived and topically self-contained pieces of research.

I embrace this fortuitousness—but not without principle. Allow me to explain my perspective. Suppose one is given the task of identifying what the contents of a certain bag generally have in common—a fortuitous circumstance, no doubt. In the bag is found a pen, a cigarette, and a screwdriver. What do the items in this purportedly arbitrary assortment have in common? Perhaps that all are oriented vertically in virtue of their function? Or perhaps that (let us assume) they are all white? Certainly, they are all in the same bag. Where will these commonalities lead us?

If the goal were merely to detect similarity, then citing any of these features would suffice. If, however, the goal is to enable discovery and judgment about such things beyond whatever similarity relation we find to supervene directly on each item's immediately observable properties thought together with those of the others, then—as Leibniz tells us—we should be interested in how these items are implicated in a combination of ideas and truths that resolve and articulate a larger order.[84] It may not be obvious how a pen, a cigarette, and a screwdriver could fulfill this role. But consider: each of these items, in a richly informative and unique way, embodies or expresses the idea of *something that is habit-forming*—we're all familiar with the nicotine addict, the obsessive writer, and the inveterate Mr./Ms. Fix-It. Leibniz thinks that given a concept like *habit-forming*, or even *habit*, it is possible to discover all the predicates of the concept or all the propositions which are true of it. Given an exhaustive enumeration of these predicates and propositions, some will relate to, or express, the concept more meaningfully—i.e., more richly, consequentially, and informatively.

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[84] This is the general presumption underlying the model of conceptual thought Leibniz proposes in his 1666 treatise *On the Art of Combinations*. There he writes, for example: "Since all things which exist or can be thought of are in the main composed of parts, either real or at any rate conceptual, it is necessary that those things which differ in species differ either in that they have different parts—and here is the use of complexions—or in that they have a different situation—and here is the use of dispositions" (A VI.i 177; quoted in Rutherford 1995, 228). As Donald Rutherford explains: "It is evident that he [Leibniz] regards this theory of [the combinatorial nature of] concepts as following from more general metaphysical principles. In his view, *all* things, and thus all concepts, are defined in terms of the parts they contain (their 'matter') and the specific arrangement of these parts (their 'form'). Differences in parts (when these parts are conceived as belonging to some larger whole) are differences of 'complexion'; differences in the arrangement of parts are differences of 'situation' or 'disposition'" (Rutherford 1995, 228).

In this essay, I have treated Aquinas's ideas on privation and causation, Spinoza's views on relations, and Leibniz's understanding of unconscious perception as together offering a distinctly meaningful window into the concept of an *object of thought*. This involved exploring whether the thought of an object which cannot represented as existing is a notion that can help us resolve our understanding of what it is to apprehend what does exist, as well as whether our grasp of our own ideas follows analogous principles. If my cursory investigation here has demonstrated anything, I hope it is that the occasions and motivations of philosophical inquiry are not arbitrary until they are *discovered* to be so.

Titles and Abbreviations

Aquinas

DEE = *De entia et essentia*

InMeta = *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum expositio*

QDP = *Quaestiones disputatae de potential Dei*

QDV = *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*

Sent = *In quatuor libros Sententiarum*

ST = *Summa theologiae*

Spinoza

CM = *Cogitata Metaphysica* [*Metaphysical Thoughts*]

Ep. = *Epistolae* [Letters]

KV = *Korte Verhandeling van God de Mensch en deszelfs Welstand* [*Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being*]

TIE = *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* [*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*]

E = *Ethica* [*Ethics*]

Note: All citations to the Latin text of Spinoza's works are from G, and all English translations of Spinoza's writings are taken from C (both listed in the bibliography). References to the parts of Spinoza's works follow the conventions used in Yitzhak Y. Melamed, ed. *A Companion to Spinoza.* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021.

Leibniz

NE = *New Essays on Human Understanding*

M = *Monadology*

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Chapter 1:
On the Causal Role of Privation in Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics

1. Introduction

'Privation' (*privatio*) is defined by Thomas Aquinas as the want of some property in a subject that ought naturally to possess that property (see, e.g., *Summa theologiae* I q. 48, a. 5, ad 1).[85] Aquinas relies on the notion of privation to a considerable extent in grounding his distinction between two senses of 'being' (*esse*), one of which attaches to the truth of propositions, as well as in explaining the structure of the natural processes of generation and corruption. However, the concept of privation is problematic in such contexts because, prima facie, privations do not look like "real" things at all: they are *wants* of some property. Indeed, Aquinas explicitly denies that privations are "real beings" (*entia reale*). If privations are not real, positive beings, however, how can they play a genuine role in metaphysical explanations, and how can we be said genuinely to know about them or to predicate anything truly of and with them?

In this paper, I crystallize these questions into an examination of whether privation, a kind of absence, plays a *causal role* in Aquinas's metaphysical scheme, and if so, how. In order to answer this question, I look to the way in which Aquinas describes the ontological status of privation in portions of his accounts of being, truth, and natural change. Aquinas's ultimate view on the causal role of privation in these contexts, I shall argue, is that while privations in a subject serve to determine or constrain what sort of (efficient) causal relations that subject can enter into, privations, as nonbeings, cannot be the cause of the subject's entering into those relations. It follows that privations cannot be efficient causes of effects distinct from the subject. Thus, to illustrate, Homer's blindness (a privation) delimits the kinds of actions he can perform and the causal relations he can enter into. But Homer's blindness, as a lack or absence, is not the sort of thing that can bring it about that Homer *does* perform any of these actions or enters into any of these causal relations. Because it does not follow from Homer's *blindness* that he performs certain actions and enters into certain causal relations, it cannot be on account of his blindness that Homer affects things other than Homer. If to serve as an underlying condition delimiting causal interaction is as much to play a "causal role" as is to be a cause or an effect, I conclude, privations, for Aquinas, *do* play a causal role, but not as *causes.*

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[85] I use the following abbreviations for works of Aquinas cited in this paper: *DEE* = *De ente et essentia* (*On Being and Essence*); *DPN* = *De principiis naturae* (*On the Principles of Nature*); *In Sent* = *Scriptum super libros Sententarium* (*Commentary on the Sentences*); *In Meta* = *Sententia super Metaphysicam* (*Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*); *In Phys* = *In octo libros Physicorum expositio* (*Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*); *QDV* = *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (*On Truth*); *QDM* = *Quaestiones disputatae De malo* (*Disputed Questions on Evil*); *SCG* = *Summa contra Gentiles*; *ST* = *Summa theologiae.*

To frame my analysis, I chart a telling comparison between Aquinas' thinking on privation and the views of David Lewis and John Haldane, two prominent contemporary philosophers with mutually opposed takes on the metaphysical status of privations and absences. According to Lewis,

(L1) Privations (i.e. absences)[86] are nonbeings.

(L2) Therefore, privations (or absences) cannot enter into patterns of counterfactual dependence with actual things or events.

In stark opposition to Lewis' perspective, Haldane maintains:

(H1) Privations can be causes.

(H2) Therefore, privations (being absences of a certain type) can enter into patterns of counterfactual dependence with actual things or events.

Whereas Lewis's position might accord with most philosophers' intuitions about the ontological status of absences in general, Haldane offers convincing reasons, partly inspired by Aquinas, for singling out the peculiar dependence of privations on actuality as showing that at least a subclass of absences can be causally relevant in ways Lewis does not countenance.

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[86] To better bring out the relevance of Lewis' view to the theme of this paper I am here glossing over the crucial fact, to be discussed below, that Lewis does not (as do Haldane and Aquinas) single out privations as a particular *subclass* of absences. He appears to treat absences as all of a kind.

Aquinas's treatment of privation is interesting for the intermediate position it occupies between the options staked out by Lewis and Haldane respectively. On the one hand, Aquinas accepts (L1) but rejects (L2); yet, on the other hand, he rejects (H1) while accepting (H2). Unlike Lewis, Aquinas appreciates the causally relevant character of privations; yet, unlike Haldane, he does not feel pressure to assign an independent sort of causal agency to nonactual or "non-natural" entities. In the three sections that follow, the comparison between Aquinas's views and the theories of Lewis and Haldane will guide my examination of Aquinas's view of the ontological status of privation and how it underpins or reveals privation's causal role in relation to (respectively) Aquinas's accounts of being, truth, and natural change.

Before I proceed, I must remark on a noteworthy omission. As is well known, another domain in which Aquinas makes extensive appeal to privation is his metaphysical account of evil. I won't completely overlook this domain, but for reasons of space I will not explore it directly. Focusing on the putative status of privations as causes, I bracket (i) the topic of God's putative role in bringing about evil as a privation,[87] and (ii) the complexities surrounding the nature of deficient actions and privative effects as pertinent, e.g., to cases of sin.[88] These latter topics are defining but difficult themes in Aquinas's metaphysics of morality the elucidation of which is beyond the scope of my analysis.

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[87] Brock (2018, p. 33) provides a helpful summary of Aquinas's view of God's causal role with respect to evil: "God does not directly cause evil. What he directly causes is an unequal distribution of good. This brings evil with it, because some good things are able to fail and sometimes do fail. God does indirectly intend and cause corruptions of things, but he in no way causes sins. He wills neither the occurrence nor the non-occurrence of the sins that occur, but only his own permission of their occurrence. He does so intending to bring good from them. He is not an indirect cause of them, since he provides what is needed to prevent them, though in a measured way, as his justice and wisdom dictate. Still, he is a cause of whatever there is of being and act in sin."

[88] 'Sin' (*peccatum*), for Aquinas, denotes any lack of due order, and is an extension of the concept of 'evil' (*malum*). On Aquinas's privation account of evil (radically distilled), evil causes privation by inhibiting a thing's perfection, through a deficiency of the thing's will (see *QDM* q. 1, a. 3). The role of privation in Aquinas's account of evil, I should emphasize, is continuous with his accounts of privation in the contexts we will consider but is considerably more complex. It is for this reason alone that I choose not to delve into it here. For a helpful recent account of evil and privation in Aquinas, see Still and Dahl (2016).

2. Being: Aquinas and the Actuality-Dependence of Privations

What, more intuitively, can we make of Aquinas's definition of 'privation'? What is interesting about privation from a philosophical point of view?[89] We can approach an understanding of Aquinas's take on these questions by way of some initial observations. Our language is replete with expressions signifying the want of some property. Consider, for instance, the following perfectly ordinary assertions:

(1) Homer is blind [= Homer lacks sight]

(2) Your claim is implausible [= Your claim lacks plausibility]

(3) The bronze is unshaped [= The bronze lacks form]

Expressions of this sort are not merely prevalent. As Haldane (2007, p. 180) points out, they also regularly inform attempts to make sense of events, processes, the obtaining or non-obtaining of states of affairs, and the existence or non-existence of substances and characteristics. To take just two examples:

(4) Homer stumbled because he is blind.

(5) The smoke alarm failed to go off because there was no battery in it.

In general, predications of privation appear to attribute to a thing a want of some property (as in [1]-[4]) or of some provision (as in [5]). The semantic and explanatory role that predications of privation play distinguishes them from mere negations. Thus, I can say of anything, of a rock as much as of Homer, that it is not sighted, and thus negate the corresponding affirmation '*x* is sighted' as applied to any (unseeing) subject you wish. But clearly, saying that Homer is 'not-sighted' carries a distinct significance from saying that a rock is not sighted. For we might say (as, we will see, Aquinas does) that Homer is the kind of thing that *ought* to possess sight. The statement 'Homer is blind' uniquely attributes a state of deprivation to Homer, which is not similarly conveyed about a rock in 'The rock is not-sighted'. Here, then, a predication of privation tracks an ontological distinction between those entities for which sight is natural, and those for which it is not. On this basis, one can characterize the distinction between negation and privation by saying that negations are oppositions to states of affairs *simpliciter*, whereas privations are oppositions specifically to states of *natural possession*.[90]

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[89] There is not a great deal of targeted and sustained research on the notion of privation, not only with respect to philosophers like Aquinas, but generally. However, see Newlands (2014) for an excellent recent discussion of the notion of privation in Leibniz, largely in connection with the views of Aquinas. For two contemporary accounts of the logic and semantics of privation, see Horn (1989) and Gerogiorgakis (2012).

The notion of privation as spelled out in this way is importantly—to borrow a term from Haldane (2007)—*actuality-dependent*. The truthmakers of any privation will, on this understanding, include a determinate (actual) subject and a determinate property (e.g. capacity) or provision naturally enjoyed by or present in subjects that belong to a relevant class of entities of which the deprived subject is a member.[91] They may also include a determinate time or respect in which a subject is lacking something.[92] The actuality-dependence of privations is a putative feature of privations which Aquinas resolutely affirms. Among multiple texts in which Aquinas emphasizes this characteristic of privations is *Summa theologiae* I q. 11, a. 2, ad 1, where he writes: "No privation takes existence away completely, since, according to the Philosopher [i.e. Aristotle], 'privation is a negation in a subject' [*Metaphysics* IV.2, 1004a15]."[93] For Aquinas, then, privations are not mere absences; they are absences *in* actualities.[94]

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[90] This is how Aristotle characterizes the notion of 'privation' in *Metaphysics* IX, 1046a32-35: "Privation has several senses; for it means that which has not a certain quality and that which might naturally have it but has not got it, either in general or when it might naturally have it, and either in some particular way, e.g. when it *completely* fails to have it, or when it in any degree fails to have it. And in cases of things which naturally have a quality but lose it by violence, we say they suffer privation" (Aristotle, 1984, vol. 2, p. 1652).

[91] This dependence of privation, in contrast with negation, on a determinate (type of) subject is affirmed in numerous places by Aristotle (see, e.g., *Prior Analytics*, 51bs8-32 (Aristotle, 1984, vol. 1, pp. 82-3)): "[T]he expressions 'it is a not-white log' and 'it is not a white log' do not belong at the same time. For if it is a not-white log, it must be a log: but that which is not a white log need not be a log at all.") This classical view in fact reflects a currently acknowledged central feature of the semantics of privations. Cf. Tsohatzidis (1995, p. 86): "The distinctive purpose that *lack*-sentences are designed to serve is ... twofold: on the one hand, to suggest that the entities referred to by their subject terms may be viewed as belonging to certain not explicitly mentioned *categories*, and, on the other, to suggest that the *prototypical* members of those not explicitly mentioned categories do possess the properties that the entities in question are being described as not possessing ...."

[92] Haldane (2007, p. 185) notes that, unlike mere negations, privations have more or less determinate individuation conditions and can be compared: "actuality-dependent privations [are] ones whose truth-makers include actual

Yet isn't this "rootedness in actuality" somewhat mysterious? After all, what is it that we refer to when we predicate a privation of something? One might not wish to go as far as Aquinas in thinking that predications of privation invoke the notion of properties that a subject *ought* to have. Instead, one might think that in identifying the want of some property in an individual we purport to refer to an absence of some kind and nothing more robust involving the prior assumption of the suitability of a given subject to be receptive to such an absence.[95] But if that is the

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entities. In the case of [privations] there are derivative identity and individuation conditions as determinate or indeterminate as those of the actualities upon which they depend. (Here 'actualities' covers whatever is admitted to positive ontology: substances, properties, events, processes, relations, or whatever.) So, for example, a hole in a piece of fabric may differ slightly in size or contour from another adjacent to (though evidently not contiguous with) it. Likewise, two omissions may differ slightly in their spatial, temporal, and/or functional or intentional features."

[93] Aquinas, 2014, p. 113. In addition to the pivotal concept of actuality-dependence, there is another feature that plays a key role in Aquinas' thinking about privations, namely, what Aristotle in the passage in n. 6 above indicates to be their susceptibility to variations of degree. In contrast to attributions of blindness to a person, which generally presuppose complete loss of sight (though cf. *In Meta* IX.2.1785, for the view that blindness may come in degrees), value-based attributions like goodness or evil, or justice or injustice, admit of degree and comparison. In this vein, Aquinas distinguishes between "complete" and "partial" privation (*ST* I-II q. 18, a. 8, ad 1). Aquinas' treatment of evil as a partial privation expresses one of his most crucial motivations for his doctrine of privation generally, namely, to impugn the status of evil as a positive reality and as something that can completely nullify the goodness of being. While my emphasis in this paper is on Aquinas' views on privation in relation to his doctrine of the convertibility of truth and being and his views on the nature of change, it must be acknowledged that another key dimension to his thought on privation which runs parallel to the former theme is his affirmation of the convertibility of being and the good (see, e.g., *ST* I q. 5, a. 3, reply). Because Aquinas wants to establish that being is coextensive with goodness, he is concerned to show that evil cannot be a real form inhering in real substances. Yet the fact that evil is partial privation can explain (i) how the intellect can *predicate* badness to acts and events (for reasons of a sort we will encounter below); (ii) how such predications can be true and dependent on facts about actually existing objects; and (iii) how no attribution of evil to a thing, action, or event can imply the complete nullification of goodness in being

[94] See Haldane, 2007, p. 184.

[95] Or, following Lakoff (1987, ch. 8), one might maintain that it is incorrect to hold (with the likes of Aquinas) that predications of privation pick out a genuine relation between language and the world, or how the world is genuinely supposed to be, but rather that they reveal a commitment to a certain folk theory of what the world is like. This stance resembles the view of Lewis about to be surveyed.

case, such 'reference' is quite paradoxical from the point of view of a commonsensical, actualist metaphysics. Here, it would seem, our concept of absence goes beyond reality, segregating human discourse, which may make reference to absences, from metaphysical fact, which must strictly involve what is actual. Precisely this worry has been spelled out by David Lewis apropos of the role of privations or absences in causal reasoning:

> Absences can be causes, as when an absence of food causes hunger; they can be effects, as when a vaccination prevents one from catching a disease; and they can be among the unactualized alterations of a cause or effect which figure in a pattern of influence.
>
> [However] absences are not events. They are not *anything*: where an absence is, there is nothing relevant there at all. Absences are bogus entities. Yet the proposition that an absence occurs is not bogus. It is a perfectly good negative existential proposition. And it is by way of just such propositions, and only by way of such propositions, that absences enter into patterns of counterfactual dependence. Therefore, it is safe to say with the vulgar that there are such entities as absences, even though we know better.[96]

The crux of Lewis' position is stated in the claim that "where an absence is, there is nothing relevant there at all."[97] What is meant by this? Lewis's view assimilates predications of absence and privation to the category of negative existential propositions. Indeed, Lewis does not explicitly distinguish between predications of absence and predications of privation in the first place. Because he treats the notion of absence simply and univocally as the notion of a lack or of nothingness *per se*, he feels entitled to deny that absences can stand in any genuine or appropriate relation of relevance to actual objects, states, and events. The context of the above passage is Lewis' late (2000) presentation of his theory of causation in terms of "influence." On this theory, we might put it, a cause *C* is "relevant" to the occurrence of an effect *E* if and only if *how* alterations in *C* take place is part of a process resulting in *how* alterations in *E* take place.[98] For Lewis, absences are putative causes for which this condition cannot be satisfied, because one can never point to an alteration *of* an absence that could influence alterations among actual events. As the above passage indicates, Lewis views absences rather suspiciously, as familiar denizens of our language that purport to be more than just that. But despite denying to absences a rightful place as genuine causal relata, Lewis does appear to grant here that it may not be *false* to appeal to absences in describing the conditions that surround the occurrence of an effect.[99]

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[96] Lewis, 2000, pp. 195-96.

[97] Cf. Lewis, 2004, pp. 281; 283: "[W]henever any effect is caused by an absence of anything, we have the problem of the missing relatum. (And likewise whenever anything causes an absence.) ... A relation of counterfactual dependence is still a relation, a relation needs relata, and absences still fail to provide the needed relata. The counterfactual analysis escapes the problem because, when the relata go missing, it can do without any causal relation at all." As we will see below, Aquinas too believes that a privation cannot be one of the relata of a causal relation. However, there is, in contrast to Lewis, a more robust sense in which Aquinas appreciates the "relevance" of privations to actually existing objects.

Interestingly, Aquinas can be seen to endorse two parts of Lewis' view. In the first place, Aquinas claims that privations (or absences) are not real beings. In his early work, *On Being and Essence*, Aquinas, truncating Aristotle's distinction in *Metaphysics* V.7 among four senses of being, distinguishes between two fundamental senses of 'being': being in a categorial or what commentators call an "ontological" sense, which denotes Aristotle's category of substance or any of his categories of accidents, and another, "logical" sense of 'being' denoting everything which can be truly affirmed or denied.[100] Absences and privations are treated as belonging to this second sense of being, which “puts nothing forward in reality.” Thus, at the opening of *On Being and Essence*, Aquinas writes:

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[98] See Lewis, 2000, pp. 187-88. This is just a summary statement of Lewis' position; the details of his theory are more nuanced and are mostly inessential to the main points here under discussion. Lewis' theory of causation as influence—which is meant to replace his older counterfactual analysis of causation—arises in great part out of worries concerning the implications for an analysis of causation of treating absences as causes. (Cf. Nolan's (2005) helpful synopsis of Lewis' views on causation.)

[99] In what sense could one *truthfully* appeal to an absence in giving a causal explanation of some state of affairs? Lewis does not spell this out. One can surmise, however, what he has in mind. As we see from the above passage, he affirms that absences "can be causes," implying that it is *true* to regard them as causes. Yet he also maintains that this view is fundamentally *incorrect*, there being no truthmakers for or consisting in absences to appeal to in statements about one thing's causing another. It would seem, then, that Lewis is operating with a pragmatic sense of 'truth' in this context, which might be illustrated by a claim such as 'Donald Trump is no Abraham Lincoln': one might take this statement to be true (in a pragmatic—no less than literal—sense), but surely this 'explanation' of his personality traits and behavior is not strictly *relevant* to any of the causal factors influencing Trump's behavior and the expression of his public persona. Lewis, then, appears to be suggesting that when one cites absences as part of a causal explanation of a state of affairs, what one says will strictly speaking be false insofar as no such absence could have positively influenced the state of affairs, but nevertheless one's remark can be seen as *true to* the reality constituted by the state of affairs insofar as it is consistent with it and is intended to induce certain beliefs about and related to it. For a similar account that denies (genuine) causation by absence but ascribes to absences a legitimate and natural role in "causal explanation," see Beebee (2004). For an explanation of our intuitive inclination to speak of absences as causes and effects that locates this (mistaken) tendency in the epistemic similarity between genuine causation (between positive events) and causation by absence, see Dowe (2000, ch. 6).

> ‘[B]eing’ is said on its own in two ways: (a) what is divided by the ten genera; (b) what signifies the truth of propositions. The difference between (a) and (b) is that according to (b), anything of which an affirmative proposition can be formulated can be called a being, even if it puts forward nothing in reality. According to (b), privations and negations are called beings: for we say that affirmation *is* opposed to negation, and that blindness *is* in the eye. But according to (a), only what puts forward something in reality can be called a being. Accordingly, blindness and the like are not beings according to (a).[101]

As this text makes clear, Aquinas further agrees with Lewis in thinking not only that privations are not real beings, but also that they can somehow be accepted on semantic or logical grounds: privations are 'beings' insofar as they play a part in the formation of true propositions. This view seems very close to Lewis’ idea that privations can function intelligibly in causal explanations even if they fail to pick out any genuine or actual causal relationships.

However, despite Aquinas's and Lewis's shared emphasis on the essentially logical role of concepts of privation and on the ontological status of privations as nonbeings, their views in this context differ fundamentally. Unlike Lewis, Aquinas espouses, first, the view that the logical being of privations is specified in reference to a form inherent in a given *subject.* Further -- and this is the crux of the difference between Aquinas's and Lewis's views --the being of a privation is truly ascribed to a subject only on the basis of the *nonbeing* of a form in that subject, a form to which the privation is conceived as being opposed. Thus, for Homer's blindness to be (a "logical" truth rooted in the formation of a proposition about Homer) is for Homer's sight not to be (in the ontological sense, pertaining to what inheres in Homer).[102]

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[100] Aristotle distinguishes between being taken as (1) accidental being (which Aquinas leaves out in his account of being in *On Being and Essence*), (2) being of the categories (which Aquinas is picking out in the above passage), (3) being as the truth of a proposition (which Aquinas is here contrasting with categorial being), and (4) being as divided between act and potency. Although Aquinas does not treat (4) in this context, elsewhere he affirms that act and potency divide categorial being: "in the case of all of the foregoing terms which signify the ten predicaments [i.e. categories], something is said to be so actually and something else potentially; and from this it follows that each predicament is divided by actuality and potentiality" (*In Meta* V.9.897; Aquinas, 1995, p. 323). And later Aquinas writes: "being as divided by the ten categories signifies the very nature of the ten categories insofar as they are actual or potential" (*In Meta* X.3.1982; Aquinas, 1995, p. 649). Notice, however, that the first sense of 'being' that Aquinas introduces in *On Being and Essence* does not mention actuality. The reason for this is that Aquinas wants here to emphasize that being in the first sense does not signify actuality but essence. This point is reflected in a threefold distinction Aquinas presents elsewhere between senses of '*esse*', which respectively denote (i) the nature of a thing, (ii) the 'act' of an essence, and (iii) what signifies the truth of the composition in propositions, as represented in the copula (see *In Sent. I* d. 33, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1). The relevant point is that in *On Being and Essence* Aquinas is not maintaining that absences and privations lack actual existence; what's asserted, rather, is that privations have no essence. Hence, they are neither actually existing entities nor potentially existing entities. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for spelling out and encouraging me to clarify this point.

[101] *DEE* 1.4-13 (Aquinas, 2014, p. 14).

As Aquinas's distinction between two senses of 'being' suggests, predications of being or nonbeing in the logical sense may stand in certain relations of counterfactual dependence with predications of being or nonbeing in the ontological sense. As Aquinas says in another passage where he develops the distinction,

> [W]hatever is said to be a being in the first sense is a being also in the second sense: for whatever has natural existence in the nature of things can be signified to be by an affirmative proposition, e.g. when it is said that a color is, or a man is. But not everything which is a being in the second sense is a being also in the first sense: for of a privation, such as blindness, we can form an affirmative proposition, saying: 'Blindness is'; but blindness is not something in the nature of things, but is rather a removal of being: and so even privations and negations are said to be beings in the second sense, but not in the first. And 'being' is predicated in different manners according to these two senses: for taken in the first sense it is a substantial predicate, and it pertains to the question 'What is it?' [*quid est?*], but taken in the second sense it is an accidental predicate … and it pertains to the question 'Is there [such and such a thing]?' [*an est?*].[103]

For Aquinas, questions and statements of the '*an est*', logical sort supervene on questions and statements of the '*quid est*', ontological sort. This entails the counterfactual dependence of the former on the latter. Thus, if we follow Gyula Klima's convention[104] and italicize '*is*' and its cognates in order to denote being in the first, ontological sense and to distinguish it from being in the second, logical sense, we could say, e.g., that where there *are* no eyes, there are no attributions of sightedness; where there *is* no wall, there are no attributions of whiteness-in-the-wall, etc. Or in standard modal parlance: if it were the case that *x* had no eyes, then it would be the case that there could be no attributions of sightedness to *x*; if it were the case that there is no wall, then it would be the case that there would be no attributions of whiteness to the wall. This pattern of dependence is reflected in predications of privation, which Aquinas classes as being of the *an est* variety. Thus, blindness cannot be predicated of a thing which does not have eyes and is not naturally supposed to see; tears and holes (both privations) can only be attributed to materials of a certain kind, say fabric.[105] The key point is that no predications of privation can be *true* absent a subject *in which*, or *for which*, they are true.

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[102] See Klima (1996).

[103] 2 *SN* d. 34, q. 1, a. 1; quoted in Klima (1996, p. 92).

[104] See Klima (1996).

This indicates that the patterns of dependence that privative concepts can enter into are, for Aquinas, not confined to the role that such concepts play in ordinary inferences about causation and the properties of objects, as when I merely infer on a certain occasion that I am hungry because of an absence of food. Concerning the absence putatively relevant to a person's case of hunger, Aquinas would say that here one must understand what it is for a *subject* to lack a feature or accident, which can be derived only from prior cognition of what it is for that feature or accident to inhere in a subject. In other words, to predicate hunger of a human individual is to identify, with respect to that individual, a (temporarily) missing member of the set of necessary and sufficient conditions on being a nourished human being. Hunger and lack of food, then, are not *mere* absences, equal among others in their non-specificity, but are absences *for* a given human being in particular circumstances. This allows us to maintain, plausibly, that *one* subject's hunger is invariably different from *another* subject's hunger -- though both are absences -- where one might be able to spell out the difference in terms of (e.g.) the temporal, environmental, physiological, and psychological properties associated with hunger in each subject.

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[105] Cf. Haldane, 2007, pp. 184-85. I should note that accidental privation is dependent not only on substances (as are all accidents), but on positive accidental privation. Thus, not only would the absence of a wall entail the absence of whiteness-in-the wall; the latter would be entailed by the existence of blackness-in-the-wall. It is also worth noting here that Aquinas' distinction between *quid est* and *an est* predication can be compared helpfully to what Geach (1969, p. 65) characterizes as Frege's distinction between different senses in which existence may be predicated: "Existence in the sense of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) is several times over emphatically distinguished in Frege's works from the existence expressed by 'there is a so-and-so' (*es gibt ein* --)."

It is significant in light of these reflections that Aquinas likens knowledge of a privation to knowledge of the definition of a thing, contrasting it with something that is known as a conclusion is known from its premises.[106] Aquinas here seems to be suggesting that knowing how a subject falls short of having actuality in the way characteristic of its species, and what this implies about the nature of the species and of the deprived subject, involves more than knowing how appeals to absence may—solely, for Lewis—figure in inferences which display no special regard for what inheres in a subject or what it is to be a subject. By contrast with Lewis's view, for Aquinas it need not be *merely* by entering into propositions involving absences and wants that privations enter into patterns of counterfactual dependence.

The chief lesson concerning the causal role of privation that we glean from this discussion is that, for Aquinas, privations differ from mere absences in virtue of the former's dependence on actuality, a dependence entailing that any causal explanation one could make by appealing to privations must advert to an actual subject in which the privation inheres. This relevance to actuality on the part of privations makes it possible for privations to have a causal role in the first place, a role that Lewis and Aquinas reasonably eschew for mere absences.

3. Truth: Exemplarity and (Knowledge of) Privation

For Lewis, there is nothing we can strictly know about absences beyond the fact that they are not actual. Aquinas might seem to skirt this difficulty by suggesting that we can know about privations through observing how privations inhere in a subject. However, Aquinas espouses the view that being is convertible, or coextensive, with truth. This entails that *no truth* can pertain to nonbeing. Can we, therefore, be said to have true representations of privations as nonbeings? Without a proper answer to this question, Aquinas cannot hope to prevent the collapse of privations into mere absences, bringing us around to Lewis's alternative. As I shall try to show in this section, Aquinas upholds a complex theory of truth that allows him to explain our knowledge of privations even while the relation between being and truth entails that no truth can be ascribed to nonbeing. As we will see, Aquinas's account of how privations are known involves a distinct explanation of the causal role of privations in relation to the mind. Let us examine this account more closely.

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[106] See *SCG* I, 71.

Earlier, we encountered Aquinas's distinction between being in the 'logical' sense -- being as it attaches to the act of judgment or predication -- and being in the 'ontological' sense -- being as it denotes Aristotle's ten genera. This distinction translates into one between 'logical' truth -- or the 'truth of predication' (*veritas praedicationis*) -- and 'ontological' truth -- or the 'truth of the thing' (*veritas rei*). Aquinas maintains that, fundamentally, truth is in the mind, founded on a conformity or 'adequation' between the way judgments are composed in the mind and the way real-world forms inhere in real-world subjects.[107] When the intellect combines its concepts into a complex judgement that conforms to the structure of the inherence relation holding between an extramental form and an extramental subject, the intellect thereby judges truly, or conforms to the way things are in the world, and it is in this sense, Aquinas says, that truth is 'in' the intellect. Due to this dependence of truth on there being a relation of things to an intellect, Aquinas claims that truth 'in the intellect' is to be regarded as truth in the 'primary' sense.

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[107] The intellect "asserts truth by composing and dividing, for in every judgment some form signified by the predicate is either applied to the thing signified by the subject, or removed from it" (*ST* I q.16, a. 2; as quoted in Wood (2013), p. 24). For a central statement of this view in Aquinas, see *QDV* 1.1-2. For two excellent accounts of Aquinas on truth, see Wood (2013) and the classic and more in-depth Wippel (2007).

Aside from the way the ideas of finite intellects conform to the structure of extramental objects, there is another, more foundational sense in which, for Aquinas, truth depends on the relation of extramental beings to an intellect. This is the sense in which each created being corresponds to, and depends for its intelligibility on, the idea of that thing in *God's* mind. In this sense, what it is for each created being to be 'true' is for it to exemplify the idea of that thing as it exists in God's intellect. As Aquinas puts it, "Every thing is true insofar as it has the proper form of its own nature,"[108] a nature represented, and produced, by God. In this, ontological sense of 'true', being, inasmuch as it is being, is something true, and is said to be 'convertible' with truth. It is the correspondence of things to ideas in the mind of God that makes them true.

Thus, for Aquinas, truth in general depends on a correspondence between a thing and an intellect in a twofold manner: insofar as the thing corresponds to an idea in God's intellect, and insofar as an act of judgment on the part of a finite intellect corresponds to the structure of an actual thing (as it is represented by, and dependent on, God's idea of it). Aquinas sums up this general "correspondence" theory of truth in (among other places) *De veritate*: "[1] to every act of true understanding there must correspond some being and likewise [2] to every being there corresponds a true act of understanding."[109] The double appeal to "correspondence" in this sentence marks an inversion of the way in which Aquinas's correspondence theory holds between God's ideas and beings, on the one hand, and between beings and our ideas, on the other. On Aquinas's view, the truth of our knowledge depends on what we know, on what beings we cognize or what our minds come to be 'adequated' with (a dependence suggested in [2]). On the other hand

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[108] *ST* I q. 16, a. 2; as quoted in Wood, 2013, p. 26.

[109] *QDV* 1.2. ad.1; as quoted in Wasserman, 2007, p. 10 (bracketed numbers mine). *Prima facie*, this statement might look false. Surely there are beings -- some deep-sea creatures, say -- whose act of being does not correspond to anyone's particular act of understanding. But, as we have seen, what Aquinas has in mind in making a statement such as the one above is that each being imitates a form in the divine intellect and that, insofar as the being in question imitates the divine intellect, it in turn is something that the human intellect can imitate. See *QDV* 1.8.

(as might be taken to be implied by [1]), the truth of things depends on God's knowledge of them, on what ideas exist in God's intellect to which the natures of things correspond. In each of these cases, there is no truth to be had without a relation of being to an intellect. This primary sense in which truth is in, or depends on, an intellect (ours or God's) is illustrated vividly by the implication that if we were not around to know things and if, *per impossibile*, God did not exist but other things still did, there would, on Aquinas's view, be no truth at all.[110] For Aquinas, then, in the absence of any understanding on the part of an intellect, and even in the presence of things, there could, *contra* Lewis, not even exist the 'truth' that nonbeings *aren't* actual.

As noted, it might seem impossible, on Aquinas's correspondence theory of truth, to know anything true about privations, since privations are *non*beings and truth consists in the correspondence between being and understanding. But in fact we can see how Aquinas's theory of truth accommodates the concern that we cannot know privations, as nonbeings. Aquinas would say that since privations are nonbeings, they cannot have truth of being, or ontological truth: they cannot be true insofar as they correspond to a particular idea in God's mind. It follows that they can only be *logically* true.

Still, this explanation of our knowledge of privation cannot be deemed fully adequate. When we purport to say something true involving a privation -- as when we assert, 'Homer is blind' -- we aim to do more than vent the content of our thoughts or perceptions: we aim to express a truth about a state of affairs existing, as Aquinas would put it, "outside the soul." In this connection, privations, like absences in general, present Aquinas with the difficulty of accounting for how we can make true statements about nonbeings (as we purport to do), even though nonbeings are literally unable to affect the mind in any way that would make us directly cognizant of them.

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[110] See *QDV* 1.2. I owe this observation to an anonymous referee.

Aquinas is aware of this difficulty. He addresses it in a suggestive and often-overlooked passage from *De veritate*, where he provides a rare elucidation of how it is that we come to know, and make true statements about, nonbeings. In the course of this discussion, he confronts the proposal (*QDV* 1.8 ob. 6) that non-existence should be said to be the cause of negative propositions, i.e., that non-existence can cause such propositions to exist in the intellect. Aquinas rejects this possibility, saying:

> Non-existing is not the cause of the truth of negative propositions in the sense that it causes them to exist in the intellect [*in intellectu*]. The soul itself does this by conforming [*conformans*] itself to a non-being outside the soul [*extra animam*]. Hence, this non-existing outside the soul is not the efficient cause of truth in the soul, but, as it were, its exemplary cause [... *non est causa efficiens veritatis in anima, sed quasi exemplaris*]. The difficulty is based upon the efficient cause.[111]

Gloria Wasserman, in her compelling treatment of Aquinas's views concerning truths about nonbeings, proposes the following explanation of Aquinas's thinking in this context:

> Perhaps what Aquinas meant in saying that certain negations and privations exist *extra animam* is that they are nonbeings to which there corresponds a *fundamentum in re* for the concept that the intellect has in thinking them. Privations and qualified negations do not have being apart from an intellect, yet the intellect is not responsible for the unity of the intelligible character that privations have. The *fundamentum in re* for the concept of certain privations and negations is the real existence of subjects that lack certain forms that should be present in them. The real being that falls short of what it should be acts as the exemplar of the intellect's combining in one concept negation together with a species.[112]

Wasserman is right in bringing out that the logical truth of privations involves a complex state of affairs. More important, she insightfully accounts for the notion of nonexistence outside the soul by locating it in the "unity" of the representation of privation generated by the mind, for which unity the mind is not itself responsible.

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[111] *QDV* 1.8 (Aquinas, 1952).

[112] Wasserman, 2007, p. 107.

However, scrutinizing Aquinas's precise wording in the passage from *De veritate* under consideration leads me to think that aspects of this interpretation are incomplete or slightly off target. Two important points here concern what Aquinas says about the nature of the 'exemplarity' involved in the cognition of privation and what it is precisely that counts as the exemplar in the present context. An 'exemplar cause', for Aquinas, is a formal cause that is extrinsic to what it forms, such as the blueprint of a house, which specifies the form of a house without inhering in it.[113] As this characterization implies, however, exemplar causality embodies both formal and efficient causality, being, as in the case of the blueprint of a house, a form 'in regard to which' (*ad quam*) something is brought about.[114] Now Aquinas writes, in the previously-quoted *De veritate* passage: "[T]his non-existing outside the soul is not the efficient cause of truth in the soul, but, as it were [*quasi*] its exemplary cause." The two key points regarding this passage that I alluded to above are as follows. First, notice what Aquinas says about the 'exemplarity' of this nonexistence outside the soul: such nonexistence is "as it were" (*quasi*) the exemplar cause. The "*quasi*" qualifier is crucial here. Just as Aquinas denies to nonbeings efficient-causal status, so he denies that nonexistence can truly be an exemplar cause. Privations, he is saying, are *like* exemplar causes, implying, however, that there is no true comparison between them (since privations are not intrinsically a type of cause). Though the significance of this qualification is easy to miss, it is entirely in keeping with Aquinas's uniform disallowance of causality to nonbeing. Second, as we glean from the passage just quoted, what accounts for the truth of the mind's privative concept is not, as Wasserman suggests, "[t]he real being that falls short of what it should be," but rather "non-existing outside the soul." Strictly speaking, it is the absence of due form, i.e. the privation, and not the deprived subject itself, that serves as the exemplar according to Aquinas.

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[113] " In another sense cause means the form and pattern of a thing, i.e., its exemplar. This is the formal cause, which is related to a thing in two ways. In one way it stands as the intrinsic form of a thing, and in this respect it is called the formal principle of a thing. In another way it stands as something which is extrinsic to a thing but is that in likeness to which it is made, and in this respect an exemplar is also called a thing's form" (*In Meta* V.2.764 [Aquinas, 1995, p. 282]).

[114] See *QDV* 3.1. For a highly informative and carefully researched account of Aquinas's view of ideas as exemplar causes, see Doolan (2008).

Where does this leave us? What does it mean to assign to 'nonexistence outside the soul' the status of 'quasi-exemplar' of truth in the mind? How does this enable us to understand Aquinas's insistence that in the case of privation the mind conforms itself to nonexistence outside the soul without the truth of the soul's privative concept being efficiently caused by such nonexistence? In grasping what Aquinas has in mind, we might rely on the following intuitive analogy.

Students in beginning art classes are sometimes asked to do an exercise in drawing 'negative space', where they attempt to discern and trace the contours of all the empty spaces intervening between and directly surrounding the "positive" form of a chair. The objective is to avoid drawing the chair along any of its positive contours and instead create a representation that *tells of* the positive shape of the chair through the buildup and juxtaposition of the various traced-out "negative" spaces (Fig. 1).

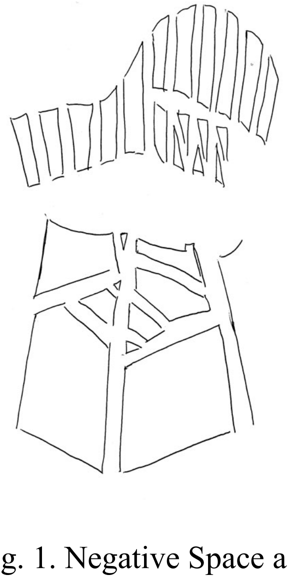

Fig. 1. Negative Space as an Illustration of Quasi-Exemplarity

Now, Aquinas would surely say -- as would we, I presume -- that the shapes delineated here, individually or collectively, correspond to nothing (no object) in reality. The lines in Fig. 1 do not represent the positive outline of any being, but rather delineate the absence of a particular form, namely the original, positive form of the chair. I believe that this illustration reveals just how Aquinas thinks about the logical truth of privation. Privations are nonbeings, absences of due form; however, as absences of *form* they are still spoken of as inhering in a subject. (The notion of nonbeing inhering in an actual subject is not as paradoxical as it may seem; think of a cavity "in" a tooth -- the inherence of a privation in subject is ostensibly something like that.[115]) Privative concepts are efficiently caused by the mind, just as the "negative" image of the chair is purely a product of the artist's perceptions. But privation also corresponds to 'nonexistence outside the soul', having as its material cause the subject in which it inheres. Just so, the artist in our present example produces a representation of nonexistence whose "intelligible character" is owed to the positive form of the chair and is set against the artist's own subjective perceptions, hence "outside" the artist's soul. For Aquinas, then, the mind's alleged "conformity" to privative form apparently consists (in terms of our example) in the coincidence of the perceptions of the mind with the negative shape demarcating the positive form of the actual chair. Thus, to apprehend a privation in a subject is at the same time to apprehend the positive form to which the relevant privation is conceived as being opposed. This is the view underlying (e.g.) the claim that knowledge of Homer's blindness implies knowledge of what it means for Homer to possess sight.

As we have seen, privation plays a unique causal role in relation to the mind's apprehension of the former. Privations fall short of being causes *per se*, but constitute quasi-exemplar causes of the mind's representations. Our negative-space example is also useful for bringing out this causal role. The negative shapes of what we might call the "privative" representation of the chair in Fig. 1 do not amount to anything that can be sat upon, kicked, or moved across the room: Fig. 1 is not a drawing of something that could enter into efficient-causal interactions with anything else. Relatedly, the "privative" image of the chair cannot fulfill the role of a proper exemplar cause, because it is not something that could guide the building of a chair in accordance with its form as a blueprint guides the construction of a house, although the negative shape is telling of a positive form that could. This being so, the "privative" chair significantly does retain one feature of exemplarity: its imitation or modelling of a form -- the positive form of a particular chair -- through its determinate arrangement of shapes, an arrangement produced by the mind (of the artist) but beholden to the real structure of the chair. It is, I believe, this restricted notion of exemplarity that Aquinas has in mind in speaking of the 'quasi-exemplarity' of privations, and which makes clear the character of 'nonexistence outside the soul'.

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[115] I borrow the tooth analogy from Still and Dahl (2016, p. 148).

For reasons stemming from his broader philosophical commitments, then, Aquinas, unlike Lewis, appreciates that privations, as one type of absence, have a "foundation in reality" (*fundamentum in re*) because, as Wasserman explains above and as we have seen in some detail, they are not absences *simpliciter*, but absences in a subject whose existing nature is responsible for the absences' intelligible character. The doctrine that privations have a more robust metaphysical and cognitive significance than they would if they were -- *à la* Lewis -- regarded as mere *façons de parler* thus finds its theoretical moorings in Aquinas's doctrine of the convertibility of truth and being. Crucially, this view of the metaphysical character of privations brings along the notion of the "quasi-exemplarity" of privations residing "outside the soul." In this way, the ontological status of privations involves a distinct conception of their causal role, consisting not in their being *causes*, but rather in their being a kind of condition, an integral component of a complex state of affairs, undergirding truth in the mind. Despite the notable divergence of Aquinas's views from Lewis's account of absence and its relation to causality, Aquinas, as we can now appreciate, anticipates Lewis's view that absences cannot be genuine causes. In the next section I examine the form that this rejection of privations as causes takes in the more narrowly circumscribed domain of Aquinas's account of natural change.

4. Natural Change: Privations, Principles, and Causes

Let me begin by pointing out how it would have been natural for Aquinas, given his commitments concerning the actuality-dependence of privations canvassed thus far, to uphold the view that privations *are* causes. Recently, John Haldane has invoked Aquinas' views on being and privation to argue against Lewis' views on causation by absence. Haldane (2007, p. 184) distinguishes three claims relating to the intuition that only what is actual can have effects:

(i) There can be no causing without there being a cause.

(ii) Every cause must reside in, or depend on something actual.

(iii) There are privative causes.

He points out that if (i) and (ii) are interpreted as stating that there cannot be bare privative causes, then they are compatible with (iii), since, as he argues and as we have seen Aquinas maintain, privations are not *bare* nothings but are always lacks or deprivations of things *in* actuality. Haldane goes on to argue that appeal to the mere notion of absence coupled with an intuitive commitment to the idea that there can be no causality without actuality is insufficient to rule out that privations can be genuine causes. As he writes,

> The dependence of ‘real’ privations upon actualities does not imply … that privations are not themselves causes; and certainly it does not show that privative explanations are translatable without loss of information into solely provisive ones. Likewise, the fact that privations may only be efficacious in company with some provisive factors does not show that their role is eliminable

> in favour of more detailed or extensive specifications of the latter. If, other things being equal, some set of conditions is necessary and sufficient for the occurrence of some effect, then the non-occurrence of that effect due to the non-obtaining of some member of the conditional set is not explicable by further elaboration of provisive conditions that did obtain. And a counterfactual analysis in which reference to privative absences features essentially is not an alternative to admitting the existence of privative causes, rather it is recognition of them.[116]

So, drawing on Aquinas' views about the relation between privation and actuality, Haldane concludes that, at the very least, we should be open to regarding privations as themselves effective. Why, then, does Aquinas himself reject this implication?

Of crucial relevance to this question is Aquinas's distinction between 'principle' (*principium*) and 'cause' (*causa*). In his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Aquinas generically draws the distinction in the following way: "[I]t should be noted that, although a principle and a cause are the same in subject, they nevertheless differ in meaning; for the term principle implies an order or sequence, whereas the term cause implies some influence on the being of the thing caused."[117] A major insight stemming from Aquinas's reliance on this distinction in the naturalistic context is that privation plays an essentially 'principiative', rather than causal, role relative to the subject in which it inheres. Privations are initial conditions in a subject that underlie or frame causal processes involved in natural change without themselves acting as causes *per se*. This characterizes the role of privations relative to the subject in which they inhere. But, concerning Haldane's question about the efficiency of privation, Aquinas also holds that privations cannot function in a causal role relative to something other than the subject in which they inhere, i.e., that they cannot serve as efficient causes. For notice that, if causes are chiefly to be regarded as principles rather than as causes (*per se*), then their lack of causal influence in determining which changes a subject might undergo equally prevents them from playing a causal role in determining change relative to something other than the subject. As we are about to see, while privations determine what *kind* of causal relations a subject can enter into -- in virtue of, for example, a subject's blindness -- as principles rather than causes (*per se*) they cannot *bring it about* that the subject enters into those relations. Since privations cannot causally influence the subject in which they inhere, they cannot bring about change in things other than the subject with which the subject causally interacts.

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[116] Haldane, 2007, p. 185.

[117] *In Meta* V.1.751 (Aquinas, 1995, p. 277).

As we see from the previously quoted definition of the distinction between 'principle' and 'cause', these notions may apply to the same subject, but each with its own connotation. In *On the Principles of Nature*, Aquinas applies this difference to the topic of natural change. He writes: “Privation is put among the principles and not among the causes, because privation is that from which generation begins.”[118] In keeping with his general definitions of 'principle' and 'cause', ‘principles of change’ are distinguished from ‘causes’ in that the former are said by Aquinas to constitute the origin of some type of change, whether or not the effects of the change follow from that origin in the sense in which effects follow from the action of a causal agent. Aquinas proffers as an example of a ‘principle’ in this sense the transition of something that is black into something that is white. Blackness is not the cause of the qualitative change but is the state whence the change begins.[119]

Aquinas takes there to be three essential “principles” in nature, of which privation is one:

> Therefore, there are three principles of nature: namely, matter, form, and privation. Of these, one—namely form, is that to which generation moves. The other two have to do with that from which the generation moves. Hence, matter and privation are the same in subject, but they differ in formula [*ratio*]. For the bronze and the unshaped are the same before the advent of the form, but it is called ‘bronze’ in accordance with one formula and ‘unshaped’ in accordance with another.[120]

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[118] *DPN* 3.80-85 (Aquinas, 2014, p. 7).
[119] *DPN* 3.72-75 (Aquinas, 2014, p. 7).
[120] *DPN* 2.1-8 (Aquinas, 2014, p. 3-4).

According to Aquinas, privation is a principle that is coextensive with matter and is present wherever matter's taking on one form precludes it from taking on another (of which the said matter is thereby deprived). However, unlike matter and form, which for Aquinas are principles *per se*, privation is a principle *per accidens.*

In fact, Aquinas's view of the nature of privations in this context is more nuanced than just this characterization implies. For Aquinas allows that privations may be regarded as both principles *and* causes "*per accidens*":

> [T]he first thing from which motion begins cannot be said to be a cause *per se*, even if it is called a principle. And, for this reason, privation is put among the principles and not among the causes, because privation is that from which generation begins. But it can also be called a cause *per accidens*, insofar as it coincides with matter... (3.80-85.)

The "*per accidens*" qualifier implies the same thing in both the cases of causes and principles. As Aquinas illustrates, a privation's being a cause or a principle *per accidens* can be understood on the model of a builder's musical abilities being incidental to the builder's capacity to construct a house, either in principle or when he does so. In this case, musicality coincides "in the same subject" with possession of capacity as a builder.[121] Aquinas thinks that privations coincide with matter in this way: both insofar as matter is implicated in a distinct causal process that carries it from potentially possessing a form to actually possessing it, and insofar as the matter is simply the state from which (but not in virtue of which) such a transition might take place. In the former case, privation serves as a cause *per accidens*, and in the latter a principle *per accidens*.[122] This explains why Aquinas is comfortable with simultaneously labelling privations as causes and principles *per accidens*: the upshot of both designations is essentially the same, expressing the role of privation as kind of perpetual precondition or abiding concomitant underlying, but in no way constituting, *per se* causal processes effecting change in nature. Privation does not operate through the kind of agency located in material, efficient, formal, and final causes, but rather ubiquitously constrains—or rather, frames—the outcome of causal processes of the previous kinds.

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[121] Cf. *DPN* 2.9-14.
[122] Cf. *DPN* 2.1-17; 2.67-85.

This view of privations as principles/causes *per accidens* is thus rooted in the unique role that Aquinas envisions for privation in the naturalistic context: privations always underlie and are implicated in change insofar as any causal process brings about the instantiation of one form to the exclusion of another: what 'privation' ubiquitously stands for in such scenarios is the *lack* in the existing form of its (nonexistent) contrary.[123] As Jeffrey Brower persuasively argues, expounding this picture as a key component of the explanation of natural change is the fundamental point of Aquinas's appeal to privation in the naturalistic context.[124] Not only does the notion of privation here elucidate Aquinas's conception of natural change; it also serves to indicate how privations do not, at least by Aquinas's lights, function as efficient causes in their own right.

In this respect, the '*per accidens*' nature of privation in the naturalistic context lines up with Aquinas's hedged conception of privations as 'quasi-exemplar causes' in the context of his views on the logical truth of privation. But it also mirrors Aquinas's account of quasi-causality in cases of efficiency where there is no natural change, as in the case of evil being incidentally brought about by good through a deficient will. In *De malo*, Aquinas succinctly expresses his view of the role of the accidental cause of evil as follows: the "will causes evil by accident when the will is borne to something that is good in some respect but is linked to something that is unqualifiedly evil [i.e., insofar as it involves the failure to reach the perfection to which a thing or person is ordained]."[125] For Aquinas, privation cannot be the efficient cause of an agent's bringing about evil, because we can only directly intend the good. The notion of privation becomes morally relevant in denoting an underlying state of deficiency of the will that is manifested in, but does not strictly cause, the agent's wayward behavior. The agent's will, the bearer of moral responsibility, suffers a contingent lack as the agent's intentions are diverted toward to the pursuit of something apparently good but rationally sub-optimal. Privation, then, does not explain the agent's (misdirected) pursuit of the good; it is needed to characterize the underlying change in the agent's moral condition as her actions are diverted from the morally and rationally proper choice.

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[123] Tellingly, Aquinas speaks of change in terms of both forms and contraries. See *In Phys* 1.10, 13.

[124] Brower, 2014, p. 71.

As we see in the naturalistic context—and as is correspondingly evident in the moral sphere, though in somewhat different terms—Aquinas's view of privations as principles/causes *per accidens* suggests a deeper relationship between privation and causation than Haldane countenances in simply proposing that privations can be causes. Even prior to citing certain kinds of absences as reasons for a particular event (say, Homer's stumbling because of his blindness), we need to possess the concept of what properly belongs to a thing of a given nature (or, in the case of human agency, what properly belongs to a the actions of a subject insofar as that subject strives toward the good). In a general vein, Homer and a mole may both be deprived of sight, but only in Homer's case would we view blindness as relevant to events in which Homer fails to perform certain functions or enjoy certain experiences natural for ordinary, sighted members of his species. What is needed, therefore, is a sense of the conditions that must be fulfilled, or must fail to be fulfilled, in order for certain causal processes to occur (or not to occur).[126] Granted a conception of those conditions—established by a conception of the kinds of privations a subject or its actions might naturally undergo—there is no need to attribute (counterintuitively) a distinct form of causal agency to privations, i.e. to countenance the notion of an intrinsic (as opposed to accidental or 'quasi') "privative causality." It was not by a full-blown agency possessed by Homer's blindness that Homer stumbled, for it does not follow from *blindness*, as I have said, that Homer (or anyone) might stumble. Instead, Homer's blindness excludes his sightedness and all the capacities that accrue to those in whom sight inheres. So, while it was (e.g.) the movement of his feet and the boulder in front of him that (efficiently) caused Homer to stumble, these causes were effective *while* Homer's blindness excluded the form of sight; they were not effective *in concert* with his blindness, as if the latter were another efficient causal factor of the same nature as the former causes.

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[125] *QDM* q,1, a. 3, c; as quoted in Still and Dahl (2016, p. 152). Concerning the bracketed bit, see Still and Dahl (2016, p. 150).

[126] In more recent work, Haldane (2011) appears to concede this point, while holding onto the view, which I believe Aquinas does not himself uphold, that there are genuinely 'privative causes'.

5. Conclusion

Aquinas, I have argued, sees privation as functioning in explanations of natural change and causation as an underlying condition (principle), which things possess as they causally interact with other things, rather than as some form of causal agency in its own right. Together with his views on privation in relation to his doctrine of the convertibility of truth and being, Aquinas's treatment of privation as a principle of natural change and as a quasi-exemplar of truth in the mind suggests that accounting for being as intelligible requires a more complex metaphysical framework than can be based on a simple inventory of positively existing entities and their causal relationships. This is true even while privations do not themselves augment or stand in an extrinsic relation to real, positively existing beings. For Aquinas, the carves in reality (privations) are just as important as the joints (properly individuated subjects and their causal interactions). This, I submit, is a philosophical perspective worth recognizing, regardless of our metaphysical ideology.[127]

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Chapter 2:
Spinoza on Relations

1. Introduction

Unlike many of his medieval scholastic predecessors, and unlike his younger contemporary, Leibniz, Spinoza had little explicitly to say about relations -- their logic, epistemology, and ontology. This might seem surprising, as many recent commentators have profitably explored "Spinozistic" relations -- relations, such as 'conception', 'causation', and 'inherence', that Spinoza invokes in a characteristic way -- in elucidating features of his thought (see, e.g., Della Rocca (2008), Melamed (2012), and Newlands (2010)). Yet we should not ignore the significance that Spinoza assigned to relations *as such* in his metaphysical system. This significance is most visible in connection with Spinoza's discussion in his early works of relations as 'beings of reason' (*entia rationis*). In this chapter, I investigate Spinoza's understanding of relations in this domain. Relations, as beings of reason, function as mental heuristics for ordering and "explaining" existence but have no extramental existence and do not independently determine or structure the properties of things in the world. Relations thus occupy a shadowy place in Spinoza's metaphysics while they play a distinguished role in our mental lives and possess a complex epistemological status at the interface between being and its representation in the mind.

For early modern as well as present-day philosophers, the concept of relation is closely associated the concept of *universal*. The early moderns viewed the connection between relations and universals as arising from the way relations were implicated in the formation of universals, namely, through the comparison of singulars. Because this sort of comparison was regarded as resembling the way in which comparison induced relations like *taller than*, the metaphysical characteristics of relations and universals were thought to be akin (see Carriero (2015), 163 n. 6).

In striking contrast to this picture, I shall argue, Spinoza viewed relations and universals as substantially different in multiple respects. These differences, I shall argue, are rooted in the special way in which Spinoza regards relations – not universals – as embodying the characteristics of beings of reason as he conceives them. To expound this noteworthy point of view, I will attempt to disentangle Spinoza's concept of relations from his concept of universals. My objective is not directly to rule out universals as *entia rationis,* though I will suggest that there are grounds for regarding universals as a separate type of "metaphysical being." Rather, my chief aim is to bring out how relations are more central to the nature of beings of reason than universals appear to be.

My focus shall be on two of Spinoza's early works, the *Short Treatise* (KV) and the *Metaphysical Thoughts* (CM). In section 2, I flesh out the profile of relations as beings of reason, specifically as suggested in these works. In section 3, I compare Spinoza's conception of universals and his conception of relations as articulated in this early period. I end in section 4 with some brief concluding remarks, gesturing toward Spinoza's mature conception of relations in the *Ethics*.

2. Relations as Beings of Reason

Reflecting what was standardly the case in medieval discussions of relations (see Brower (2018), §2.1), Spinoza's talk of relations is not confined to any one piece of Latin terminology (leaving aside expressions in Dutch). Significantly, the term '*relatio*' and its variants show up sparingly in Spinoza's talk about relations; associated notions like 'order' (*ordo*), 'respect' (*respectus*), and 'comparison' (*comparatio*) appear to occur more frequently. This datum is important to keep in mind in what follows, since it might be erroneously assumed that where translated passages do not contain the word 'relation', Spinoza is not speaking about relations. In the discussion that follows, by contrast, I construe talk of 'order', 'respect' and 'comparison' as talk about relation. Since, as we are about to see, these terms are integral to Spinoza's characterizations of the nature of beings of reason, it is natural and informative to posit an intimate connection between relations and beings of reason – or so I shall presently argue.

Before proceeding with this argument, let me foreground two crucial features of Spinoza's concept of a 'being of reason'. The first concerns the kinds of notions which Spinoza takes to qualify as such. Spinoza does not allude to such examples all in one place, but examining different passages in the CM reveals that the following notions are among those that count: *blindness, extremity or limit, term, darkness* (see G I/234/25-28), *opposition, order, agreement, difference, subject, adjunct,* etc. (see G I/245/1). The list contains notions "which the mind uses for negating" (G I/234/27), such as *extremity* and *limit*; notions denoting privation, such as *blindness* and *darkness*; and notions indicating relations, such as *opposition, order, agreement, difference,* etc. In dividing beings of reason into negations, privations, and relations Spinoza is channeling a standard conception of beings of reason found in scholastic philosophy, as witnessed, for example, in the work of Francisco Suárez (*Disputatio Metaphysica* 54, §3). The division is instructive for our purposes, for it clearly exhibits that, aside from conceptions of negation and privation, relations are constitutive of the notion of beings of reason. If it turns out that none of the above notions qualify as *universals*, this might be taken as evidence that relations have a role in Spinoza's metaphysics prima facie distinct from the role assigned to universals. This is the central prospect on which I hope to shed some light.

A second, profound, feature that Spinoza ascribes to *entia rationis* is their essential role in determining, not how objects are constituted in extramental reality, but rather how, or by what modes of thinking, we are apt to conceive such objects. Thus, Spinoza warns:

> [W]e should carefully be on guard in the investigation of things, lest we confound real beings with beings of reason. For it is one thing to inquire into the nature of things, and another to inquire into the modes by which things are perceived by us. (CM I 1 | G I/235/30-37)

For Spinoza (in the early works we will be looking at), all characterizations of the nature of relations must advert to this basic premise about the proper, epistemically reflexive role of beings of reason. As the continuation of this passage implies, failure to appreciate this role threatens to undermine our understanding of, precisely, “the ways in which we apprehend nature” as well as “nature itself.” This indicates that the “modes by which things are perceived by us” are construed by Spinoza as the modes by which, through the representation of relations, we *rationally* perceive things. This admonition, then, would seem to relate distinctly to beings of *reason.* To anticipate, the chief lesson I shall draw from this sort of presupposition is that relations are markedly distinct from universals – confused representations -- in what the former reveal about the rational bearing of human cognition on the world. With these basic observations in place, let us see how Spinoza’s (early) account of relations unfolds.

Spinoza subsumes relations under the category of 'beings of reason' in multiple early texts. A concise and revealing passage on the character of relations as beings of reason occurs in KV I 10:

> Some things [*dingen*] are in our intellect and not in Nature [*in ons verstand ... niet in de Natuur*], so that these are only our own work, and they help us to understand things distinctly [*onderscheidelijk ... verstaan*]. Among these we include all relations [*betrekkingen*], which have reference to different things. These we call *beings of reason* [*Entia Rationis*]. (KV I 10 | G I/49/5-8)

According to Spinoza in the KV, there can be no relations without an activity of the mind that helps us "to understand things distinctly [*onderscheidelijk ... verstaan*]." Although Spinoza doesn't spell out this notion of "understanding," it is plausibly interpreted as the ability not only to represent the notions of, say, left and right, but to identify *which* thing(s) are to the left or to the right of something else (cf. Geach (1957), 33, for an informative discussion of this view). As Spinoza intimates in KV I 10, attributions of relative goodness and evil cannot be made unless there is *something* that is perceived to instantiate either goodness or evil so that *it* can be compared with other things in this respect, which "respect" Spinoza defines as its perceived utility or desirability relative to something else -- an intrinsic property of neither thing. However, although it may, for Spinoza, be a necessary condition on grasping the concept of a relation that one have the capacity to recognize when particular things satisfy it, such recognition does not include the representation of the essence of any particular thing, because it doesn't necessarily involve being able to tell anything further definitive about each of the things related. In other words, the content of thoughts about relations derives from some observable respect in which the relevant objects, independently of their natures, can be brought into comparison (G I/235/30-I/236/5). On this account, then, relations, considered in their own right, never uncover the essences of things they relate, and thus never constitute the idea of a particular object, whether possible or necessary (see CM I 1 | G I/234/30).

This cardinal feature of Spinoza's conception of relations illuminates his frequent appeal to the relevant distinction between 'extrinsic' vs. 'intrinsic' denominations. Spinoza customarily associates relations with the notion of 'extrinsic denominations' (see, especially, TIE §101 | G II/36/32; see also CM II 2 | G I/252/29; E2d4, E3DeffAff48 | G II/203/22-24; Ep. 54 | G IV/252/30-32). As the scholastics understood the concept -- an understanding appropriated by Descartes (see AT VII 84ff. | CSM II 58) -- an 'extrinsic denomination' is a name given to a thing in virtue of its perceived relation(s) to something outside it (cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II, ch. 13, and Manning (2016), 276). An example of an extrinsic denomination would be that of the predicate that occurs in the sentence 'Joe Biden is *Vice President*'. *Vice President* is a name or designation that does not pertain to Biden's nature but applies to him in virtue of his perceived relations to other things, e.g. other people who occupy different positions in the governmental hierarchy.

The significance of the contrast between extrinsic and intrinsic denominations is that it allows Spinoza to express relationality -- and its definitive detachment from ideas that represent the natures of particular things -- in semantic terms. Spinoza's denial that relations have the status of ideas of the natures of existing objects can be viewed in light of the putative purchase of language on metaphysical reality. People, Spinoza says, confuse relations with ideas of real beings. He diagnoses this error as consisting in people's giving names to relations that are confusedly attributed to things, as if the relations existed outside the intellect. Because a thing's extrinsic denominations apply to it in virtue of the relations it stands to other things, *those relations themselves* are mistakenly regarded as *ideas* of that thing (as when we take *Vice President* and the manifold relations this notion implicates to form part of the *idea* of Joe Biden). In short, people "judge the things from the words," i.e. from extrinsic denominations, " not the words from the things" (G I/235/8-9) Thus, Spinoza can be seen to rely on the character of extrinsic denominations to express the crucial point that relations are not ideas of the natures of particular things.

Just as notable as this tenet of Spinoza's account of relations is Spinoza's distinctive view of relations as *purely heuristic representations* that govern the mind's comprehension of empirical reality. As beings of reason, relations enable us to "more easily *retain, explain, and imagine* the things we have understood [*ad res intellectas faciliùs retinendas, explicandas, atque imaginandas*]" about the features of empirical existence we represent (G I/233/31-32; emphasis in original). The notion of a mode of thought that does not represent the natures of objects, but embodies or expresses the way we comprehend the respects in which objects cohere with one another, may seem paradoxical, as far as the project of explanation is concerned. It need not seem so strange, however, if one takes a being of reason to *consist in* the *activity* of retaining, imagining, and explaining, as well as whatever representation results from the immediate *output of* such activity. This definition is suggested quite vividly in Spinoza's explanation of 'time' in CM I 4:

> *What time is*
> But to determine this duration, we compare it with the duration of other things which have a certain and determinate motion. *This comparison* is called *time* [*haecque comparatio tempus vocatur*]. Time, therefore, is not an affection of things, but only a mere mode of thinking, *or*, as we have already said, a being of reason. For it is a mode of thinking that serves to explain duration. (G I/244/23-32; emphasis in original)

Spinoza is careful here to avoid saying that a being of reason is properly speaking a mental representation *of* an object. Rather, the (or a) defining feature of a being of reason is that it "serves to explain" some feature of existence, in this case by comparing, or bringing into relation, the "certain and determinate motion" of one thing with that of other things "which have a certain and determinate motion." The result is a *heuristic* representation that gives us purchase on the way we grasp (empirical) existence, telling us – for example -- that, in relation to our perspective, one plant takes three times as long to bloom as another. The being of reason here is not the idea of either plant -- nor the idea of *planthood* -- but 'time', the measure -- *not* the idea --we apply to both. Such comparison falls short of illuminating the essences of the things compared, but it is useful and edifying in other ways, informing, for instance, our horticultural practices. In the case of Spinoza's elucidation of the notion of time, then -- which he appears to suggest as illustrative of the conception of 'being of reason' generally -- a being of reason is an act of comparison along with what emerges from such comparison as a kind of rational tool, a notion devoted to defining our representational bearings in the (empirical) world. Despite its being guided by reason in this way, however, the representation of a relation is tied to no one object and cannot be true or false (G I/235/18).

We can make more vivid and precise Spinoza’s notion of the characteristics of relations as beings of reason by holding that notion up against Kripke's famous example of the standard meter and the metaphysical and epistemological lessons Kripke draws from it. For Spinoza (as we have just seen), a good illustration of the nature of beings of reason is provided by spatiotemporal measurement, or the constructing of spatiotemporal relations. As all will agree, such measurement must be fixed in a manner that is not wholly fortuitous (or self-contradictory); yet, as many will also recognize, any system of measurement -- standard or not -- will in a fundamental way be arbitrary relative to the reality it measures. Thus, suppose that I arbitrarily single out a portion of my physical environment, a stick say, and declare,

(K) 'The length of stick *S* at time t_0 is one meter.'

As Kripke (1980, 56-57) tells us, (K) is not a necessary truth (even if it is supposed to be a definition), for 'the length of *S* at time t_0' does not give the meaning of 'meter' but rather "fixes the reference" of the latter term. Though the reference of 'meter' is fixed by the notion of 'the length of stick *S* at time t_0,' the relation between S and the designation of one meter is arbitrary. For this reason, (K) expresses what Kripke famously called the 'contingent a priori': I know 'a priori' -- automatically, without further investigation -- that S is one meter long insofar as it was I who stipulated ('designated') that it is such; and yet the fact that S is one meter long is contingent because, even holding fixed the meter as a standard of measurement, it could have happened that S had a different length, even at t_0.

Beings of reason are like meter sticks, for Spinoza. The relations we posit in explaining spatiotemporal existence -- the way we order or oppose things, for instance -- furnish us with knowledge of certain features of that existence insofar as we have used such relations to "fix" those features. Nevertheless, this practice has no bearing on the nature of the features it delineates, because nothing about the way the relevant features of existence have been fixed dictates why they should be fixed that way.

So, for Spinoza (in the KV and the CM), there is an element of arbitrariness in representations of relations; indeed, such arbitrariness is intrinsic to the way in which relations “explain” features of existence, as we saw in the case of duration. At this point, however, one might allege that such arbitrariness threatens or even undermines the aptness of such explanations: in what way can such representations of the world be perspicuous if they do not represent “the inmost essence of things”?

Spinoza could respond to this worry by saying that the perspicuity of such representations rests on the *clarity* that representations of relations possess in virtue of being thought of as tied to our perception of a given *circumstance*. Spinoza highlights the association between relations and circumstance in an important passage from the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, where he contrasts proper knowledge of the essence of singular things with the understanding of things drawn from the relations in which they stand, a contrast we observed at the outset: "The essences of singular, changeable things are not to be drawn from their series, *or* order of existing, since it offers us nothing but extrinsic denominations, relations, or at most, circumstances, all of which are far from the inmost essence of things" (TIE §101 | G II/36/30-35; for a later statement of the connection of relation to circumstance, see E5p29s). Now it might be said that, insofar as representations of relations are attached to specific circumstances, their content is determined by the way the world *is*. Thus, when we think (non-fictitiously) of two objects as related, we inevitably think of them as related in a real-world *context*. This context provides the setting of the mind’s comparison between two things and helps render the representation of the relation between those things *clear*, even though the ideas of the relata as independent beings remain obscure or imperfect.

To illustrate, consider the relation defined by the concepts of *laying an egg* and *an egg hatching* (the example is from Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding* II, xxv, 8). My representation of this relation will be clearer if it is couched as a relation between a female bird parent and her chick – these are objects *which* may be identified as satisfying or instantiating the former, more abstract relation. Further, the representation may be rendered still more lucid and precise if it is tied to the representation of the mother's laying the egg and the egg hatching *in a certain setting*, say in a nest in a tree in the North End of Central Park. It could be said that the more precisely a relation is imagined as holding between objects in a certain circumstance, the more valuable and effective is its heuristic function, revealing how and to what extent features of existence may be organized and elucidated by us. Crucially, however – and this is a concession to the present worry about the perspicuity of representations of relation -- Spinoza would point out (in the same spirit we've witnessed all along) that no matter how acute is our perception of the *relation* between the mother bird and her chick, as well as of the circumstance to which that relation is tied, such a relation is – and must be -- compatible with having an obscure and imperfect idea of the natures of the *birds themselves.*

Considering the representational role of relations adumbrated above, what do we make of their ontological status? Does their relegation to the intellect as mere representations make them "a mere nothing" overall, as Spinoza puts it (G I/235/13)? Spinoza's definitive response to this question holds true not only of relations but of universals (and in principle any form of abstracta): representations of relations (universals, etc.) are not entirely bereft of ontological status, insofar as they are *modes of thought*, something the mind can be "employed about," to use Locke's expression. Spinoza puts the point succinctly: "[I]f anyone looks outside the intellect for what is signified by those words ['being of reason'], he will find it to be a mere nothing. But if he means the modes of thinking themselves, they are indeed real beings” (CM I 1 | G I/235/13-16). By Spinoza's lights, a non-veridical representation is still a mode of thought, a mental entity, and in this precise sense it is not a mere nothing.

Before I conclude this section, let me raise, without resolving, a further worry concerning the role of arbitrariness in Spinoza’s account of relations. In the KV and the CM, Spinoza seems adamant that relations do not exist independently of the intellect. Insofar as they are the workmanship of the intellect, relations apply arbitrarily – though guided by reason (G I/236/13) -- to real objects. Although Spinoza builds a careful case for this view, one might simply ask why he feels obliged or entitled to hold it in the first place. My earlier comparison between Spinoza’s account of relations and Kripke's contingent a priori was intended to bring out how the relations we posit (when we measure things, for example) have no bearing on the natures of objects as they exist outside of thought. However, although Spinoza holds that there is an element of arbitrariness in representaitons of relations, it does not seem as if there is any such arbitrariness in the fact that one thing is, say, longer or taller than another. It does not just happen to be the case that Theaetetus is taller than Socrates in the way that it just happens to be the case that we use a certain stick as the standard for one meter. The worry here is that, although (e.g.) which particular system of measurement we adopt is arbitrary, not *all* relational truths are arbitrary.

This objection is interesting and on point, but I think that its force would not be recognized by Spinoza in this context. For the question of the arbitrariness of relational truths is not the chief concern of Spinoza’s account of relations in the KV and CM; rather, the concern in these texts is to treat relations in a way that convinces us not to reify them. Relations are supposed to contribute no being to reality *beyond* whatever form of reality is possessed by *our* cognitive relation to the world. Spinoza repeats this point numerous times in both the KV and the CM, and indeed this scruple would appear to be the principal take-away message of Spinoza’s early account of relations as beings of reason.

To summarize, then, we have seen that, for Spinoza in his early writings, (1) relations cannot be ideas of the *natures* of objects; (2) relations have a rational basis insofar as they provide a cognitive foundation for the explanation (or retention or imaginative appropriation) of empirical objects; and, finally, (3) relations, as beings of reason, are connected with, and distinguished by, some circumstance or context. As we are now about to see, these features are important in discerning the differences between relations and universals, a distinct kind of "metaphysical being" (E2p48s) – or so, in my view, the following discussion should imply.

3. Relations vs. Universals

It seems standard practice among commentators giving an account of Spinoza’s views about 'beings of reason' to posit similarities, rather than to probe differences, between relations and universals (see, e.g., Carriero (2015) and Newlands (2017)). While there is some textual justification for positing such similarity, I think there is stronger and more abundant evidence that Spinoza kept universals and relations apart, and that it was the latter which he regarded as constitutive of his conception of beings of reason. In this section I present a limited assortment of textual evidence for the view that Spinoza regarded relations as a distinguished sort of mental being.

Ethics 2p40s offers what is perhaps Spinoza's most representative characterization of the nature and origin of universals. (E2p40s is consistent with Spinoza's early characterization of universals: see KV I 2 | G I/32/33-I/33/4 and the bit of text immediately preceding. Notably, this passage from the KV *contrasts* the notion of a universal with the notion of a 'whole', described as a being of reason; the passage is complex and worth exploring, but I do not have space to do so here.) I quote E2p40s at length:

> [1] Those notions they call *Universal*, like Man, Horse, Dog, etc., have arisen ... because so many images (e.g. of men) are formed at one time in the human Body that they [2] surpass the power of imagining -- not entirely, of course, but still to the point where the Mind can imagine neither slight differences of the singular [men] (such as the color and size of each one, etc.) nor their determinate number, and [3] imagines distinctly only what they all agree in, insofar as they affect the body. For the body has been affected most [NS: forcefully] by [what is common], since each singular has affected it [by this property]. And [NS: the mind] expresses this by the word *man*, and [4] predicates it of infinitely many singulars. For as we have said, it cannot imagine a determinate number of singulars.
>
> But it should be noted [5] that these notions are not formed by all [NS: men] in the same way ... For example, those who have more often regarded men's stature with wonder will understand by the word *man* an animal of erect stature. But those who have been accustomed to consider something else, will form another common image of men -- e.g., that man is an animal capable of laughter, or a featherless biped, or a rational animal. (G II/121/12-32)

I shall outline some differences between Spinoza's conception of universals and his conception of relations as beings of reason by attending to the individual points in this passage marked by the bracketed numbers I have inserted above. Let us start with [1] (in conjunction with [4]).

[1, 4] Universals are representations, or predications, of (infinitely many) particulars; the objects of universals are ultimately the ideas of singular things -- modes-- that can or (necessarily) do exist. Relations, by contrast, "have no object that exists necessarily, or can exist" and hence are not ideas of things (G I/234/31-32).

[2] Universals surpass the power of imagining; beings of reason are formed as aids to the imagination (CM I 1 | G I/233/32, G I/234/17-28; CM I 5 | G I/245/1-16).

[3] Universals represent things without distinction; relations, as beings of reason, involve the representation of things as distinct (although both universals and beings of reason arise from the mind's being affected in some way) (KV I 5 | G I/49/5-6).

[5] Universals are not formed by individuals in the same way -- the representations that constitute universals are rooted in the idiosyncratic experience of each individual. Controversies involving appeal to universals arise from differences in "the disposition of [one's] brain" (E1App | G II/82/33). By contrast, misrepresentation of (with) beings of reason has less to do with individual idiosyncrasy and more to do with improperly distinguishing the beings of reason from real beings (see, e.g. Ep. 12 | G IV/58).

Two points of elucidation concerning [1] are in order.

(i) First, it is worth noting the clear contrast in the types of notions Spinoza labels as universals from the list he gives of beings of reason in CM, as I hinted at in the beginning. In E2p40s, paradigmatic examples of universals include "Man, Horse, Dog, etc." In the CM, as we saw, examples of beings of reason include the relational notions of *opposition, order, agreement, difference, subject, adjunct,* etc. (see G I/245/1). Names like 'man', 'dog', and 'horse' (as well as, e.g., 'perfection' and 'imperfection' (E4pref | G II/207/19)) are formed by a process of abstraction from a con-*fusion* of representations, to which we apply a kind of taxonomical term. However, such a term -- as the list of features of universals just adumbrated implies -- expresses only how our cognition relates *confusedly* to the world, failing to represent features of the world that we *distinctly* represent. By contrast, the notions listed as beings of reason in the CM pick out different ways in which existing things are kept distinct -- not conflated -- through comparison.

As I suggested above, this might be the precise basis for categorizing relations as beings of *reason*, to the exclusion of universals which are subject not to the guidance of reason but to the capricious workings of the imagination. In short, relations, as beings of reason, embody how our representations relate rationally to the world, whereas universals, I submit, form a distinct kind of “metaphysical being” born of the adventitious effects of objects on the imagination, the result of such impingement being the warped and indeterminate representation of empirical reality by the mind (E2p40s). It might be said that, crucially, though Spinoza is interested in uncovering how the mind apprehends empirical reality both confusedly and perspicuously (as evidenced by, for example, his discussion of the three types of knowledge in E2p40s2, directly following his account of the nature and origin of universals), insofar as he is concerned with the *investigation* of nature, he is distinctly concerned with the nature of relations and what they reveal about the character of the mind's relation to the world.

(ii) Second, I should mention one passage (discussed at length by Carriero (2015)) which might seem to run counter to my thesis that Spinoza regards relations, as beings of reason, as importantly distinct from universals. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza uses the term "*Being of Reason*" to gloss the notion of the "the Will" as "only an Idea of this or that volition" (KV II 16 | G I/83/3-5). This might seem like evidence that Spinoza regards universals as beings of reason, and this might be taken as indirect evidence that relations too may involve having *ideas* of (the nature of) particular things (e.g. "this or that volition").

However, I think any appearance of inconsistency with my account can be explained away. To begin with, Spinoza in the same passage also calls the idea of the will a "fiction" (G I/83/6). However, in the *Metaphysical Thoughts* (a work written later than the KV) Spinoza distinguishes beings of reason from *both* universals (see G I/234/30-I/235/2) *and* fictions (see G I/236/6-21). This suggests that the KV passage may simply be an expression of a view that Spinoza later abandoned. Second, having an "idea" of "this or that volition" seems to be a way of putting things that is compatible with Spinoza's view that bringing things into relation involves identifying a *respect* in which two things -- whose natures do not thereby form the *content* of the mind's representation -- stand in relation. This could involve discerning how a thing *x* displays or expresses a volition or action, *v*, that differs in respect of how a thing *y* does not express *v* or does so to a lesser extent. This need not involve having an idea of the nature of either *x* or *y*, *nor* does it involve reifying *v* and subsuming it under the abstract idea of the *will*, such subsumption being characteristic of the formation of a universal.

4. Concluding Remarks

By way of concluding, let me briefly remark on the relevance of a further domain of Spinoza's thought about relations. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues that finite beings (modes) that fall under an attribute of substance are conceptually relat*ed* because their natures are conceived through the same attribute (see E1p10&s, E2p6d). Modes that have an attribute in common can therefore stand in determinate relat*ions* with each other. By contrast, modes that have 'nothing in common' with one another due to their belonging to different attributes (see E1a5, E1p3) cannot enter into such relations because their natures are not (conceptually) related (as is the case between, e.g. mental and physical modes), and hence cannot be understood (*intelligi*) through one another (1a5).

In this context, if I am right, relations are *not* describable as beings of reason. This is because such relations are formed based on the (shared) *natures* of modes insofar as they fall under a certain attribute. Yet (ideas of) the *natures* of things are irrelevant, as we saw, to the way relations figure as beings of reason. We have witnessed one sense of what 'to explain' (*explicare*) means in the context of Spinoza's discussion of beings of reason in the early works. Perhaps one thing this discussion indicates is that Spinoza's notion of 'explanation' differs as between these early works and the *Ethics*, where the notion of explanation is tied to truth and essence (see, e.g., E1p4d, E2p5). Moreover, it is an interesting question whether Spinoza's characteristically *explanatory* relations posited the *Ethics*, principally *causation, conception,* and *inherence*, would count as *relations* judging by the view of the KV and the CM. If these considerations are apt, then there is perhaps *no one* concept of relation that can encompass all the characterizations Spinoza gives across his works of relations and all he says or implies about their place in his ontology. Evidently, what Spinoza explicitly says about relations as connected with their status as beings of reason is not all there is to his take on relations.

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Chapter 3:
Brandom's Leibniz

1. A Telling Exchange

In this paper, I discuss a significant objection by Margaret Wilson (1999) against Robert Brandom's (1981) interpretation of Leibniz's 'metaphysics of intentionality' or, more precisely, Leibniz's metaphysical account of perceptual distinctness.[128] Brandom's account is a detailed and rigorous intervention in a discussion of Leibniz's views on perceptual distinctness and representation that has, I believe, still not received the critical attention it deserves.[129] Aside from its considerable explanatory potential as a work of Leibniz exegesis, we find in Brandom's account a creative and substantive precursor to the inferentialist account of representation for which Brandom is famous.[130] One reason to approach Brandom's reading of Leibniz, then, is to gain a richer sense of the development of one of the most important theories of representational content currently on offer, one that, as Brandom's treatment of Leibniz shows, suggestively draws inspiration from the philosophical tradition.[131] Another reason why Brandom's reading of Leibniz is significant is that it exhibits a unique type of historiographical methodology, one that Brandom colorfully characterizes as 'bebop historiography,' imagined as similar to the way 'in which a melody is treated as an occasion for improvisation on its chord structure.'[132] Such hermeneutic improvisation involves 'navigat[ing] among different inferential perspectives on the conceptual contents deployed on the text.'[133] In the present case, Brandom pursues this interpretive avenue in creatively limning the underlying conceptual apparatus used by Leibniz to express claims 'about the mechanism underlying our capacity to think or represent various kinds of things.' Brandom envisions that these claims, when brought to light, will prove consequential for a discursive, rationally integrated, and foundational understanding of our representational bearing in the world.[134]

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[128] Brandom 1981 is reprinted in Brandom 2002; in this paper I shall cite the original 1981 version of his article.

[129] Aside from Wilson 1999, the most extensive and illuminating engagement with Brandom's views is found in Puryear 2006; Jorgensen (2019, §1.3) offers a more recent and succinct commentary on the exchange between Brandom and Wilson. Brandom (1981) does not cite much previous work on the topic of Leibniz's theory of perceptual distinctness. However, he does explicitly engage the interpretation of Montgomery Furth (1967), who understands Leibniz's notion of perceptual distinctness in terms of distribution of consciousness. Brandom raises several important objections to Furth's account. For example, that account, according to Brandom, mistakes clarity for distinctness, essentially attributing to Leibniz the view that 'nearest is clearest' (purportedly stemming from Leibniz's claim in *Monadology* §60 that a monad perceives most distinctly what is nearest or greatest with respect to it.). Brandom points out that Furth's way of reading M §60 has implausible implications for bodily awareness: 'On this [Furth's] view, if on a certain occasion I am more aware of the moon I gaze at than of the eye employed, then the moon has become part of my body, or the eye has ceased to be such a part, or both' (Brandom 1981 452). Other authors (not mentioned by Brandom) who connect perceptual distinctness with sensation or consciousness include McRae (1976) and Parkinson (1982). Significantly, Brandom is unique among these authors in emphasizing the notion of *degrees* of perceptual distinctness; this is, in fact, a feature of Brandom's account that Wilson (1999, 339) broadly commends.

[130] As Brandom (2002, 91) notes autobiographically, 'before I finished the Leibniz essay [Brandom 1981], inferentialism had not been visible to me as a possible order of explanation, never mind as one embodied in actual tradition.'

Brandom's distinctive proposal, then, is to interpret Leibniz's doctrine of degrees of perceptual distinctness in terms of the notion of *inference*. This is the proposal that Wilson targets. Brandom sees himself as seeking to fulfill two desiderata:

i. to provide a general explanation of how, on Leibniz's view, monads are individuated by the degrees of distinctness of their perceptions, in spite of the fact that all monads represent the same thing (the entire universe); and

ii. to illuminate Leibniz's notion of awareness, or 'apperception,' without couching the notion of perceptual distinctness in terms of awareness from the outset.

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[131] Although interesting, the development of Brandom's inferentialism will not be my topic here.

[132] Brandom 2002, 117.

[133] Brandom 2002, 117.

[134] Brandom 2002, 112.

Brandom's approach to discharging (ii) is part of his broader account of monadic perception that aims principally to fulfill (i). That is, he attempts to explain individual differences in how monads perceive -- despite the commonality of what they perceive, viz., the entire universe -- by arguing that a given monad is distinguishable from every other in virtue of the particular features of the world that can be differentially deduced from consideration of the particular content of each of that monad's perceptual states at a time. The relative *distinctness* of a perception is a function of its inferentially articulated content: the greater the specification or enrichment of that content, the more it enables inferences[135] from the properties or accidents 'enfolded' in the perception to properly discriminated features of the world. Finally, Brandom seeks to account for apperception as one *type* of perception – higher-order perception -- and hence as explicable in terms of the notion of degrees of perceptual distinctness, which in turn is explicable in terms of the notion of inference.

Wilson's criticism of this account consists in pointing out an ambiguity in the notion of 'inference' that Brandom appeals to. On the one hand, Brandom clearly relies for his characterization of Leibniz's view of perception on the idea that inferences can (somehow) be drawn from the consideration or report of the content of monadic perceptions to the existence of properties in the world which those perceptions 'enfold' or which constitute the latter's content. On the other hand, in a few places Brandom speaks as if it is the *monads themselves* which are supposed to be able to conduct such inferences concerning the content of their own perceptions. In such places, Brandom seems willing to invoke the notion of a monad's *taking* certain features of the world to be inferable from its own perceptions. This is to invoke what Wilson calls the 'intensional features of Leibniz's notion of perception' (Wilson 1999, 337). According to Wilson, this twofold appeal to the notion of inference is incoherent as a general interpretation of Leibniz's views on monadic perception because it suggests, implausibly, that even what Leibniz calls 'bare monads' somehow 'experience representationally,' whereas Leibniz clearly seems to deny to bare monads any experience of *what* they represent. For Wilson, the decisive flaw underlying this oversight is a conflation of the notion of Leibnizian perception as involving 'external deducibility' *from* the objective occurrence of a perceptual state of a monad *to* the existence of properties in the world represented by that state, with the notion of 'internally accessible content or representationality' *for* the monad that has it (Wilson 1999, 341).

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[135] This has the content *enabling* inference. Note that on Brandom's own view inferential relations are more fundamental than content, so the latter can't enable the former. Here is an instance in which the Leibniz essay offers a partial foreshadowing of the Brandomian view that nevertheless departs from it. I'm indebted to Steven Gross for this observation.

This objection is potentially devastating to Brandom's account. If Wilson is right, then Brandom's putative attempt to account for the distinctness of monadic perceptions in terms of monads' awareness of what they perceive is spurious, because not all monads are aware of what they perceive. After providing the relevant Leibnizian background and canvassing Brandom's account and Wilson's major criticism thereof, I shall pursue a response to this criticism on Brandom's behalf. The response is modest: I shall argue that Wilson overlooks a natural way to read Brandom's interpretation on which Brandom does not commit the conflation Wilson alleges. In fact, I'll try to show, interpreting Brandom's text in the way I will propose reveals the substantial *agreement* between Brandom and Wilson concerning the proper way to understand Leibniz's theoretical commitments in this context. Wilson's oversight is valuable nevertheless, for it forces us to confront one of the most central and seemingly intractable puzzles in Leibniz's metaphysics and philosophy of mind, namely, how to make sense of the representationality of unconscious mental states. It is from considering the motivation and meaning behind Wilson's noteworthy objection to Brandom's account that we learn to appreciate the inherent tensions in Leibniz's doctrine of degrees of perception, the depth of Brandom’s grasp of these tensions, and the resourcefulness of Brandom’s positive proposals for how to resolve them.

In the next section, I review some of the essential components of Leibniz’s metaphysics relating to his account of distinctness of perception, identifying and developing the main issue of concern between Brandom and Wilson on this topic. This discussion will serve to motivate the above two desiderata concerning the grounding of monadic individuation in perceptual distinctness and the place of awareness in that account. In section 3, I discuss Brandom’s proposal and how it purports to meet these explanatory desiderata. In section 4, I canvass Wilson’s main objection to Brandom’s proposal. Here I attempt to give Wilson’s worry a fair hearing before showing, in section 5, why it does not decisively undermine the explanatory potential of Brandom’s account, and how we may in fact rely on Wilson's own positive approach to making sense of monadic perception to show how Brandom’s account does not fall prey to Wilson’s critique.

Before I proceed, I should mention that a previous engagement with Brandom’s reading of Leibniz (and Wilson's critique of it), that of Stephen Puryear (2006), covers some of the same ground as does the current treatment. I am indebted to Puryear’s careful and comprehensive account of Brandom’s position, as I indicate in various notes in the section where I offer my own (less thoroughgoing) explication of it. However, Puryear and I emphasize different aspects of Brandom’s account of representation in Leibniz in assessing Brandom’s views, as well as different elements of Wilson’s critique of those views.[136] Whereas Puryear’s account and assessment are more holistic, covering most aspects of Brandom’s theory, I emphasize the problem presented by bare monads for Leibniz’s views about awareness and Brandom’s reconstruction thereof. Puryear, too, offers a defense of Brandom's account against charges by Wilson, but I believe that my proposed defense of Brandom is importantly new. Overall, then, I believe that my own more restricted discussion of Brandom's account and Puryear's more comprehensive one ought to be seen as complementary.[137]

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[136] As we will see by the end, Wilson (1999) levels two criticisms at Brandom. The main one studied here concerns the ‘internal accessibility’ vs. ‘external deducibility’ of monadic perceptions. A second criticism, discussed briefly at the end, targets Brandom’s assumption about how the content of Leibnizian perceptions are individuated, and at the same time questions Brandom’s historiographical approach.

2. Leibnizian Background: Developing the Main Problem

Wilson describes very nicely the central point at issue in her evaluation of Brandom's account. Vividly illustrating what will be her focal distinction between external deducibility and internal accessibility of content, Wilson (1999, 350 n. 27) likens monads to house plants of distinct kinds situated respectively in isolated rooms of a house, reflecting Leibniz's view of the causally isolated existence of each monad in the universe. Her question is whether the ability to deduce facts about the location of each plant in the house, as derived from knowledge of some assumed rule or regularity according to which they are placed there (external deducibility), can be thought to have any intelligible implications for what each *plant* knows or perceives about the arrangements and types of the plants in other rooms in the house (internal accessibility of content). Wilson's basic point is that even if (knowledge of) a law or regularity makes it possible to deduce general features of a situation from features of its component parts, it of course does not follow that the component parts of that situation themselves have the wherewithal to comprehend or perceive *any* features of the situation of which they are a part. Transferring this insight to the case of monads, however, generates a problem, since Leibniz holds that all monads perceive their world with varying degrees of perceptual distinctness. But while not all monads comprehend or are aware of what they perceive, *some* do consciously apprehend the world. How is this fact to be understood within the overarching paradigm of varying levels of perceptual distinctness? As Wilson (1999, 343) aptly states the problem:

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[137] Brandom's interpretation of Leibniz's views on perception and representation is ambitious and extraordinarily rich. Among the topics he brings up which I will *not* examine in this essay are Leibniz's views on sensation, error, the relation between distinctness and clarity, the relation between perceptions and ideas, the nature of reasoning and definition, the preestablished harmony, rationalism (particularly as embodied in the principle of sufficient reason and the identity of indiscernibles), and (most important for Brandom), the relation between perceptual and conceptual content.

> Leibniz's distinction between *distinct* and *confused* perception cannot just be read as a distinction between *conscious* and *unconscious* perceptions, since it has to be applicable *within* the realm of wholly unconscious monads. For similar reasons, it cannot be identified with a distinction between perceptions that do possess internal intensionality, and those which merely "express the many in the one" in a way that allows external inference from the "perceiver" to the "perceived". For (I am supposing) bare monads do not *experience* representationally any more than they experience consciously. The question, then, is whether anything can be made of the distinction between distinct and confused perceptions that does not trade on either internal intensionality or the distinction between conscious and unconscious perceptions.

As we will see repeatedly, the disagreement between Wilson and Brandom hinges on the apparent threat that unconscious or bare monads pose to the intelligibility of Leibniz's proposal that perception extends to all monads. How can we know what a perception is like *prior* to its being (or becoming) something of which we are aware, or which can itself be understood as a form of awareness? Ultimately, whether Brandom or Wilson ends up making the better case depends on what is the most plausible answer to this question. Wilson sets up the problem in the above passage by identifying two related distinctions that she believes are spuriously identified with Leibniz's distinction between distinct and confused perception, namely the distinctions between (respectively) conscious and unconscious perception, and internal accessibility and external deducibility of content. Both of these latter distinctions involve the notion of consciousness or (what appears to be much the same thing) internal accessibility of content. For this reason, Wilson points out, neither of these distinctions can be applicable *within* the category of *unconscious* monads, whereas Leibniz does hold that the distinct/confused distinction *is* applicable to this category because (as we will shortly see) all monads perceive distinctly to *some* degree. But if that is right, then we are left with the puzzle of how to elucidate Leibniz's distinction between distinct and confused perception in a way that does not depend on either of the distinctions between conscious and unconscious perception or internal accessibility and external deducibility of content.

We see, therefore, that in terms of the two desiderata I presented above as those which Brandom's account chiefly aims to fulfill, desideratum (ii), concerning how to give a non-question-begging explanation of Leibniz's conception of awareness, constitutes what we may regard as the *main problem* with which Wilson and Brandom are both concerned. My goal in this section is to document (albeit in a cursory manner) the source of this problem in Leibniz's texts. Let us begin with the most familiar data. In Leibniz's late metaphysics, monads – simple, immaterial, and indestructible 'atoms of nature' (*Monadology* §3) -- are regarded as the building blocks out of which all of reality is constituted.[138] The distinctive attribute of monads is that they *perceive* and indeed are *constituted* wholly by perceptions (and subject to a force or appetite that brings about transitions from one perception to another). As Leibniz writes in a famous letter to Burcher de Volder, '... we must say that there is nothing in things but simple substances [i.e. monads] and in them, perception and appetite' (AG 181).

Leibniz classifies monads into three types. At the bottom of his metaphysical hierarchy are 'bare' or 'simple' monads. Simple monads constitute simple living things like plants and 'other sorts of living thing that are entirely unknown to us' (GP VI.539).[139] Like all monads, bare monads perceive in some sense; however, they are presumed to be wholly unconscious or else in a kind of preponderantly confused stupor. Thus, in one place Leibniz writes: ‘if, in our perceptions, we had nothing distinct or, so to speak, in relief and stronger in flavor, we would always be in a stupor. And this is the state of bare monads’ (M §24, AG 216). Whether it is correct to view bare monads as wholly unconscious or (as Simmons 2011 considers) as subject to a kind of Jamesian blooming buzzing confusion, what appears uncontroversial is that, as Alison Simmons puts it, ‘simple monads have perceptions that represent things but they are not, in virtue of those perceptions, aware of anything in particular’ (2011, 199).

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[138] I use the following abbreviations for works of Leibniz cited in this paper: DM = *Discourse on Metaphysics*; PNG = *Principles of Nature and Grace*; M = *Monadology*; NE = *New Essays on Human Understanding*. Abbreviations to editions of Leibniz's works are provided in the bibliography.

[139] For a helpful overview of Leibniz's monadic hierarchy, see Simmons 2011.

At the middle level of the metaphysical hierarchy are animal souls, sentient beings which are capable of apperception but not rational thought.[140] At the highest level are rational souls capable of introspection and discursive thought.[141] Both animal (sentient) souls and rational (sapient) souls are distinguished from bare monads by their possession of sensation and memory.

Leibniz implicates all three types of monad in a crucial statement about the character and scope of perceptual distinctness in *Monadology* §60:

> [S]ince the nature of the monad is representative, nothing can limit it to represent only a part of things. However, it is true that this representation is only confused as to the detail of the whole universe, and can only be distinct for a small portion of things, that is, either for those that are closest, or for those that are greatest with respect to each monad, otherwise each monad would be a divinity. Monads are limited, not as to their objects, but with respect to the modifications of their knowledge of them. Monads all go confusedly to infinity, to the whole; but they are limited and differentiated by the degrees of their distinct perceptions [*les degrés des perceptions distinctes*]. (AG 221)

I want to highlight two important points from this passage. First, it claims that it is the very nature of a monad to represent; as Leibniz explains elsewhere, a monad’s perceptions just are its (intrinsic) properties.[142] Second, monads differ from one another neither in their being essentially representative nor in what they perceive -- the entire universe -- but in how distinctly they perceive it. Notice that this principle is supposed to apply to *all* monads, not just those that are conscious. This passage thus provides for the generalizability of facts about perceptual distinctness to all monads, conscious and unconscious alike: the basic principles of monadic representation extend to monads at any level of the hierarchy.

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[140] See GP VI.600, 610-11.

[141] See e.g. GP VI.611.

Thus, monads are categorized comprehensively by their mental capacities, and distinguished individually by the distinctness of their perceptions, a measure which cuts across monadic categories. This picture raises two questions: (1) How does the notion of perceptual distinctness figure in the individuation of monads within and across the monadic categories? (2) If all perceptions are distinct to *some* degree, as this passage implies, then why aren't all monads correspondingly conscious to some degree? Notice that these two questions respectively generate the two main desiderata -- (i) and (ii) above -- that Brandom thinks interpretations of Leibniz on this issue ought to fulfill: to account for how individual differences among monads are based on differences in the degrees of distinctness of their perceptions, and to give a fully general account of Leibniz's views on perceptual distinctness that explains its relation to apperception but does not trade on an antecedent conception of intrinsic awareness or 'internally accessible content.' To begin to appreciate the depth of these issues, we must have a glimpse of what Leibniz says about the nature of perception, the way monads are individuated by their perceptions, and the nature of apperception and its place within the mental economy of monads. In the remainder of this section, I briefly present Leibniz's (sometimes seemingly ambiguous) views on these topics before turning to a discussion of Wilson's and Brandom's handling of these issues.

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[142] See M §21.

As we will examine in detail, Brandom connects Leibniz's notion of perception constitutively to the notion of inference or inferrability. This interpretive move has a firm basis in what Leibniz says about perception. For Leibniz, perception is a species of representation or 'expression.' As Leibniz defines the notion of expression in one place: 'It is sufficient for the expression of one thing in another that there should be a certain constant relational law, by which particulars in the one can be referred to corresponding particulars in the other' (C 15, MP 176-77; quoted in Jorgensen 2015, 51). Leibniz describes expression in generic terms as a kind of a rule-based mapping from one thing onto another, as in the projection of a circle onto a regular plane, which supplies the rule for the mapping of a circle onto an ellipse, a parabola, or a hyperbola. Any of these latter figures, on this account, will 'express' a circle.[143] Leibniz maintains that structural mappings of the latter kind obtain between such diverse things as a model of a machine and the machine itself, speech and thoughts or truths, and -- most relevant to our discussion -- a substance and the entire universe.[144] It is possible to see how Leibniz takes what Wilson calls 'external inferrability' as an essential condition on representation as such, for, on a plausible reading of the doctrine of expression, if *x* represents/expresses *y*, then it must be possible to *reason* about features of *x* in way that correspondingly enables us to reason about features of *y*.[145]

Perception, on the other hand, is regarded by Leibniz specifically as 'the expression of many in one.' This is generally taken to mean that in perception, the one, i.e. the simple substance, expresses the many, i.e. things external to the substance (see e.g. PNG §2). Leibniz also maintains that 'each singular substance expresses the whole universe in its own way' (DM §9), which, given the definition of perception, must mean that each singular substance *perceives* the entire universe in its own way.[146] Leibniz supposes that perception exhibits the features of expression in general, in that the internal perceptual structure of a monad 'preserves the correlating structure of the universe' (Jorgensen 2015, 55). But, importantly, what differentiates perception from other types of expression is its association with a *point of view*. The notion of a point of view implies that monads differ in terms of how their perceptions preserve the correlational structure between those perceptions and the perceptions of every other monad (which collectively constitute the metaphysical structure of the whole universe). Leibniz cashes out the notion of a point of view in terms of perceptual distinctness, as we saw in the passage from *Monadology* §60: a monad's point of view is defined by what it most distinctly represents.

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[143] In this paragraph and the next I rely on Jorgensen's (2019, ch. 5) helpful formulation of Leibniz's basic views on expression and perception.

[144] For a more comprehensive list of examples, see Kulstad 1977 and Swoyer 1995.

[145] For an interpretation of the 'expression' relation along these lines, see Swoyer 1995.

But how are we to measure differences in the distinctness of a given monad's individual perceptions (perceptions which carve out the monad's singular point of view, serving to distinguish the monad from all other monads defined in turn by their unique points of view)? One might well think that consciousness has something to do with this question. Thus, for instance, we might ask whether we can track differences in the relative degree of distinctness of monads' perceptions by assessing the relative clarity of our awareness of the content of those perceptions. Such questions are indeed appropriate, since even a cursory investigation of Leibniz's texts reveals that observations or claims that Leibniz makes concerning the nature of perceptual distinctness typically go hand in hand with observations and claims about consciousness. Understanding the relationship between consciousness and perceptual distinctness was undeniably a major objective for Leibniz.

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[146] A point noted by Jorgensen (2015, 54).

In fact, Leibniz's views on this topic initially appear somewhat ambiguous. In the first place, he sometimes writes about the relation of apperception to perception as such, where the latter isn't specifically qualified as distinct. Thus, in several places Leibniz seems to claim that perception (per se) is not coextensive with consciousness, i.e. that consciousness does not extend to all perceptions. For example, he writes:

> The passing state which involves and represents a multitude in the unity or in the simple substance is nothing other than what one calls *perception*, which should be distinguished from apperception, or consciousness. … This is where the Cartesians have failed badly, since they took no account of the perceptions that we do not apperceive. This is also what made them believe that minds alone are monads and that there are no animal souls or other entelechies. … (M §14, AG 214; cf. PNG §4, NE 134)

One might grant, in accordance with passages like this, that 'perception' and 'apperception' are not coextensive – bare monads, or 'other entelechies,' as Leibniz implies here, being the prime counterexample to the view that consciousness goes all the way down. But when reference to the relation of apperception to the *distinctness* of perception enters the picture, it seems prima facie to yield a different conclusion. In this context, there is evidence that Leibniz espouses the view that *insofar as they are distinct*, perceptual states are *also* conscious states. According to this alternative, a perception with any degree of distinctness at all *would* also be conscious to some degree. This is suggested by passages such as the following:

> We are never without perceptions, but necessarily we are often without *awareness*, namely when none of our perceptions stand out. (NE 162)

> But since each distinct perception of the soul includes an infinity of confused perceptions which embrace the whole universe, the soul itself knows the things it perceives only so far as it has distinct and heightened perceptions; and it has perfection to the extent that it has distinct perceptions. Each soul knows the infinite -- knows all -- but confusedly. It is like walking on the seashore and hearing the great noise of the sea: I hear the particular noises of each wave, of which the whole noise is composed, but without distinguishing them. (PNG §13, AG 211).

> [A] soul can read in itself only what is distinctly represented there; it cannot unfold all of its folds at once, because they go to infinity. (AG 221)

In these passages, Leibniz seems to treat degrees of distinctness *as* degrees of awareness. This is one conclusion we might glean from these passages,[147] but we are not automatically entitled to uphold it. For, in the first place, Leibniz never explicitly identifies degrees of distinctness with degrees of apperception. Second, as we saw, passages such as §60 of the *Monadology* suggest that all monads have perceptions that are distinct to some degree, even though not all are capable of awareness. These caveats suggest that Leibniz might not have wanted to regard degrees of perceptual distinctness as coextensive with degrees of awareness. Significantly, however, the possibility that Leibniz did reject the coextensiveness of awareness and (degrees of) perceptual distinctness is compatible with the view, minimally expressed in the above three passages, that sufficiently distinct perception is a *necessary condition* on apperception.

Assuming the latter, minimal reading of the last three passages, and considering the points on apperception and perception made in the above-quoted passages from *Monadology* §60 and §14, we can view Leibniz as committed to the following notably consistent set of claims:

- All perceptions are distinct to some degree. (M §60)
- Not all perceptions, however distinct, are conscious. (M §14)
- Sufficiently distinct perception is necessary for consciousness. (e.g. NE 162, PNG §14)

These are all commitments that Brandom attributes to Leibniz and attempts to develop and integrate as part of a comprehensive account of Leibniz's views on perceptual distinctness and its connection to apperception. The last point in the list above is crucial in motivating this enterprise because it leaves unsettled what else might be *sufficient* for apperception. Perhaps the answer lies in determining the precise threshold at which distinct perceptions turn into conscious ones; perhaps it lies in the way that higher-order perceptions operate on first-order perceptions, thereby affecting their degree of distinctness. In any case, Leibniz's appealing to distinct perception as a necessary condition on apperception leaves open a unique explanatory challenge. For Leibniz, apperception is an *explanandum*, to be explained *in terms of* perceptual distinctness.[148]

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[147] Furth 1967 is the *locus classicus* of the interpretation on which perceptual distinctness is understood in terms of distribution of consciousness.

Brandom seems perfectly conscious of this point: 'The crucial explanatory role played in Leibniz's metaphysics by the various degrees of perception ... lends urgency to the question of how we are to understand the dimension along which qualitative comparisons of "perfection" or "distinctness" can be made.' Once we countenance this fundamental explanatory role of the notion of perceptual distinctness, 'the concept of *awareness* (Leibniz's 'apperception') will emerge as what we must get clear about in order to appreciate the order of perfection of perceptions,' i.e. the scheme of degrees of perceptual distinctness (1981, 450). That is, we must see how apperception is explained by the concept of distinct perception. This will give us a fuller sense of what Leibniz means when he invokes the notion of perceptual distinctness. Brandom, then, is attuned to the two desiderata stated at the beginning of this paper and is particularly aware of what I regard as our 'main problem' (desideratum [ii]). But does he succumb to this problem, nonetheless? We can now progress toward answering this question.

3. Brandom's Proposal

The core of Brandom's proposal is that, just as we can speak of a series of properties or modifications contained in the individual *concept* of a monad, so we can speak of the *perceptual* containment of features of the world in individual perceptions of a monad. Brandom's fundamental explanatory concept in this context is his notion of an 'expressive range.' He claims that not only do monads contain all of their perceptual modifications in the relevant sense, but *each* perception of a monad contains or 'enfolds a multitude (of accidents), its expressive *range*' (1981, 461). In other words, not only do a monad's perceptual modifications express the monad, but also each one of those perceptions expresses a range of accidents, or non-maximal properties,[149] of things external to the monad, so that given the concept of such a monad, one can deduce not only all of its perceptual modifications, but also everything expressed by its perceptions (1981, 462).

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[148] Simmons (2001, 60) also attributes this explanatory enterprise to Leibniz.

This model of inferential containment and the notion of an 'expressive range' have considerable potential to clarify Leibniz's commitments to the distinctness of each monad (despite its perceiving everything that every other monad perceives) and to there being degrees of perceptual distinctness. As Brandom (1981, 462-63) observes:

> ...this interpretation gives a natural sense to talk of degrees of expression. For if many accidents are expressed in one perception, it is possible for more or fewer of them to be expressed by another perception. We may say that two perceptions differ in perceptual or expressive degree just in case the expressive range or content of one of them properly includes the range or content of the other.

Thus, while each monad expresses the entire universe, *how* each monad does so differs according to the distribution of accidents represented by its various perceptions. Individual perceptions vary intrinsically in the number of accidents that they 'enfold,' even though, collectively, they ultimately amount to representations of the same thing (the whole universe). The total content of a monad's contemporaneous perceptions is also expressed by all other monads, but that content will be distributed differently among monads and among the perceptions of each monad in non-overlapping ways. This, then, is one way to represent differences in point of view among monads.

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[149] Brandom (1981, 460) defines an 'accident' as 'any property of a subject that is not a maximal property, in the sense that it does not contain or entail all of the properties of that subject that are comprised by its individual concept.'

Because of this internal variability in what individual monadic perceptions represent, such perception is best characterized, according to Brandom, as the representation of *more-or-less in one*. More specifically, Brandom explains the notion of a difference in expressive degree or inferential potential between the perceptions of any two monads in terms of set inclusion. A difference in expressive degree or inferential potential between the perceptions of any two monads is determined according to whether the content of one monad's perceptions properly includes that of the other. If one perception is more distinct than another, this means that the former enfolds all the accidents of the latter and more.[150]

To illustrate, consider three perceptions of a physical object (Brandom 1981, 463): p_1 represents the object as red (its expressive range consists of a single accident), p_2 represents it as cubical, and p_3 represents it as red and cubical. P_3 properly includes p_1 and p_2 individually. By virtue of its greater inclusiveness or superior richness, p_3 is *more* distinct than p_1 or p_2, insofar as p_1 cannot distinguish the relevant object from a red sphere, while p_2 cannot distinguish it from a green cube. Perception p_3 is thus 'more distinguishing and more specific than the others,' (Brandom 1981, 463). Brandom uses this example to illustrate his point precisely:

> These perceptions [i.e. p_1-p_3] are distinguishable, since no two of them have the same expressive range. The monads these perceptions modify are accordingly distinguishable as well, since they are qualified by distinguishable modifications. Yet each monad expresses *every* feature of its world, since for each monad there is no accident not expressed by some one of its perceptions. Each complete set of a monad's contemporary perceptions has the whole set of its world's real accidents as the union of the expressive ranges of its perceptions. But the distribution of more and less inclusive expressive ranges over that set of perceptions differs from monad to monad, and from time to time within a single monad.... It is these differences in the distinctness (inferential potential) of the individual perceptions that jointly express the whole world which distinguish the various monads. (1981, 463-64)

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[150] A point made by Puryear (2006, 75).

In essence, then, Brandom's view is that monads and their perceptions 'divide up' the 'expressive labor' of representing the world in different ways. To the extent that fewer perceptions are required to represent the infinite detail of the world, those perceptions have greater inferential potential, whereas perceptions that enfold fewer accidents (or are less inclusive) have less inferential potential and are less distinct.[151]

In sum, according to Brandom the specificity (distinctness) of perception *brings out* the features of a monad's world, showing us that the unique distribution of content expressed by a monad's perceptions defines *this* monad's representative place in the world. We pass from the (differentially expressed) singulars of the perception to the corresponding singulars of a monad's perceived world, this 'passage' culminating in a conclusion about the makeup of the universe as 'experienced' from a singular point of view. (The vexed nature of such appeal to 'experience' will become an issue below, when we examine Wilson's critique of Brandom's view of monadic perception.) With this explanation, Brandom sees himself as having accounted for the connection between perception and expression more generally, what is meant by the 'distinctness' of perceptions, what the notion of a monadic point of view amounts to, and above all, how monads are to be individuated on the basis of their distinct perceptions. The foregoing explanation can therefore be taken to fulfill the first of the two desiderata with which we began. What about the second desideratum – our main problem?

As we saw in section 2, Leibniz closely associates perceptual distinctness with apperception: distinct perception is at least a necessary condition on awareness. However, Brandom thinks that the inferential potential model of perceptual distinctness has to be qualified to accommodate the notion of awareness, since in some contexts, Leibniz seems to suggest that we might be aware of perceptions that have relatively little expressive degree while being unaware of perceptions which have considerably greater expressive degree (1981, 467). To explain this phenomenon, Brandom introduces a new sense in which the term 'distinct' may be understood, building on Leibniz's occasional references to perceptions being more or less *developed* (cf. NE 117).

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[151] Cf. Puryear 2006, 3.3.1.

Brandom assumes from the start that apperception, for Leibniz, is a matter of higher-order perception.[152] He takes apperception to consists of two components: a perception of an outer object, and a further perception that has the first perception as its object. Thus, a perception p is developed if and only if (i) p to gives rise to ('produces') a further perception, p', which in turn (ii) *specifies the content* of p such that the expressive range of p' is a superset of (or includes) the expressive range of p.[153] When conditions (i) and (ii) are met for a perception p, then p is apperceived and p' is an apperception *of p* (Brandom 1981, 468). In stating necessary *and* sufficient conditions on apperception, Brandom appeals not merely to the specification (inclusion or subsumption) of the content of a first-order perception by a higher-order perception, but also to the requirement that the first-order perception 'produce' the higher order perception in the right way. Brandom suggests that 'being produced in the right way' should be understood as involving memory on the part of an individual monad and as determined by a metaphysical 'law' that governs the unique passage of each monad from one of its perceptual states to another (1981, 468).

Aside from the added factors of memory and metaphysical production, Brandom's explanation of what underlies apperception falls right out of his analysis of perceptual distinctness in terms of content-specification or inferential potential, providing us with the following, neat and simple way to view apperceptions in relation to ordinary, first-order perception. *All* increases of a perception's expressive range constitute specification of its content and an increase of its distinctness. However, *apperceptions* are strictly developments of *other* perceptions, whereas perceptions that do not develop other perceptions are not apperceptions (1981, 468-70).

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[152] That Leibniz espouses a higher-order theory of phenomenal consciousness -- according to which perceptual states become conscious by virtue of a higher-order mental act -- is the standard view among commentators. For representative readings, see Gennaro 1999 and Simmons 2001. Other commentators, however, demur; see Barth 2014 and Jorgensen 2019.

[153] This formulation of Brandom's definition is based on that helpfully given by Puryear 2006, 79.

A major virtue of this account, Brandom shows, is the sense it makes of the vexed question of bodily awareness as it arises in the setting of Leibniz's monadology. Leibniz holds that the perceptions of which a monad is most aware are of things that are 'nearest' or 'greatest' with respect to the monad (see M §60 above). This might lead one to believe that on Leibniz's view a (dominant)[154] monad's body must be that of which it is most aware. This obviously has problematic implications, for taking our own case as an example, it seems that at any given time we have greater awareness of objects distinct from us than we do of our bodies. Brandom's theory of perceptual distinctness and apperception enables him to address this counterintuitive result by giving him the resources to distinguish between two senses of 'distinct.' In the first sense, elaborated above, a perception is 'distinct' to the extent that it has comparatively greater specification of content and hence inferential potential. However, that a perception is distinct in this sense does not entail that it is a perception of which we must be more aware. For the latter to obtain, a perception must be 'distinct' in the measure of its *development*: perceptions of which we are aware are those that are more develop*ing*, regardless of their original inferential potential. This part of Brandom's theory models how we can have greater awareness of objects at various degrees of distance from our bodies more distinctly that we are aware of our bodies themselves: although our perceptions of our bodies may have in themselves the greatest expressive degree (i.e., may have the richest content and be the locus of the most complex and extensive inferential connections we have to the rest of the world),[155] they need not be the perceptions in us that give rise to '*more* expressive specifications of themselves' -- that is, are the most developing. It is the latter, developing perceptions, Brandom stipulates, 'that matter for awareness' (1981, 470).

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[154] For Leibniz, monads constitute organic bodies, each of which stand in a structured, expressive relationship with one another. Leibniz holds than in each organic body there is a 'dominant' monad which perceives the body it constitutes most distinctly. He refers to the dominant monads of organic bodies as the 'souls' of the latter (See M §70).

Brandom never assumes that all distinct perceptions are conscious perceptions. He does, however, provide the desired necessary and sufficient conditions on one's being or becoming conscious of one's distinct perceptions, namely, when one such perception gives rise to another perception whose expressive range subsumes or includes that of the first. At least as far as his *intentions* are concerned, Brandom seems to have successfully addressed our main problem, insofar as he uses his basic analysis of perceptual distinctness in order to gain purchase on Leibniz's notion of awareness, and not the other way around.

Brandom's initial suggestion is that Leibniz seeks to base 'the concepts of awareness and representation on the concept of inference (even for monads incapable of thought)' (1981, 450). We have just seen the extent to which the inferential model illuminates the concepts of perception and awareness in Leibniz's theory of monadic representation. The litmus test for the successful generalizability of this interpretation, however, rests on whether Brandom can plausibly apply his account to the case of bare monads. Brandom clearly believes that he can, but Wilson thinks otherwise. Let us inspect her misgivings more closely.

4. Wilson's Critique

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[155] There is very good evidence that Leibniz holds this view; see M §62: 'Thus, although each created monad represents the whole universe, it more distinctly represents the body which is particularly affected by it, and whose entelechy it constitutes. And just as this body expresses the whole universe through the interconnection of all matter in the plenum, the soul also represents the whole universe by representing this body, which belongs to it in a particular way' (AG 221).

The essential feature of Brandom's interpretation that strikes Wilson as controversial is Brandom's view that (in Wilson's words) 'principles based on the harmony preestablished among the monads, by making possible inference from one monad's perception to the accidents of the others, provide content *internally accessible* to any given monad,' this allowing for 'an intensional reading of expression' (Wilson 1999, 341). Her criticism revolves around our main problem: how to provide a general account of perceptual distinctness that explains Leibnizian apperception and does not presuppose it or some type of ordinary rendition of it in the characterization of what makes perception distinct for Leibniz.

Wilson locates Brandom's purported failure to achieve this task in his observation that his conception of perceptual distinctness allows for an 'intensional reading of expression' (Brandom 1981, 460). Wilson takes the following passage – call it 'Passage B' -- to be Brandom's elaboration of the view about the content of monads' perceptions that we acquire through such an 'intensional' reading:

> A perception provides its monad with information about the rest of the world only insofar as the preestablished harmony provides principles (laws of Nature) which permit inferences from the occurrence of this particular perception, rather than any other possible one, to conclusions about facts outside the monad. We are assured of the existence of such principles only by metaphysical reasoning. The form in which that harmony manifests itself in the experience of particular monads is the physical or phenomenal world. It is accordingly facts couched in the phenomenal terms of *this* world that are the informational contents of perceptions as experienced by the monads those perceptions modify. For the monad, its world is the world of physical, perceptible attributes. Leibniz's phenomenalism entails that the deductive relations between perceptions implied by the preestablished harmony are reflected by the deductive relations between those perceptions and features of the phenomenal things which appear to the perceiving monad as their objects. (Brandom 1981, 462)

Taken at face value, this passage asserts that: (i) monads receive through their perceptions information about the physical, perceptible world; (ii) monads 'experience' these perceptions; (iii) according to Leibniz's doctrine of preestablished harmony and his purported phenomenalism about bodies, the (deductive) connections among the perceptions of each monad are 'reflected' or manifested in the (deductive) connections between perceived features of physical things which appear to each monad as the content of its perceptions.[156]

All three of the above points appear to characterize monadic perception as something that presupposes the internal accessibility of perceptual representations – always tantamount to representations of certain features of the physical world -- for each monad to which they belong. Wilson sees in Brandom's apparent commitment to internally accessible content a departure from the general line that he takes in his study. Indeed, as witnessed above, Brandom mostly speaks of differences in the distinctness of perceptual content as something that is manifested in different ways in which inference from a 'third-person' standpoint is enabled from the (somehow objectively reportable) content of a monad's perceptions to the (also objectively reportable) instantiation of certain properties in the world.[157]

For Wilson, the untoward result of this apparent inconsistency in Brandom's approach is a view according to which the nature of monadic perception brings along intensionality or internally accessible content for all monads as intrinsic perceivers. This is problematic for the basic reason we've already encountered multiple times: that bare monads perceive yet do not have conscious access to the content of their perceptions. Thus, Wilson states her objection:

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[156] Leibniz's doctrine of preestablished harmony can be partly stated as the doctrine that every created substance is preestablished or programmed so that all of its natural states conform with the natural states of every other created substance, and there is no causal interaction between any two created substances. (See Kulstad and Carlin 2013 for discussion). The nature of Leibniz's phenomenalism is a controversial topic but is often taken to consist in the view that the only genuinely real beings are mind-like substances, with physical bodies and relations being mere "appearances." For a particularly careful explication of the issues surrounding this view, see Adams 1994.

[157] Cf. e.g.: 'We may say that two perceptions differ in perceptual or expressive degree just in case the ... content of one of them properly includes the ... content of the other. Leibniz's standard definition of perfection is that that is most perfect which is "simplest in hypotheses and richest in phenomena." That is, one substance is more perfect than another if from fewer premises about it, more about its world can be deduced than is the case for the other. The "hypotheses" will be statements reporting the occurrence of a perception in some monad, and the "phenomena" deducible from them will be statements reporting on the inherence of an accident in some subject ...' (Brandom 1981, 463).

> Brandom speaks of monads as having experiences, and being provided with information, without explaining how such characterizations are appropriate for wholly unconscious substances. Even if we assume that the laws of nature are somehow included in every monad, we cannot, I think, suppose that a non-conscious – indeed, non-rational – being makes "deductions." Brandom attempts to combine in his interpretation the notions of *external deducibility* and *internally accessible content or representationality* ... (1999, 341)

In his alleged attempt to combine the notions of external deducibility and internally accessible content as part of a fully general account of monadic perception, then, Brandom overextends his account and ends up with an unrealistic picture of Leibniz's views on perceptual distinctness.[158] He fails to achieve his second desideratum by integrating a notion of awareness into his account of monadic perception from the start, whereas such an account must do without such an initial appeal in attempting to make sense of what Leibniz says about awareness and its relation to perception.

Wilson's misgivings about Passage B and Brandom's account seem appropriate. It is hard to reconcile the claims Brandom apparently makes in Passage B about the first-personal experiences of monads and the appearances they apprehend with other claims that Brandom presents as definitive of his account, such as this: 'the expressive or representative nature of perception consists in the fact that from the existence of the modification of some monad which is a perceiving can be *inferred* the existence of various *accidents* or facts pertaining to its own monad or to others' (1981, 460). This statement, like many others we have seen, characterizes perception in terms of Wilson's notion of external deducibility. Brandom appreciates the distinction between this way of characterizing monadic perception and the alternative of explicating perception in terms of the internal accessibility of content, for he recognizes that the former model extends to bare monads whereas the latter does not (1981, 450).

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[158] This is also what Puryear (2006) understands to be the essential verdict of Wilson's critique of Brandom.

Indeed, Brandom seems fully aware of the unintelligibility of ascribing first-person experience to unconscious monads. In discussing a claim that Leibniz makes to the effect that we have an innate *idea* of perception (see e.g. NE 45), Brandom points out that this must be an idea of *conscious* perception, i.e. apperception. This must be so because, as Brandom points out,

> [w]e cannot say, "...[unconscious] perceptions are just like the ones which we are conscious of, only unconscious," and claim thereby to have expressed an idea (clear or distinct) as one might say, "unobserved elephants are just like observed ones"; for, as Wittgenstein has pointed out, when mental states are at issue awareness is the only feature that matters. ... [I]t is clear that we cannot make the … notion of unconscious perception distinct merely by invoking a plenum of degrees of perception intermediate between those of which we are aware and those of which we are not. (1981, 459)

Brandom claims here that the *concepts* of unconscious perception or unconscious perceptual experience are, from our point of view, unintelligible (contrasting with the way in which the concept of an 'unobserved elephant', for example, is not). Although he does not mention bare monads here, it is clear that Brandom must agree with Wilson at least in principle that it is senseless to speak of the 'internal accessibility' of perceptions within the category of bare monads. This, of course, does not allay Wilson's concern but only heightens it: if Brandom is aware of the underlying incoherence of the concept of unconscious perception, why then does he make the claims that he does in Passage B?

5. Brandom Recovered

These concerns are pressing and, indeed, point to a major puzzle in Leibniz's account of monadic perception concerning the role of awareness in perception and the possibility of individuating bare monads given their lack of relatively distinct perception. Wilson has her own solution to this puzzle, which consists in eschewing altogether the appeal to internal intensionality in explaining the meaning of Leibniz's notion of degrees of perceptual distinctness in monads. Wilson insists that the only textually consistent interpretation of Leibniz's views on perceptual distinctness must advert to Leibniz's notions of action and passion, which he associates with perceptual states with greater and lesser degrees of distinctness, respectively. Leibniz often stresses the mutuality of monadic perception, consisting in one monad's action upon another monad which receives the former's action (see M §§49-56). Because, for Leibniz, active-passive (i.e., causal) relations between monads are only ideal, activity and passivity are explained in terms of a monad's having perceptions that are more distinct than the corresponding perceptions of another monad. Crucially, Leibniz claims (as Wilson emphasizes) that such mutual relations of activity and passivity founded upon relative degrees of perceptual distinctness reflect, and are determined by, God's reason for creating any given monad with more distinct perceptions than another, and not the other way around. Thus, according to Wilson, we must 'suppose that the "perceptual" states of simple substances in general need not be attributed *internal* intensionality; rather, whatever they are, their relative distinctness may be understood in terms of their place in the order of reasons in *God's* mind' (1999, 345).

Wilson advances this proposal specifically as a response to what she sees as Brandom's misguided ascription of internal intensionality to bare monads in Passage B. As I will attempt to show in this section, however, there is an alternative reading of Passage B that supports an account of the perceptual reality of bare monads that is entirely consistent with what Wilson believes to be the correct exegetical alternative to Brandom's account.[159] My proposed reading, corroborated by texts of Leibniz, brings out the conceptual resources available to Brandom for accommodating the case of constitutively unconscious (or stuporous) bare monads within his larger reconstruction of Leibniz's thought on perceptual distinctness. And, as we are about to see, Wilson's lucid articulation of her own view not only meshes with but aids in comprehending the alternative reading of Passage B I am about to advocate.

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[159] It is worth noting that in his overview of the exchange between Brandom and Wilson, Jorgensen (2019, 124-25) presents Wilson's interpretation of Passage B without raising the question whether there may be alternative readings of the passage.

Above, I provided a prima facie breakdown of the claims Brandom makes in Passage B as follows: (i) monads receive through their perceptions information about the physical, perceptible world; (ii) monads 'experience' these perceptions; (iii) according to Leibniz's doctrine of preestablished harmony and his phenomenalism about bodies, the (deductive) connections among the perceptions of each monad are 'reflected' or manifested in the (deductive) connections between perceived features of physical things which appear to each monad as the content of its perceptions.

My proposal is this. We can neutralize the passage's allegedly troublesome appeal to internal accessibility by giving each of these three points a 'flat' reading, as follows.[160] (i′) The 'information' received by each monad is there, to be consciously exploited, but not necessarily by the monad. (ii′) Monads 'experience' only in the sense of having or undergoing (cf. my tire experienced a puncture). (iii′) Phenomena 'appear to' the monad specifically in the sense of being there. Notably, none of these readings of the claims of Passage B says anything about internal accessibility of content. If there is enough evidence from Leibniz's texts that Brandom's proposals in Passage B can legitimately be given these flat readings, then Passage B no longer appears to militate against the general tenor of Brandom's account with its emphasis on external deducibility.

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[160] I'm indebted to Steven Gross for initially proposing a "flat" reading of Passage B as a response to its alleged inconsistency with Brandom's overall treatment of monadic perception.

5.1 Mirroring and intensionality[161]

In fact, there are clear and conspicuous expressions of all of these 'flat' reconstructions of Passage B in Leibniz's thinking about monads and their perceptions. Let us start by looking at evidence for Leibniz's espousal of the type of situation described in (i′) as it pertains to the characterization of monadic perception. One of Leibniz's chief ways of conveying the nature of a monadic point of view and the representational interrelatedness of monads is to characterize monads as 'living mirrors.' Wilson herself relies on Leibniz's appeal to this mirroring metaphor in textually corroborating her own take on the relative distinctness of monadic perceptions. She cites the following remark of Leibniz which offers a particularly helpful contrast implying how a monad might harbor or relate to perceptual content without consciously exploiting it (or being able to do so).

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[161] At this point it should be noted that Wilson evidently misinterprets Brandom's use of the term 'intensional' in taking the term to denote 'internally accessible,' or as connected with the experiential feature of representation. It seems to me more than likely that Brandom uses the term 'intensional' in the way that Leibniz properly does, viz., as denoting a logical feature of predicates that involves the specification of conceptual content. Here the notion of an 'intension' is contrasted with that of an 'extension'. As Leibniz illustrates the contrast in the *New Essays*:

> For when I say *Every man is an animal* I mean that all the men are included amongst all the animals; but at the same time I mean that the idea of animal is included in the idea of man. 'Animal' comprises more individuals than 'man' does, but 'man' comprises more ideas or more attributes: one has more instances, the other more degrees of reality; one has the greater extension, the other the greater intension. (NE 486)

The greater the intension of a term or concept, in other words, the richer or more specific its conceptual content. This notion is important to Brandom, for whom, as we have seen, the relative distinctness of a perception is a function of the relative specificity of its content. The greater the extent to which a perception's content is specified, the greater the extent to which it is possible to make inferences from that content to features of things in the world (e.g. being able, on the basis of perceiving something as a red square, to distinguish the latter thing from a red sphere or a green cube). Thus, in one place, Brandom summarizes the background assumption behind his major interpretive suggestion about the distinctness of monadic perception as follows: '... degrees of perception … correspond to more-or-less-in-one, where … following Leibniz's intensional logic, increasing the number of accidents attributed to a subject amounts to specifying one's claim' (1981, 466). This point is important, for if correct, it seems that Brandom is truly invoking *external deducibility* -- the logical or inferential articulation of perceptual content -- just where Wilson takes him to be appealing to or mentioning the internal accessibility of perceptions. While I think one could seriously call into question the efficacy of Wilson's critique of Brandom based on these semantic considerations, I will not be resting my defense of Brandom on them.

> [T]he difference between intelligent substances and those which are not is as great as that between the mirror and him who sees (DM §35; quoted in Wilson 1999, 343).

For Leibniz, all monads are living mirrors, and their status as such derives from, and serves to reveal, the general 'interconnection or accommodation of all created things to each other, and each to all the others, bring[ing] it about that each simple substance has relations that express all the others, and consequently, that each simple substance is a perpetual, living mirror of the universe' (AG 220). In the above-quoted passage relating non-intelligent substances to mirrors, however, Leibniz is specifically comparing the separation that exists between a mirror and a beholder, on the one hand, with the separation between 'intelligent' and non-intelligent substances, on the other. Precisely, the analogy here concerns the greatness of the gulf between the elements in these contrastive pairs, rather than any direct parallel between the elements of each pair; but a purported analogy between the notions they contain certainly seems implied. If so, the passage delivers a concrete illustration of how the difference between monads at opposite poles of the monadic hierarchy depends on the different extent to which the monads can or cannot exploit the content of their perceptions.

Thus, suppose that I, an intelligent being, look in a mirror and see my own image. This image constitutes content or information that I, as an intelligent being, can respond to in many ways --I can use the image to pass judgment on my body or otherwise examine it, for example. More important, I *can alter the image* in the mirror by moving myself or other objects in front of or away from it. Because I can control and manipulate the images in the mirror, my perception of them must be suitably distinct, or must have suitably rich content, insofar at least as I know that *if* I move, so too will the image in the mirror. I have a privileged relation to the content reflected in the mirror; above all, I see that image *as* an image of myself. This is so far entirely uncontroversial.

What I think Leibniz wants us to derive from his mirror talk, however, is the more provocative idea that what a cognizant being sees of itself in a mirror is *also* a state of the mirror, even though the mirror doesn't ‘see’ it that way. In these respects, then, bare monads are just like mirrors; insofar as they reflect or ‘contain’ content, bare monads (to adopt Wilson's observations concerning actual mirrors) ‘do not utilize information, or represent *to themselves* external reality. Rather, they *alter in response to changes in external reality,* in a regular manner intelligible to a rational mind acquainted (explicitly or habitually) with the laws of reflection. (*I* "read off" from the mirror that the cat has just jumped onto the bed; the *mirror* knows nothing of this.)’ (1999, 343).

Leibniz's use of the mirror analogy therefore conveys the idea that the same perceptual content can be found ‘in’ monads of any type, where differences in type of monad or between any two individual monads are reflected in the differing degrees to which each monad can consciously exploit the content that it expresses.[162] This picture might lead us to suppose that the notion of ‘representation’ undergoes a gradual shift or enrichment from its application to bare monads to that of sentient monads. Bare monads ‘represent’ essentially in the sense of ‘embodying’ or ‘exemplifying,’ as a mirror represents an image, which conscious beings can be aware of and implicate in their broader perceptual lives, whereas the *mirror* cannot. As we ascend the scale of cognitive ability among monads, ‘representation’ gradually takes on an added, intensional significance, implying at least minimal awareness (sensory or cognitive); sentient monads embody this form of representation along with the notion of ‘representation’ as ‘presentation’ or

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[162] In speaking of perceptual states being ‘had’ by the mirror, we are not forced to attribute to the mirror a ‘unity of consciousness.’ Wilson (1999, 343) correctly points out that Leibniz’s official definition of perception as the ‘expression of many in one’ says nothing about ‘the many’ (representations) *being internal to* the one (i.e. represented in a single consciousness); all it directly implies is that in perception, many are expressed *as a unity*.

‘exemplification’ which is the sole sense of representation pertinent to bare monads.[163] In short, the ‘flat’ perceptual reality of bare monads is developed, ordered, and expanded as more representationally complex monads are brought into that reality. It would be worthwhile to flesh out and further apply Leibniz's living mirror metaphor, specifically to ascertain how sentient and sapient monads can themselves be regarded as mirrors and what their status as such further shows about the representational character of Leibniz's ontology.[164] But I think I have said enough here to illustrate how Leibniz might view the characteristic relation of bare monads to perceptual content, and how the perceptual reality of bare monads may coincide with, but differ paradigmatically from, the perceptual reality of more mentally sophisticated substances, by virtue of the latter’s ability to exploit the content of their perceptions and bare monads’ lack thereof. Leibniz’s views in this context clearly express parts (i′) and (iii′) of the alternative reading of Passage B proposed above.

5.2 ‘Experiencing representationally’

A second important indication that Leibniz espouses the flat construal of monadic perception concerns the nature of his reliance on the notion of ‘experience’. Leibniz is famous for describing sensation -- one form of experience -- as arising from an infinity of ‘minute perceptions’, each individually unconscious but together ultimately sensed by a given (sentient) monad.[165] Yet Leibniz does not seem inclined to *define* perception strictly in terms of experience. This lack of specific treatment of the notion of experience grants some interpretive freedom, and I believe that Wilson, in this context, relies on an understanding of 'experience' that is not, or need not be seen to be, shared by Leibniz or Brandom.

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[163] In claiming that Leibniz’s mirror analogy indicates his espousal of the equivalence of degrees of distinctness with degrees of conscious exploitability, I do not mean to imply that ‘exploiting’ content consciously means exploiting it rationally. The point is that, like Leibniz’s notion of perceptual distinctness, conscious exploitability comes in degrees, so that (e.g.) an animal’s sensory experiences and limited capacities of recognition and discrimination would count as some form of conscious (apperceptive) exploitation of perceptual content, even though the animal may lack the ability to exploit or implicate the content of its perceptions in activities involving (say) self-awareness.

[164] For a recent and detailed treatment of Leibniz’s notion of monads as living mirrors, see Nachtomy 2019.

[165] For an influential account of Leibniz’s notion of sensation, see Simmons 2001.

In Passage B, recall, Brandom claims that each monad ‘experiences’ its perceptions, a claim Wilson finds problematic due to its implication that monads universally enjoy such experience, against what looks like Leibniz’s restriction of experience to the realm of sentient monads. Wilson’s worry, as we’ve seen, is that one simply cannot apply conceptions of consciousness and experience to bare monads in any sense, not even proleptically, since there is simply no way of talking about representation that could give us any purchase on what perception in a bare monad is like. She expresses her point in these terms: ‘bare monads do not *experience* representationally any more than they experience consciously’ (1999, 343)

Notice that the notion of ‘experiencing representationally’ seems paradoxical as applied to bare monads only if experience is thought to entail awareness or internal accessibility of content. In that case, being unable to experience representationally is tantamount to being unable to experience consciously -- indeed, Wilson in the just-quoted excerpt seems to treat the former notion as a kind of queer and inappropriate way of couching or referring to the latter notion. Her point is that denying that monads experience representationally simply follows from the denial that monads experience consciously. If x does not experience consciously, then x does not experience representationally.

The flat reading of Passage B, however, relies on a different sense of the notion of ‘experience’ that does not invite Wilson's misgivings about the unrestricted scope of the notion granted it by Brandom. On this flat account, perceptual states are ‘experienced’ insofar as they are had or undergone, as a tire might ‘experience’ a puncture. This sense of ‘experience’ intuitively seems appropriate to the case of monads, each of which is identified with a unique unfolding or succession of perceptual states that comprise its intrinsic properties: here it is natural to say that each monad *undergoes* such a succession of states, even though, as Leibniz thinks, each monad is the active source of the content each of its perceptions.[166]

In the following passage from the *Monadology*, Leibniz seems to marshal the notion of experience in this flat sense. Although not obvious at first, his invocation of the notion of experience in this passage is probably not an appeal to the notion of 'experience' in the way Wilson understands it -- as consisting in or presupposing 'internal intensionality.' This is because what the passage says we 'experience within ourselves' is an *unconscious* state.

> For we experience [*nous expérimentons*] within ourselves a state in which we remember nothing and have no distinct perception; this is similar to when we faint or when we are overwhelmed by a deep, dreamless sleep. In this state the soul does not differ sensibly from a simple monad; but since this state does not last, and since the soul emerges from it, our soul is something more. (AG 215)

Thus, while it may be that Leibniz occasionally uses the term 'experience' in a way connoting awareness, it could be argued that being in a perceptual state -- the 'passing state which involves and represents a multitude in the unity or simple substance' -- is fundamentally something that perpetually 'befalls' each monad from its own point of view, thereby serving to determine what it 'experiences.' Taking a broader view, there is a sense in which each monad -- bare or sentient – 'undergoes' the alterations and vicissitudes of the perceptible universe, though each may be more or less cognizant of its own place within this infinite scheme and comparatively active with respect to a certain segment of its monadic cohort.

These reflections shed some light on how one might interpret -- and ascribe to bare monads -- the notion of 'experiencing representationally': this term could be taken to mean that a monad undergoes a change consisting in an alteration of perceptual content, much as a mirror will 'undergo' changes in the images it reflects depending on the activity of things which alternately appear before and move away from it. In bare monads, I am proposing, such change is 'experienced' in the flat sense but is not apperceived and does not consist in the development of any given content as required for apperception.

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[166] Cf. NE 86, where Leibniz describes thoughts as actions.

There is, moreover, another way to gloss the notion of 'experiencing representationally' that is derived from Leibniz's explanation of sensation, which attributes a distinctly representational status to perceptions we do not apperceive. In the *New Essays* (among many other places), Leibniz insists on the representational character of minute perceptions too confused to notice individually but which collectively and incrementally produce a sensation in monads with bodies of the right type. He writes:

> I would prefer to distinguish between *perception* and *being aware*. For instance, a perception of light or colour of which we are aware is made up of many minute perceptions of which we are unaware; and a noise which we perceive but do not attend to is brought within reach of our awareness by a tiny increase or addition. If the previous noise had no effect on the soul, this minute addition would have none either, nor would the total. (NE 134)

Sensation, for Leibniz, is a form of apperceiving, whereas the individual confused perceptions that act as a conglomerate to trigger a sensation are inaccessible to awareness. However, Leibniz reasons that insofar as sensation involves a distinct kind of awareness, the myriad perceptions that comprise sensation must 'have an effect on the soul' characteristic of perceptions: though not *separately* discernible by us, these minute perceptions are hypothesized as playing a representational role relative to the soul in that they imbue (unconscious) states with certain perceptual content. To monads that are sentient to various degrees -- and by virtue of their association with organic bodies outfitted with the right kind of sensory and intellectual equipment -- this content is exploitable in episodes of sensation and cognition. By contrast, bare monads are constitutively incapable of exploiting this content. But their failure to so exploit perceptual content does not make their operation or existence devoid of all ‘representationality.’ Bare monads, as I have proposed, relate to perceptual content -- shared by other monads -- by embodying it, and the ‘experience’ of bare monads consists in their undergoing a passage from one incarnation or expression of such content to another.

Thus, in reply to Wilson’s concern about the coherence of maintaining that bare monads ‘experience representationally,’ we may affirm that, for Leibniz’s monads, including the bare ones, *all* experiencing is ‘experiencing representationally.’ Everything that happens to a monad depends on what and how it perceives, whether consciously or unconsciously. Any experience monads may undergo will be representational (or perceptual) in nature. And I believe we are now in a position to see that, while it is true that bare monads do not ‘experience consciously,’ they can, on Leibniz's principles (and *pace* Wilson), be said to ‘experience’ -- to undergo – ‘representationally.’

6. Last Words

If what I have argued in this essay is correct, Wilson’s animadversions against Brandom, based on the claims he appears to make in Passage B, are not ultimately compelling; in fact, Wilson’s reading of the passage obscures the profound way in which her own reading of Leibniz is consistent with Brandom’s, and might be said to enrich it. For example, the subject of the relation of perception to action (and passion) in Leibniz's monadology is treated only marginally in Brandom's account, which could surely be enhanced by integrating -- at no cost to Brandom's theory – Wilson’s view about the inferential basis of monadic action in the order of reasons in God’s mind.

In the end, interestingly enough, Brandom and Wilson seem to have the same agenda -- in Brandom’s terms, to reveal the dependence of ‘the concepts of awareness and representation on the concept of inference (even for monads incapable of thought)’ (1981, 450). Both see the proper elucidation of these Leibnizian topics to require an account of how features of the world are externally deducible from features of monads and their harmonious relations to each other (and in Wilson's case, ultimately from the order of reasons in God's mind). Wilson believes that Brandom's pursuit of this explanatory enterprise falters where ‘monads incapable of thought’ are concerned. I have tried to show otherwise, but I do not want that to be quite the end of the story. Brandom’s and Wilson’s theories of Leibnizian perception are powerful and provocative, and I think it is appropriate to close this discussion by briefly pointing out some of their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Wilson, to begin with, admits explicitly that her account ‘remains on the most schematic level’ (1999, 344). For all its brevity, however, the account both provides valuable insight and bears some instructive shortcomings. The principal virtue of Wilson’s explanation of degrees of perceptual distinctness as reflecting the order of reasons in God’s mind is its due emphasis on Leibniz’s views on action and passion. Wilson points to a slew of texts (including M §§49-56) in which Leibniz develops this connection. Furthermore, one feature of Leibniz’s treatment not emphasized in the present paper is his association of greater degrees of perceptual distinctness with greater degrees of ‘perfection.’ Brandom is certainly sensitive to this usage, but it is only on Wilson’s account, where perceptual distinctness is said to be regulated by the structure of reasons in God’s mind, that Leibniz’s peculiar invocation of the notion of perfection is of manifest relevance.

However, there are several downsides to Wilson’s positive proposal.[167] First, on Wilson’s account it is hard to see to what extent the relative distinctness of a perception depends on something like the ‘articulation’ of its content (relative to the content of other perceptions). Surely, the distinctness of a perception ought to be determined in some fashion by the nature of its content. Further, making the distinctness of monads' perceptual states dependent on God makes it so that relative perceptual distinctness is an extrinsic property of monads (based ultimately on their relation to God). If that isn't objectionable in itself -- though Brandom would disagree with this result -- it is nevertheless natural to wonder how exactly we are supposed to identify the superior distinctness of a perception, if all we know is that its superior distinctness is due to the place it represents in the order of reasons in God's mind. Finally, and most pertinent to the broader theme of this paper, how does the God's-reasons analysis of degrees of perceptual distinctness explain the relationship between perceptual distinctness and consciousness? The answer is unclear.

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[167] Wilson (1999, 344) explicitly admits these downsides.

An advantage of Brandom's account, I believe, is that it does not face any of these particular difficulties. In fact (as I hope one could glean from the foregoing discussion), it could be said that the disadvantages of Wilson's account just adumbrated correspond to relative strengths of Brandom's account concerning these very issues. At this point, however, due diligence requires mentioning a significant liability of Brandom's theory, pointed out, in fact, by Wilson herself, as an accompaniment to the objection we have considered in this paper concerning Brandom's allegedly illicit appeal to internal intentionality in characterizing the perception of bare monads. Wilson's additional criticism is that Brandom's deployment of the notion of an 'expressive range' of individual perceptions 'requires a way of distinguishing co-occurrent perceptions independent of their respective objects, which is not supplied by either Brandom or Leibniz, and ... [which] sits uneasily with Leibniz's claim that a substance always has several perceptions, each of which "enfolds an infinity"' (1999, 343).

If I understand Wilson aright, she is objecting to Brandom's proposal that monadic perceptions are distinguished by their expressive ranges rather than by their objects. And this seems correct: Brandom holds, as we have seen, that multiple monadic perceptions can express (say) the same physical object but are distinguished from one another by the degree of specificity of their content. However, Wilson avers, neither Brandom nor Leibniz provides a suitable justification for this proposal. Moreover, Leibniz's view that there are always several perceptions in a monad each of which 'enfolds an infinity' seemingly conflicts with the finiteness Brandom attributes to individual perceptions that are distinguished from one another determinately by their inferential potential.

Here is not the place for me to address this worthwhile objection.[168] But it bears suggesting that the objection can be treated in one of two ways. Optimistically, one could say that it raises an interesting concern, the kind that invites us to probe the efficacy and flexibility of an otherwise profitable theory. However, in a less charitable vein (the one Wilson is pursuing), the objection might be seen to call into question the very motivation behind Brandom's interpretation: the aim to elaborate the *general* relationship between inference and representation, *as* that relationship is suggestively manifested and productively developed in a historical setting, the setting of Leibniz's thought. To accept Brandom's enterprise as an appropriate way of gaining insight into that thought, Wilson maintains, is to ill-advisedly condone a 'reconstruction' that amounts to 'an attempt to make out what Leibniz *could say* about distinct perception that bears only the most tenuous connection to what he actually does say' (1999, 341).

Brandom, for his part, puts a different spin on the task of reconstruction:

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[168] I do believe that Brandom has a rather straightforward response to this second of Wilson's objections. Faced with Wilson's presumption that the individuation of monadic perceptions must depend on their objects (rather than their inferential potential), Brandom could point to M §60 as providing evidence that his account of the individuation of monadic perceptual content is expressly underwritten by the nature of Leibniz's claims about the we may regard monads as 'limited': 'Monads are limited, *not as to their object*s, but with respect to the modifications of their knowledge of them. Monads all go confusedly to infinity, to the whole; *but they are limited and differentiated by the degrees of their distinct perceptions*' (my emphases).

> The sort of understanding that is made explicit in [conversational engagement with] the claims and texts a tradition comprises is a *critical one*. For it is manifested in the process of moving back and forth between the perspective provided by the tradition and what is true (according to the ascriber): the commitments the ascriber herself is prepared to undertake and defend. This is the form in which one engages a tradition in a dialogue aimed at deciding what commitments one ought oneself to undertake. (2002, 110)

For my part -- although I cannot defend my view here at length -- I see Brandom's outlook as valid. And I am skeptical of the charge that in embracing the elasticity of critical engagement with philosophical tradition, in probing Leibniz's thought to uncover and test his own commitments, Brandom runs afoul of what Leibniz 'did say.' Nor, further, am I convinced that Brandom's dialogical approach must bear 'only the most tenuous connection' to Leibniz's actual views (as if these were transparent and uncontroversial to begin with). To do proper historical research in philosophy, Wilson urges, one must extract -- one cannot select, supplement, and approximate (see Brandom 2002, 111). But I ask: Why not?[169]

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