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ARTICLE

IDEAS AND CONFUSION IN LEIBNIZ[1]

Shane Duarte

I. INTRODUCTION

In a paper published over thirty years ago,[2] Margaret Wilson argues that Leibniz sometimes conceives of sensible qualities like redness, heat and light as mental representations (i.e. sensations) but at other times conceives of them as complexes of primary qualities which are (ostensibly) the external physical causes of such mental representations. In support of this, Wilson observes that in one work, Leibniz states that heat is simple only with respect to the senses, suggesting that heat is not to be identified with the sensation of heat, but with the complex of causes that gives rise to this sensation.[3] However, in the same text, she points out, Leibniz implies that

[1]The following abbreviations are used in this paper: A = Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaft edn (Darmstadt, Leipzig, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923–)(cited by series, volume and page number); AG = G. W. Leibniz, *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Papers*, translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989); C = *Opuscules et fragments inédits de Leibniz*, edited by Louis Couturat (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1903); G = G. W. Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, edited by C. I. Gerhardt, 7 vols (Berlin, 1875–1890) (Roman numerals refer to volume numbers, Arabic ones to page numbers); Gr = G. W. Leibniz, *Textes Inédits*, edited by Gaston Grua, 2 vols (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948); L = G. W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, translated by Leroy E. Loemker, 2nd edn (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1969); LA = *The Leibniz – Arnauld Correspondence*, edited by and translated by H. T. Mason, with an intro. by G. H. R. Parkinson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967) (references to page numbers in this edition are to the pagination found in its margins, which is that of the Gerhardt edition); MP = G. W. Leibniz, *Leibniz: Philosophical Writings*, edited by G. H. R. Parkinson, translated by Mary Morris and G. H. R. Parkinson (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1973); NE = G. W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, translated and edited by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (the pagination of this volume is identical to that of A VI vi, references to which are accordingly omitted). Quotations from any of these works are signalled by means of an asterisk following the abbreviation and page number. Thus, a quoted passage marked 'AG 123*' is quoted from page 123 of Ariew and Garber's *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Papers*. Passages without any such mark are my own translations.

[2]Margaret Wilson, 'Confused Ideas', in *Essays on the Philosophy of Leibniz*, edited by Mark Kulstad (*Rice University Studies*, 63 (1977) No. 4: 123–37).

[3]A VI iv 2002–3/L 285.

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by 'heat' he means the sensation of heat when he states that a cold-blooded man who lives in a cool, sunless country will come to know what heat is only by experiencing it. As Wilson puts it, Leibniz 'vacillates between saying that physics tells us what sensible qualities are or consist in, and saying that physics tells us the causes of sensible qualities'.[4]

According to Wilson, moreover, such texts reveal a real ambivalence on Leibniz's part regarding the nature of sensible qualities. They cannot be explained away by supposing that Leibniz simply equivocates, in a fairly harmless way, in his use of terms like 'heat', 'light' and 'red', using such terms (as many of us do) to refer both to a sign and to the thing signified by that sign.[5] In particular, Leibniz's ambivalence about sensible qualities, she thinks, gives the impression that he sometimes overlooks the consequences of a distinction that he himself makes between two kinds of confusion. According to Wilson, that is, Leibniz holds that there is a kind of confusion that belongs to perceptions and another kind that belongs to ideas or concepts. On this scheme, a perception is confused when it possesses parts or elements of which the perceiver is not conscious (i.e. the *petites perceptions* of the *New Essays*).[6] By contrast, the distinction between confused ideas and distinct ideas is, on Wilson's reading of Leibniz, a distinction between different levels of conceptual ability. Specifically, a Leibnizian idea is clear and confused, according to Wilson, when it enables us to pick out its object, but does not enable us to identify a mark, or combination of marks, that serves to specify a respect in which the object differs from all other objects. On the other hand, a Leibnizian idea is distinct, according to Wilson, when it enables us not only to recognize its object, but also to enumerate 'explicit identifying marks' of this object.

The problem, according to Wilson, is that Leibniz seems at times not to respect the consequences of this distinction between two senses of 'confusion'. As she understands it, the distinction licenses the claim that although our *perceptions* of redness and the like might well be unavoidably confused, this does not mean that our *ideas* of these same things must also remain confused. We may never fail to experience red objects in the way we normally do, but developments in the field of optics may well lead us to distinct ideas of colours (understood as properties of bodies). Leibniz, according to Wilson, vacillates on this point: although he himself sometimes claims that a man born blind could come to have distinct ideas of colours through a study of optics (sc. an optics which offers accounts of colours cast wholly in terms of primary qualities), he also sometimes claims that a man born blind can never acquire an idea of red (since he can never have a

[4]Wilson, 131.

[5]This kind of equivocation is quite common. It is at work, for example, when I point to a bust of Socrates and exclaim, 'Look, Socrates!' In this case, I use one and the same term to refer both to a sign (the bust) and to the thing signified by that sign (Socrates himself), although of course I do not lose sight of the distinction between the bust of Socrates and Socrates himself.

[6]Wilson, 127.

perception of red). According to Wilson, these apparent inconsistencies are to be explained by appeal to the fact that Leibniz sometimes conceives of sensible qualities as mental representations (i.e. sensations), while at other times conceiving of them as complexes of primary qualities which (ostensibly) cause such mental representations. When he conceives of sensible qualities in the former way (i.e. as mental representations), Leibniz claims that our ideas of sensible qualities are wholly dependent on the having of sensations – and therefore that a person born blind must necessarily lack an idea of red. On the other hand, when Leibniz conceives of sensible qualities as complexes of primary qualities, he claims that the blind person can indeed have distinct ideas of sensible qualities.[7]

According to Wilson, then, Leibniz is inconsistent when it comes to the question of whether it is possible to have distinct ideas of sensible qualities, and this because he sometimes takes sensible qualities to be sensations and sometimes takes them to be complexes of primary qualities. In this paper, however, I will argue that Wilson is mistaken – not, however, because she is wrong to claim that Leibnizian ideas are confused in a way different from that in which Leibnizian perceptions are confused (as one recent interpreter has argued[8]), but because she (together with many other commentators[9]) is wrong to think that Leibnizian ideas admit of various degrees of confusion or distinctness at all. I shall also argue that, although Wilson's problem regarding Leibniz's supposed inconsistencies on the question of what can and cannot be known about sensible qualities admits of being reformulated in a manner consistent with a correct account of Leibnizian perceptions and ideas, this reformulated version of the problem admits of a satisfactory interpretive solution.

Against the view that Leibniz takes ideas to be distinguished into clear but confused ideas, clear and distinct ideas, etc., in this paper I argue that for Leibniz ideas simply do not admit of various degrees of distinctness. Rather,

[7]Similarly, according to Wilson, Leibniz sometimes says that persons possessed of sight cannot have distinct ideas of sensible qualities like heat because their perceptions of such qualities are unavoidably confused (the *petites perceptions* of which, say, the *quale* heat is 'composed' remaining inaccessible to consciousness). At other times – i.e. when he conceives of sensible qualities as complexes of primary qualities – he claims that persons possessed of sight can, in fact, have distinct ideas of sensible qualities.

[8]Stephen M. Puryear, 'Was Leibniz Confused about Confusion?', *The Leibniz Review*, 15 (2005): 95–124.

[9]See, for example, Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 308; Robert Brandom, 'Leibniz and Degrees of Perception', *Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 19 (1981) No. 4: 454; Nicholas Jolley, *Leibniz and Locke: A Study of the* New Essays on Human Understanding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) 184; Robert McRae, *Leibniz: Perception, Apperception, and Thought* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1976) 127–8; G. H. R. Parkinson, 'The ''Intellectualization of Appearances'': Aspects of Leibniz's Theory of Sensation and Thought', in *Leibniz: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, edited by Michael Hooker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) 15; and Alison Simmons, 'Changing the Cartesian Mind: Leibniz on Sensation, Representation and Consciousness', *Philosophical Review*, 110 (2001) No. 1: n. 41.

for Leibniz ideas are *objects* of perception or cognition that are internal to the mind, cognitions and perceptions (which *do* admit of various degrees of confusion and distinctness) being mental representations that are distinct from the ideas which serve as their objects. I shall also argue that for Leibniz the mind's ideas are perfect representations of things that exist outside the mind, while ideas themselves are related to cognitions as things signified are related to their signs, the relation between cognitions, ideas and their extra-mental objects being an *intelligible* relation of *natural* signification – as opposed to a relation of *arbitrary* signification or a relation of *conventional* signification (the likes of which are possessed by symbols and by expressions in the various natural languages). As we shall see, for Leibniz, the various kinds of cognition (clear and confused, clear and distinct, etc.) that one might have of a single object x are (roughly put[10]) conscious representations of x that differ from each other with respect to their structural complexity, the ultimate *inner* object of all these cognitions being the idea of x (which is, in turn, a perfect representation of x as it exists outside the mind).

II. LEIBNIZ'S CLASSIFICATION OF COGNITIONS

I begin here with a review of Leibniz's classification of cognitions into obscure cognitions, clear and confused cognitions, etc. My principal sources in this section are the *Discourse on Metaphysics* (where the classification is presented as one of '*connoissances*') and the *Meditations on Cognition, Truth and Ideas* (where the classification is presented as one of '*cognitiones*').

According to the *Meditations*, an *obscure* cognition of x does not allow us to identify x. This cognition, Leibniz explains, is therefore to be contrasted with a *clear* cognition of x, which does allow us to recognize x. A clear cognition of x, moreover, is either *confused* or *distinct*. It is confused when it fails to involve clear (in the sense of 'clear' just defined) cognitions of marks which, taken together, are unique to x and serve to distinguish x from all other things. Accordingly, a clear cognition is confused if it is a simple or structurally undifferentiated representation of something that is in itself complex. In this case, the complex thing's constituents are perceived without being *noticed* or *apperceived* – i.e. its constituents are only *subconsciously* perceived. Indeed, a colour (understood as a conscious mental representation) is said by Leibniz to be a clear but confused cognition – i.e. a qualitatively simple cognition of something that is in itself complex; the constituents of this complex thing are only perceived, and not apperceived.[11]

[10]I say 'roughly put' because this claim will have to be qualified in Section V below.

[11]See NE II ix 4, where, just after distinguishing between perception and apperception, Leibniz states that 'a perception of light or colour of which we are aware [*dont nous nous appercevons*] is made up of many minute perceptions of which we are unaware [*dont nous ne nous appercevons pas*]' (NE 134*).

Where, by contrast, the thing itself is simple, if it is clearly cognized, it is likewise distinctly cognized; that is, in the case of genuinely simple things, confusion is impossible, since a thing that is simple has no components that might fail to be cognized clearly. Now, a clear cognition of some complex item x is distinct when it *does* involve at least a clear but confused cognition of such parts as can serve to distinguish x from other things. (Note that such parts might themselves be complex.) As Leibniz further notes, moreover, distinctness comes in degrees: a distinct cognition of x is *adequate* when all the *simple* components or ingredients of x are clearly cognized (and are thus also distinctly cognized, since the clear cognition of something that is simple must likewise be distinct). Otherwise, the distinct cognition of x will be *inadequate*. Finally, Leibniz explains in *Discourse* §24 that my adequate cognition of x is *intuitive* 'when my spirit grasps distinctly and all at once all the primitive ingredients' of x, but is otherwise *suppositive* ('*symbolic*' in the *Meditations*).[12] This last distinction between two kinds of adequate cognition – between intuitive and suppositive cognitions – is offered in recognition of the fact that some things are so complex that a *single* and *simultaneous* grasp of all their primitive components is beyond our power. In such cases, Leibniz explains, at any one time recourse is had to symbols (understood as signs that signify conventionally or arbitrarily) which go proxy for intuitive cognitions of the thing's elements (and the cognition is thereby suppositive or symbolic). Moreover, according to Leibniz, just as confusion cannot be a feature of one's clear cognition of a simple thing (so that the clear cognition of a simple thing must at the same time be a distinct cognition of it), so must the distinct cognition of a simple thing be adequate and intuitive as well.

In order to make this classification of cognitions clearer, consider the following text, with which Leibniz closes the *Meditations on Cognition, Truth and Ideas*:

> when we perceive colors or smells, we certainly have no perception other than that of shapes and of motions, though so very numerous and so very small that our mind cannot distinctly consider each individual one in this, its present state, and thus does not notice that its perception is composed of perceptions of minute shapes and motions alone, just as when we perceive the color green in a mixture of yellow and blue powder, we sense only yellow and blue finely mixed, even though we do not notice this, but rather fashion some new thing [*novum aliquod ens*] for ourselves.[13]

As we have seen, according to Leibniz, a colour, understood as a conscious mental representation, is a clear but confused cognition, since its object is complex but is represented by the colour itself as simple. Thus, the *quale*

[12]A VI iv 1568/AG 56/L 319.
[13]A VI iv 592/AG 27*/L 294.

green mentioned in this passage is a clear but confused cognition. Note, moreover, that this *quale*, which is present in the mind of a perceiver who fails to notice that the powder she is inspecting is actually a mixture of blue and yellow powders, is said in this passage to be 'some new thing' over and above yellow and blue. In the context of this passage, it seems clear that in making this claim Leibniz means to say that, underlying one's consciousness of green is a subconscious perception of both yellow and blue. Indeed, Leibniz is quite explicit in other texts about the fact that he takes the *quale* green to 'result' or 'arise' from these two other colours.[14] The suggestion here is that if the perceiver were to inspect the powder a little more closely, the *quale* green that originally makes up part of her consciousness of the powder would disappear, giving way to the *qualia* yellow and blue – which together constitute a clear and distinct cognition of that very item of which the *quale* green constitutes a clear but confused cognition.[15] In other words, the underlying *qualia* yellow and blue would be brought to the level of consciousness.

Of course, since the *qualia* blue and yellow (like the *quale* green) are each simple representations of complex things, and therefore clear but confused cognitions, the clear and distinct cognition made up of the *qualia* yellow and blue is inadequate – since, for a cognition to be adequate, it must distinctly represent the simple component parts of the object. Moreover, although the *quale* yellow is a clear but confused cognition, it is not a cognition of that object x which is clearly but confusedly cognized when the *quale* green presents itself to the mind. Instead, the *quale* yellow is a clear but confused cognition of some complex component part of object x. The same can be said of the *quale* blue. Notice, finally, Leibniz's claim in this passage that a representation of shapes and motions underlies one's consciousness of a colour in much the same way that the representation of yellow and blue underlies one's consciousness of green. In other words, there is a representation, cast purely in terms of shapes and motions, that represents object x more distinctly than either the *quale* green or the conjunction of the *qualia* yellow and blue does. These shapes and motions, of course, are none other than what the common mechanical philosopher takes to be the external causes of our colour sensations.

With respect to the distinction between the two kinds of adequate cognition – intuitive and suppositive (or symbolic) – it is important to note that the symbols which, in a suppositive cognition, go proxy for intuitive

[14]Leibniz states in a letter of 4 June 1710 to Rudolph Wagner that green 'results from' yellow and blue (G VII 529). In the *New Essays* he states that green arises from blue and yellow ('*le verd*', he says, '*naist du bleu et du jaune*') (NE 120).

[15]In a letter to Thomas Burnett (G III 256), Leibniz states that our cognition of green is clear and distinct because we have an analysis of green into blue and yellow.

cognitions are to be distinguished from those signs which Leibniz calls 'images' or 'natural signs', one example of which is the *quale* green. In other words, according to Leibniz, the relation that obtains between an object x and a clear but confused cognition of x is *intelligible*, or what he sometimes refers to as a relation of *natural signification*. This relation he commonly describes by contrast with a relation of *conventional* or *arbitrary* signification, the likes of which is possessed by words in a natural language and by symbols whose signification is the result of an arbitrary imposition.[16] The view that all cognitions are natural signs (except for those which go proxy, in suppositive cognitions, for intuitive cognitions of certain simple ideas) is in evidence in several passages of the *New Essays*. It is most frequently mentioned during flare-ups (so to speak) in an ongoing dispute between Theophile (Leibniz's mouthpiece) and Philalethes (Locke's mouthpiece) centred on the issue of how *qualia* are related to their causes. According to Philalethes, this relationship is an arbitrary one imposed by God, while for Theophile it is an intelligible relation. A relevant passage is the following:

> THEOPHILE: ... According to the opinion (which I do not approve, though) of those who conceive of God as having arbitrarily settled what ideas we are to

[16]See NE 185–6*:

> The neglect of things that are truly good arises from the fact that, on topics and in circumstances where our senses are not much engaged, our thoughts are for the most part what we might call 'blind' – in Latin I call them *cogitationes caecae*. I mean that they are empty of perception and sensibility, and consist in the wholly unaided use of symbols, as happens with those who calculate algebraically with only intermittent attention to the geometrical features which are being dealt with. Words ordinarily do the same thing, with the object itself virtually absent from our mind.

Now compare this passage with the following from the *Meditations* (A VI iv 587–8/AG 24–5*/L 292):

> when I think about a chiliagon, that is, a polygon with a thousand equal sides, I don't always consider the nature of a side, or of equality, or of thousandfoldness (that is, of the cube of tenfoldness), but in my mind I use these words (whose sense appears only obscurely and imperfectly to the mind) in place of the ideas I have of these things, since I remember that I know the meaning of those words, and I decide that explanation is not necessary at this time. I usually call such thinking, which is found both in algebra and arithmetic and, indeed, almost everywhere, *blind* or *symbolic*. And indeed, when a notion is very complex, we cannot consider all of its component notions at the same time.

Finally, compare these two passages to the following one (NE 204*):

> everyone acts only according to his present perceptions: when the future affects someone, it does so either through his image of it or else through his having made a policy and practice of being guided by *the mere name or some other arbitrary symbol of the future*, without any *image or natural sign* of it (my emphasis).

Note carefully Leibniz's contrast here between 'blind thoughts', on the one hand, and 'images' or 'natural signs', on the other.

> have to indicate the qualities of objects, with no resemblance and not even a natural relationship, our ideas would no more conform to their archetypes than the words which are employed in languages through institution conform to ideas or to things themselves.[17]

In another passage,[18] Theophile is concerned to answer Philalethes' claim that even the most detailed examination of a thing's internal constitution will fail to make clear the connection between it and the *qualia* we pre-theoretically attribute to the thing. Here, Theophile first observes that Philalethes' claim stems from his holding the (sc. Cartesian) view that the connection is an arbitrary one imposed by God. Against this view, Theophile claims that the connection is intelligible (i.e. a relation of natural signification), and that to penetrate to the internal constitution of a body is to gain access to the intelligible grounds ('*raisons intelligibles*') of our *qualia*. He then cautions that, in claiming that such an intelligible connection exists, he does not mean to say that one can sensibly recognize these intelligible grounds *in* our *qualia*. Specifically, he notes that we have an analysis of green into yellow and blue, but for all that we cannot extract ideas of blue and yellow from the 'sensitive idea of green' itself – precisely because the latter idea is a confused one. This, of course, is an echo of Leibniz's claim in the *Meditations* that the *quale* green is 'some new thing' over and above the *qualia* blue and yellow. The *quale* green is not *itself* composed of the *qualia* yellow and blue, but rather *gives way*, upon analysis (e.g. upon taking a closer look at the mixture composed of yellow and blue powders), to the *qualia* yellow and blue.

According to Leibniz, then, the relation that obtains among cognitions and their objects is a relation of natural signification, except in the case of those symbols which, in a suppositive cognition, go proxy for intuitive cognitions. No less clear, moreover, is the fact that for Leibniz all cognitions, save obscure ones, are *conscious* perceptions or representations, since, when our clear cognition of a thing *fails* to involve a consciousness of any of its parts, this clear cognition is said to be confused. That is, our clear cognition of some object is more or less distinct to the extent that we are more or less conscious of the object's simple parts.[19]

[17]NE 264*. Leibniz makes much the same point in a letter of 1 September 1706 to Des Bosses (G II 314).

[18]NE 403–4.

[19]It is worth noting that the *Discourse on Metaphysics* makes no mention of obscure cognitions. This, I think, is significant: it suggests that obscure cognitions are not, strictly speaking, cognitions at all (just as a dead human being is not, strictly speaking, a human being at all), and this precisely because they are not conscious representations. Rather, when something that is in itself complex manifests itself in my consciousness as simple, I then have only an obscure cognition of its constituents.

III. IDEAS AS OBJECTS OF THOUGHT OR COGNITION

Several important questions arise with respect to this classification of cognitions. First, and most obviously, how exactly are cognitions related to ideas, according to Leibniz?

Although he often speaks in the *New Essays* of *ideas* as clear but confused, clear and distinct, etc. (which might be taken to suggest that the cognitions of the *Meditations* are none other than ideas), Leibniz's considered view is that cognitions differ from ideas. In fact, according to Leibniz, ideas are representations of extra-mental realities and internal *objects* of cognition, cognitions (except for obscure ones) being conscious perceptions of ideas. Strictly speaking, moreover, Leibniz holds that only cognitions admit of various degrees of clarity and distinctness. Ideas, by contrast, are *perfect* representations – by which I mean representations devoid of confusion.

In the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Leibniz makes it clear that he takes ideas to be abiding objects of perception, which must therefore be distinguished from perceptions or thoughts, which come and go. As Leibniz puts it in §26 of the *Discourse*:

> In order properly to conceive what an idea is, we must prevent an equivocation. For some take the idea to be the form or difference of our thoughts, and thus we have an idea in the mind only insofar as we think of it; every time we think of it again, we have other ideas of the same thing, though similar to the preceding ideas. But it seems that others take the idea *as an immediate object of thought or as some permanent form that remains when we are not contemplating it*. And, in fact, our soul always has in it the quality of representing to itself any nature or form whatsoever, when the occasion to think of it presents itself. And I believe that this quality of our soul, insofar as it expresses some nature, form, or essence, is properly the idea of the thing, which is in us and which is always in us, whether we think of it or not.[20]

Note carefully Leibniz's claim here that an idea is a 'permanent form that remains' in the mind even 'when we are not contemplating it', and his further claim that our idea of a given thing 'is in us and is always in us, whether we think of it or not'. The clear implication of this passage is that for Leibniz ideas are not the kinds of thing that admit of being acquired, contrary to what many of his interpreters have assumed.[21] They are, rather, permanent features of the mind that serve as objects of thought, perception or contemplation. At least at the time of the *Discourse*'s composition (1686), then, Leibniz understood ideas to be abiding *objects* of perception, rather than transient events in consciousness (transient events in consciousness

[20]A VI iv 1570/AG 58*/L 320 (my emphasis).
[21]See the works of Puryear, Wilson and Jolley cited above.

being distinct from, though representations of, ideas). Worth noting, too, is that nowhere in this work does Leibniz speak of ideas as clear and confused, clear and distinct, etc. (although he does speak of '*connoissances*' as clear and confused, etc.).

Notwithstanding initial appearances, moreover, about twenty years later, at the time of the *New Essays'* composition, Leibniz was still of the opinion that ideas are abiding objects of perception (i.e. that perceptions are representations of ideas); for in the *New Essays*, where he is most prone to speak of *ideas* as confused and as transient events in consciousness, Leibniz nevertheless remarks at several points that in fact he takes ideas to be abiding internal objects of perception, which must therefore be distinguished from thoughts, cognitions or bits of consciousness, which come and go. He further characterizes ideas as 'immediate inner' objects of thought, distinguishing them from both (i) created extra-mental objects, which are 'mediate outer' objects of thought, and (ii) God, who is the only 'immediate outer' object of thought. For example:

> [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 thought which corresponds to it, but since it is the *object* of thought it can exist before and after the thought. 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.[22]

As in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, Leibniz here characterizes ideas as objects of perception that are internal to the mind of the perceiver, and he goes so far as to state that, in so far as the soul contains ideas, it is its own 'immediate inner object', the only other immediate object mentioned in this

[22]NE 109*. See also NE II x 2, where Leibniz has Theophile (his own mouthpiece) tell Philalethes (Locke's mouthpiece):

> If ideas were only the forms or manners [*façons*, i.e. *modi*] of thoughts, they would cease with them; but you yourself have acknowledged, sir, that they are the inner objects of thoughts.
>
> (NE 140*)

Note that in this passage the term 'thought' is used in a general way, after the example of Descartes, so that a sensation counts as a thought. Leibniz's considered view is that thoughts, strictly understood, are non-sensory; but he frequently uses the term 'thought' in a more general way to refer to both sensations and non-sensory events in consciousness, as Descartes did. As he puts it at NE II xxi 72:

> One might, I believe, replace 'thought' by a more general term, 'perception', attributing thought only to minds [i.e. rational souls] whereas perception belongs to all entelechies. But still I would not challenge anyone's right to use 'thought' with that same generality, *and I may sometimes have carelessly done so myself*.
>
> (NE 210* – my emphasis)

passage being the soul's only immediate external one – i.e. God. The same point, moreover, is repeated later in the *New Essays*, where Theophile states: 'ideas are in God from all eternity, and they are in us, too, before we actually think of them, as I showed in our first discussions'.[23] Even in the *New Essays*, then, Leibniz makes a point of distinguishing ideas from conscious representations, ideas being *objects* of conscious representations.[24] Nevertheless, in this same work Leibniz is willing to accommodate Locke's very general use of the term 'idea' (according to which a thought, whether sensory or intellectual, is called an 'idea'), and he himself often speaks of ideas as confused, etc., reserving the expression 'pure idea' (or sometimes: 'minute idea which is distinct in itself') to refer to what he would, in other contexts, simply call an 'idea'. Leibniz makes this willingness to work with Locke's use of the term 'idea' quite clear in the following passage from the *New Essays*:

> PHILALETHES: I hope then that you will concede to this able author [i.e. Locke] that all ideas come through sensation or through reflection; that is, through 'our observation employed either about external sensible objects; or about the internal operations of our' soul.
>
> THEOPHILE: In order to keep away from an argument upon which we have already spent too long [sc. regarding the existence of innate ideas], let me say in advance, sir, that when you say that ideas come from one or other of those causes, I shall take that to mean *the actual perception of the ideas*; for I believe I have shown that in so far as they contain something distinct they are in us before we are aware of them.[25]

This passage implies that for Leibniz ideas are, strictly speaking, abiding objects of perception, rather than events occurring in consciousness. Nonetheless, as the passage also suggests, Leibniz is ready to accommodate himself to Locke's terminology by speaking of thoughts – whether sensory or intellectual – as ideas. It is, I claim, only when he is thus adapting himself to Locke's mode of expression that he speaks of ideas as confused or distinct.

That Leibniz thus adapts himself to Locke's terminology becomes especially clear at *New Essays* II xxix 2, where he refers to his *Meditations on Cognition, Truth and Ideas* (published in 1684 in the Leipzig journal *Acta Eruditorum*) and characterizes this work's classification of cognitions (into clear but confused, clear and distinct, etc.) as a classification of *ideas*.[26] For

[23]NE 300*.

[24]In the light of these passages from the *Meditations* and the *Discourse*, it should be clear that, on Leibniz's view, the ideas which serve as objects of our perception or cognition are in our own minds, and not in the mind of God (as some Christian Neoplatonists would have it).

[25]NE 111* (my emphasis).

[26]NE 254–5. Leibniz also presents the *Meditations'* classification of cognitions as a classification of ideas in a letter of 20 January 1699 (Old Style) to Thomas Burnett (G III 247); but there is every reason to believe that in this letter Leibniz is again adapting his terminology to Locke's,

as a careful inspection of the *Meditations* reveals, its classification of cognitions cannot be understood as a classification of ideas (in Leibniz's own preferred sense of the term 'idea'), since one thing that Leibniz insists on in this work is that we cannot be sure that we have an idea of x if we have only a clear, distinct, but inadequate cognition of x.[27] And if one can have a clear, distinct, but inadequate cognition of x without having an idea of x, clearly this cognition cannot itself be an idea. Accordingly, the fact that in the *New Essays* Leibniz presents the *Meditations'* classification of cognitions as a classification of ideas shows that in the *New Essays* he frequently uses the term 'idea' in a sense that differs from the one in which he usually uses the term. Specifically, in the *New Essays* he uses the term more generally to refer to both (i) cognitions and (ii) internal objects of perception (i.e. ideas, in the strict Leibnizian sense).[28]

The fact, then, that Leibniz frequently speaks in the *New Essays* of ideas as confused, clear or distinct cannot be taken to support the claim that ideas, in Leibniz's preferred sense, admit of various degrees of confusion or distinctness; for in the *New Essays* Leibniz uses the term 'idea' to refer also to cognitions, which *do* admit of being clear but confused, etc. Thus, it is entirely plausible to suppose that when Leibniz speaks of confused ideas in the *New Essays*, what he actually means to speak of are confused cognitions. Indeed, in many passages, the expression 'confused idea' cannot be understood in any other way.[29]

the subject of the letter being the latter's ongoing dispute with Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester.

[27]A VI iv 588–9/AG 25–6/L 292–3. Note that Leibniz makes the same point in §25 of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*. In §24 of the *Discourse*, Leibniz presents a classification of '*connoissances*' which is clearly none other than the *Meditations'* classification of '*cognitiones*'. Then, in §25 Leibniz states that it is only when one possesses a clear but confused *connoissance* of x, or an adequate and intuitive *connoissance* of x, that one can be sure of having an idea of x. I shall discuss this section of the *Discourse* below.

[28]Cf. Puryear, 102–4.

[29]Consider, for example, the following passage:

> THEOPHILE: ... As for confused ideas or rather images – or 'impressions' if you prefer – such as colours, tastes and so on, resulting from various minute ideas which are distinct in themselves though we are not distinctly aware of them: we lack an infinity of these which befit other creatures more than they do ourselves.
>
> (NE 487*)

Note that in this passage Leibniz first refers to sensations like those of colour and taste as 'confused ideas', but then signals some dissatisfaction with this expression by immediately adding, 'or rather images'. Consider also the following passage:

> [W]e can readily conclude that the situation will be the same with regard to those other 'sensory images', like colours and tastes and so on, of which we do not yet have such a perfect analysis. (For the truth is that *these ought to be called 'images' rather than 'qualities' or even 'ideas'*.)
>
> (NE 404* – my emphasis)

There is, moreover, one very good reason to think that it is more than just plausible to suppose that when Leibniz speaks of ideas as confused in the *New Essays* he invariably means (what he himself would prefer to call) confused cognitions; for in Gerhardt's edition of Leibniz's philosophical writings, the term 'idea' is to be found qualified by the terms 'confused', 'clear', or 'distinct' in only a fairly limited number of places outside the *New Essays*.[30] The majority of these instances are to be found, moreover, in Leibniz's letters to the Scotsman Thomas Burnett, in the context of discussions focused on Locke. And in these letters Leibniz is in all likelihood working, once again, with Locke's terminology, rather than his own. Further, most of the remaining texts in which Leibniz uses the term 'idea' and qualifies it with 'clear', 'distinct', or 'confused' are to be found in letters meant for Cartesians, who commonly speak of ideas as events in consciousness, or in works meant to be read by those accustomed to Cartesian ways of speaking. In still other texts, moreover, Leibniz is clearly employing the expression 'confused idea' in a non-technical and everyday sense.[31]

There is, therefore, little reason to think that Leibniz takes ideas – in his sense, according to which ideas are *objects* of thought or conscious perception – to admit of being clear and confused, clear and distinct, etc. On the contrary, when he speaks of ideas as clear but confused, etc., it would seem that he is using the term 'idea' to refer, not to ideas in his own preferred sense, but to conscious perceptions of ideas. In fact, when ideas are taken to be *objects* of perception, as they are by Leibniz, there seems to be little sense in supposing that they admit of various degrees of confusion or distinctness.

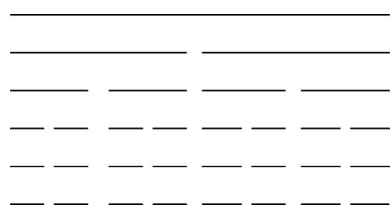
It seems clear, then, (i) that for Leibniz ideas are inner objects of thought or consciousness; (ii) that ideas are sometimes called clear and confused, clear and distinct, etc. in the *New Essays* only because Leibniz adapts his vocabulary to Locke's; (iii) that thoughts, cognitions or bits of consciousness are the only things that admit of being confused, etc., according to Leibniz; and finally, (iv) that for Leibniz the relation that obtains among cognitions, their inner objects (i.e. ideas), and their extra-mental objects is an intelligible relation of natural signification.

[30]G I 352 (to Nicolas Malebranche); G II 23 (to Ernst von Hessen – Reinfels), 112, 121 (to Antoine Arnauld); G III 223, 224, 229, 231, 232, 234, 235, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 245, 246, 247, 248, 256, 257, 269 (to Thomas Burnett), 363 (to Damaris Masham), 449, 451 (in the context of taking notes on some arguments presented by Isaac Jacquelot); G IV 331, 403, 404 (critical comments on Cartesianism); G VI 92, 300, 326–7, 404–5 (Theodicy), 493, 501 (to Queen Sophie Charlotte), 577 (comments on Locke), 590, 592 ('Entretien de Philarete et d'Ariste, suite du premier entretien d'Ariste et de Theodore'), G VII 79, 543 (to Electress Sophie).

[31]See, for example, the letter to Ernst von Hessen-Reinfels cited in the last note.

IV. AN ILLUSTRATION

Having come this far, we are now in a position to clarify the rather abstract discussion of cognitions presented in the second section of this paper. To better understand this classification of cognitions, consider the following diagram:



Here we have a diagram that consists of a single line together with five rows of segments placed directly beneath it. Call the line '*A*', the row immediately below it, consisting of two segments, '*B*', and so on, the row of segments at the bottom being called '*F*'.

In this diagram, *F* represents the complex object *x*. Each segment in *F* represents a simple part of *x* (or an element of its essence). *E* represents the complex idea of *x*, and is likewise divided into eight segments, each of which represents a simple idea that enters into the complex idea of object *x*. *A*, *B*, *C* and *D* represent four, qualitatively different, cognitions of *x*, the cognition's degree of complexity being represented by the number of segments into which *A*, *B*, *C* and *D* are divided. Thus, *A* represents a simple or qualitatively undifferentiated cognition of the complex object *x*, and therefore represents a clear but confused cognition of *x*. *B* represents a more distinct cognition, because it is cut into two segments, each of which represents a simple or qualitatively undifferentiated cognition of a complex component of *x*, a complex component that is itself composed of four simple component parts. Let us suppose, moreover, that the two clear and confused cognitions represented by these two segments together serve to distinguish *x* from all other things, and that *B* therefore represents a clear and distinct cognition of *x*. Since the clear and distinct cognition represented by *B* is composed of two clear but confused cognitions, however, it is still an inadequate cognition of *x*. *C* represents a new stage in the analysis of *x*. Here, we have a clear and distinct representation that is composed of four clear but confused cognitions, each of these four cognitions being a simple or qualitatively undifferentiated representation of a complex component of *x*, a complex component that is itself composed of two simple component parts. Since this clear and distinct cognition is composed of four clear but confused cognitions, it too is inadequate. Finally, *D* represents a clear, distinct and adequate cognition of *x*, since this cognition is composed of eight cognitions, each of which represents one of the eight simple parts of *x*.

Since each of these eight cognitions is a clear cognition of something simple, each will likewise count as distinct and, moreover, adequate. At this point, analysis of object x has come to an end. If the mind that possesses this cognition is capable of keeping x's eight simple components parts in view at the same time, without failing to keep them distinct from each other, this cognition counts as adequate and intuitive. If it cannot do this, but must instead use a symbol (e.g. a word or numeral) to go proxy for several of the cognitions of the simple parts, the entire cognition counts as adequate but suppositive (or symbolic).

At this point, it will be useful to consider, once again, the passage quoted earlier from the *Meditations on Cognition, Truth and Ideas*, the one in which Leibniz speaks of the *qualia* green, blue and yellow:

> [W]hen we perceive colors or smells, we certainly have no perception other than that of shapes and of motions, though so very numerous and so very small that our mind cannot distinctly consider each individual one in this, its present state, and thus does not notice [*non animadvertat*] that its perception is composed of perceptions of minute shapes and motions alone, just as when we perceive the color green in a mixture of yellow and blue powder, we sense only yellow and blue finely mixed, even though we do not notice this, but rather fashion some new thing [*novum aliquod ens*] for ourselves.[32]

As I mentioned earlier, the *quale* green that is present in the mind of a perceiver who fails to notice that the powder she is looking at is actually a mixture of blue and yellow powders is said in this passage to be 'some new thing' over and above yellow and blue. As I also mentioned earlier, it seems clear that in making this claim Leibniz means to say that, underlying one's consciousness of green is a subconscious perception of both yellow and blue. What is more, we have seen that for Leibniz colours, understood as mental representations, are clear but confused cognitions – i.e. simple or qualitatively undifferentiated conscious representations of complex things. Thus, on his view, green constitutes a clear but confused cognition of that very item of which the perceptions of blue and yellow, when brought to the level of consciousness, together constitute a clear and distinct cognition. In fact, this seems precisely to be what motivates Leibniz to claim, in a letter to Thomas Burnett, that we have a clear and distinct cognition of green.[33] By 'green' here Leibniz does not mean the *quale* green, but rather the object of which the *quale* green constitutes a clear but confused cognition (which is none other than the object of which the *qualia* yellow and blue together constitute a clear and distinct cognition). This is why he goes on in the same letter to say that we have only a clear but confused cognition of blue, since

[32]A VI iv 592/AG 27*/L 294.
[33]G III 256.

we lack an analysis of blue comparable to the analysis we have of green (sc. into yellow and blue).[34]

In this passage from the *Meditations*, moreover, Leibniz claims that colours and sounds (understood as conscious representations) are themselves ultimately to be understood as conscious results of subconscious perceptions of shapes and motions. The claim, in other words, is that if the colour blue does not admit of being analysed into more basic colours, its resolution into more basic parts would yield an analysis composed of representations of shapes and motions. Here, however, it is worth remembering that for Leibniz matter is not merely infinitely divisible, but infinitely divided, from which it follows that the appearance of shapes and motions itself admits of resolution into smaller shapes and their motions, and so on, ad infinitum.[35] It might well be the case, then, that for Leibniz a created mind cannot bring to completion that analysis which begins with the *quale* green.

For purposes of exposition, however, let us suppose that, according to Leibniz, this same analysis could actually be brought to completion in three steps. Let us now return to the diagram. Let *A* represent the *quale* green. *A* then counts as a clear but confused cognition of some object *x*. Underlying this clear but confused cognition, there will be an unconscious perception, represented by *B*, which, if brought to consciousness, would constitute a clear and distinct cognition of *x*. This clear and distinct cognition is itself composed of two clear but confused cognitions – namely, the *qualia* yellow and blue, each of which is represented by one of the two segments that make up *B*. Underlying the *quale* yellow, according to Leibniz, there will be further subconscious perceptions, represented in our diagram by the two segments situated directly beneath the segment that represents the *quale* yellow. Likewise, underlying the *quale* blue, there will be two subconscious perceptions, represented by the two segments situated directly beneath the segment representing the *quale* blue. If brought to consciousness, these four

[34]Ibid. Note that blue, understood, not as a *quale*, but as that object of which the *quale* blue serves as a clear but confused cognition, forms only one part of that object of which the *quale* green is a clear but confused cognition.

[35]Cf. Samuel Levey, 'Leibniz on Precise Shapes and the Corporeal World', in *Leibniz: Nature and Freedom*, edited by Donald Rutherford and J. A. Cover (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 69–94. What Levey calls the Leibnizian imagination's ability to 'plaster over' the 'fine structure' of objects (80) turns out, on my reading of Leibniz, simply to be a consequence of the mind's inability to represent all the various parts of a body distinctly (i.e. severally). In other words, according to Leibniz, the appearance of continuity is a product of confusion, which is gradually reduced during the course of analysis. Of course, the same is not true of space, according to Leibniz. At no point does a closer and closer scrutiny of some portion of space reveal it to be composed of discrete spaces. This difference between extension, understood as an attribute of bodies, and space is presumably part of the reason why Leibniz, in his later years, refers to the former as a well-founded phenomenon, but refers to the latter as ideal – on which, see Glenn Hartz and Jan A. Cover, 'Space and Time in the Leibnizian Metaphysics', *Noûs*, 22 (1988) No. 4: 493–519.

perceptions – i.e. the ones represented by the four segments that make up *C* – would together constitute a clear and more distinct cognition of *x*, and would (perhaps) together take the form of a conscious representation of shapes and motions. However, this clear and more distinct consciousness of *x* would still be inadequate, since the analysis of *x* can be carried further – until, that is, the perception represented by *D* is brought to consciousness.

This, then, seems to be the import of Leibniz's classification of cognitions into such as are clear but confused, such as are clear, distinct, but inadequate, etc. It is worth noting, incidentally, that *D* in our diagram can be taken to represent a cognition that makes up the entire content of consciousness for some monad at a given time. Such a monad would have to count as a soul, on Leibniz's scheme, since its entire conscious state possesses a certain degree of distinctness. By contrast, *A* might be interpreted as representing the entire content of consciousness possessed by what Leibniz calls a 'bare monad', or the entire content of consciousness possessed by a higher monad during a deep, dreamless sleep. This apperception, being utterly confused, constitutes a 'state of consciousness' only in a very attenuated sense, since nothing 'stands out', as it were, within it.[36] The suggestion, in other words, is that for Leibniz unconsciousness is in fact a limiting case of consciousness. Note, incidentally, that this would allow us to see how bare monads differ from each other, according to Leibniz, even if we grant something that Montgomery Furth sought to establish forty years ago – namely, that different monads, according to Leibniz, can differ from each other only with respect to their conscious perceptions and, moreover, *must* differ in this way in order to satisfy the principle of the identity of indiscernibles.[37] There is no need to suppose that the utterly confused and qualitatively undifferentiated consciousness of one bare monad is precisely like that of another. One might just as well suppose that green is precisely like orange.[38]

[36] That is why death can only be a sleep, and not a lasting one at that: the perceptions merely cease to be sufficiently distinct; in animals [perceptions] are reduced to a state of confusion which puts awareness [*apperception*] into abeyance but which cannot last forever.

(NE 55*)

I have shown above that we always have an infinity of minute perceptions without being aware of them [*sans nous en appercevoir*]. We are never without perceptions, but necessarily we are often without awareness [*apperceptions*], namely when none of our perceptions stand out [*lors qu'il n'y a point de perceptions distinguées*].

(NE 161–2*)

[37] Montgomery Furth, 'Monadology', *The Philosophical Review*, 76 (1967) No. 2: 169–200.

[38] I take it that when Leibniz denies apperception to brutes (non-rational animals), as he does (it seems) in the *Principles of Nature and Grace*, §4, he is using the term 'apperception' in a sense different from that in which he uses it in the *New Essays* – i.e. as a synonym for 'reflection', reflection being something which Leibniz denies to brutes even in the *New Essays* (see, for example, NE 173). On my view, in other words, Leibniz does not think that consciousness invariably involves a higher-order thought, as some commentators have claimed (see, for

V. A QUALIFICATION

At this point, however, it is important to note that Leibniz's view that ideas are objects of thought or perception is not as straightforward as it might initially appear, for Leibniz frequently denies that, from the fact that we think of something, we can infer that we have an idea of that thing. Indeed, this denial is an important feature of his critique of Descartes' arguments for the existence of God, which critique is to be found articulated in the following passage from a letter of 22 June 1679 to Malebranche, as well as in many other places:

> I believe the fact that you approve in M. Descartes what I am unable to appreciate results from our not understanding each other well. I consider it certain that the proofs which he produces for the existence of God are imperfect as long as he does not prove that we have an idea of God or the greatest of all beings. You may reply that, if we did not, we could not reason about him. But one can also reason about the greatest of all numbers, which nevertheless implies a contradiction, as does the greatest of all velocities.[39]

When criticizing Descartes' proofs, Leibniz typically claims (as he does in this passage) that, in order for the proofs to go through, one must first show that we do in fact have an idea of God, which is equated with showing that the simple ideas which enter into the putative idea of God are mutually consistent.[40] In other words, informing Leibniz's critique of the Cartesian arguments for the existence of God is the view that an idea which involves a

example, Rocco Gennaro, 'Leibniz on Consciousness and Self-consciousness', in *New Essays on the Rationalists*, edited by Rocco Gennaro and Charles Huenemann (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 353–71). According to Leibniz, rather, there is a kind of consciousness, found in non-rational animals, that depends entirely on the distinctness of perceptions, and in no way on reflection.

[39] A II i 725. The quotation is a modified version of Loemker's translation (L 211), which reads, in lieu of 'the greatest of all numbers, which nevertheless implies a contradiction', 'the greatest of all numbers, an idea which nevertheless implies a contradiction'. In the French original, the word '*idée*' does not appear, and so Loemker's translation obscures one of the basic points that Leibniz is concerned to make in this passage – namely, that an idea which contains a contradiction is not, strictly speaking, an idea at all. Leibniz offers the same critique of Descartes' argument in his *Meditations on Cognition, Truth and Ideas* (A VI iv 588–9/AG 25–6/L 292–3), in §23 of his *Discourse on Metaphysics* (A VI iv 1566–7/AG 56/L 318), in his *Critical Thoughts on the General Part of the* Principles *of Descartes*, part 1, art. 18 (G IV 359–60/L 386–7), and at NE 437–8.

[40] M. Descartes's other argument, which undertakes to prove the existence of God on the grounds that the idea of him is in our souls and that it must have come from that of which it is an idea, is even less conclusive. For, firstly, this argument shares with the preceding one [i.e. Descartes' version of the ontological argument] the defect of assuming that there is such an idea in us, i.e. that God is possible.

(NE 438*)

contradiction is not, strictly speaking, an idea at all. Thus, although every cognition of x results from the perception of several simple ideas, these simple ideas themselves can together be said to form the idea of x only if they are mutually consistent.

Leibniz makes much the same general point – namely, that from the fact that we can think about an object x it does not follow that we have an idea of x – in §25 of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* (entitled 'In What Case Our Knowledge [*connoissance*] is Joined to the Contemplation of the Idea'), the section which immediately follows the one in which he offers the classification of *connoissances* into clear and confused, clear and distinct, etc:

> *Now, it is evident that we have no idea of a notion when it is impossible*. And in the case where knowledge [*connoissance*] is only *suppositive*, even when we have the idea, we do not contemplate it, for such a notion is only known in the way in which we know notions involving a hidden impossibility; and if a notion is possible, we do not learn its possibility in this way. For example, when I think of a thousand or of a chiliagon, I often do this without contemplating the idea – as when I say that a thousand is ten times a hundred without bothering to think of what 10 and 100 are because I *suppose* I know it and do not believe I need to stop now and conceive it. Thus, it could happen, as in fact it often happens, that I am mistaken with respect to a notion I suppose or believe that I understand, although in fact the notion is impossible, or at least incompatible with those to which I join it. And whether I am mistaken or not, this suppositive way of conceiving remains the same. Therefore, it is only when our knowledge is *clear* in the case of confused notions, or when it is *intuitive* in the case of distinct ones, that we see the entire idea [*que nous en voyons l'idée entiere*].[41]

The final sentence of this passage implies that it is only when we have either a clear but confused cognition of x, or an intuitive and adequate cognition of x, that we can be sure of having an idea of x. (In other words, only in these two cases can we be sure that all the simple ideas which enter into the putative idea of x are mutually consistent.) The claim that an intuitive and adequate cognition of x is the only kind of distinct cognition of x which can serve to assure us that x is possible, and that we therefore have an idea of x, is also to be found in the *Meditations*.[42] In this short essay, moreover, Leibniz explains that, if one insists on speaking of 'false ideas', sense can be made of the expression by taking false ideas to be such as involve a contradiction.[43] Note that in this sense, however, a false idea is not, strictly

[41]A VI iv 1569–70/ AG 57–8/L 319 (my emphasis). The translation is from AG, except that I have modified the final sentence.
[42]A VI iv 588/AG 25/L 292.
[43]A VI iv 589/AG 26/L 293. Leibniz makes the same point at NE 269 and in §23 of the *Discourse*.

speaking, an idea at all (just as an invalid deduction is not, strictly speaking, a deduction).

When Leibniz claims that some cognitions of x do not involve a 'contemplation' of the idea of x, or do not involve our 'seeing' the 'entire idea' of x, the underlying issue is essentially one of individuation, as the expression 'entire idea' might suggest. According to Leibniz, although every kind of cognition results from the contemplation of one or more ideas, not every cognition of x results from a contemplation of the idea of x, even if this idea is free from contradiction and therefore counts as an idea in the strict sense (i.e. the sense according to which an idea that contains a contradiction is not an idea at all). Rather, a cognition of x may result from distinct, simultaneous perceptions of different ideas which together form the more complex idea of x. Again, according to Leibniz, a perception or 'contemplation' of the entire idea of x is involved only (i) in clear and confused cognitions of x and (ii) in intuitive and adequate cognitions of x. Let me first explain why a clear and confused cognition of x involves a contemplation of the entire idea of x, according to Leibniz, whereas clear and distinct cognitions other than intuitive ones do not.

Recall again the passage from the *Meditations* in which Leibniz speaks of the *quale* green as a conscious result of two subconscious perceptions – the perception of yellow and the perception of blue. Here it seems fairly clear that, for Leibniz, when the *quale* green occurs in the mind, the simple ideas that make up the intra-mental object of this *quale* together cause, or concur in the production of, this *quale*. It seems no less clear, however, that when the *qualia* yellow and blue co-occur in the mind, the simple ideas thereby represented do *not* together cause these two *qualia*. Rather, only *some* of these simple ideas jointly concur in the production of the *quale* yellow, while the remaining simple ideas together concur in the production of the *quale* blue. Thus, when the simple ideas that together form the idea of x concur in the production of a simple consciousness or cognition of the idea of x, this necessarily involves what Leibniz calls 'contemplating the idea of x', or 'seeing the *entire* idea of x'. By contrast, when the *qualia* yellow and blue co-occur in the mind, one does not see the *entire* idea of x; rather, one sees or contemplates *two* complex ideas which together form the more complex idea of x. This is why Leibniz holds that a clear but confused cognition of x involves the contemplation of the *entire* idea of x, but a clear and distinct cognition of x does not. At bottom, the issue is one of individuation.

It is for this reason that Leibniz denies that a clear and distinct, but inadequate, cognition of x implies that x is possible: in the absence of an intuitive and adequate cognition, it is only when the simple ideas that together constitute the idea of x concur in the production of a *simple* consciousness of x that one can be sure that the simple constituent ideas are mutually consistent. In other words, in the absence of an intuitive and adequate cognition, a set of simple ideas can be *known* to be free from

contradiction only when these simple ideas together cause, or give rise to, a simple consciousness of the complex idea which they together constitute. For if several ideas jointly give rise to some individual effect, clearly they're compossible and are thereby *known* to be compossible. Accordingly, in the absence of an adequate and intuitive cognition, when only half of the simple ideas that form the idea of x concur in the production of a simple consciousness of something, and, at the same time, the other half concur in the production of a simple consciousness of something else (in which case, the two simple consciousnesses might together form a clear and distinct, but inadequate, cognition of x), this provides no such assurance that all the simple ideas which together form the complex idea of x are mutually consistent; that is, when the *qualia* yellow and blue co-occur in the mind, one cannot rule out the possibility that one of the simple ideas that concur in the production of the *quale* yellow is inconsistent with one of the simple ideas that concur in the production of the *quale* blue.

In the case of an intuitive and adequate cognition of x, on the other hand, a contemplation of the idea of x is involved, according to Leibniz, because all the simple ideas that enter into the idea of x are there *individually* and *simultaneously* apperceived, in which case the mutual consistency of these ideas is manifest to the intellect. For this reason, Leibniz states in the *New Essays* that 'definitions can be said to involve intuitive knowledge in cases where their possibility is straight away apparent'.[44] A little later in the same chapter, moreover, Leibniz also states that, normally, 'when ideas are thoroughly understood, their agreements and disagreements are apparent'.[45] On the other hand, where the idea of x can only be *suppositively* cognized by the human mind because it is composed of a very great number of simple ideas, although we have intuitive cognitions of every single simple idea that enters into the idea of x (since a suppositive cognition is an adequate one), not all of these cognitions can be present to consciousness at one and the same time. (Instead, at any one time, a symbol – which signifies only conventionally or arbitrarily – must be made to go proxy for several intuitive cognitions of at least some of these simple ideas.) As a result, some inconsistency might easily go undetected. Thus, immediately after stating that, ordinarily, when ideas are 'thoroughly understood, their agreements and disagreements are apparent', Leibniz adds the following caveat: 'Yet I admit that some of them are *so composite* that great care is needed to bring out what is concealed in them, and consequently

[44]NE 367*. See also *De synthesi et analysi universali seu arte inveniendi judicandi*:

> those real definitions are most perfect which resolve the thing into simple primitive notions understood in themselves. Such knowledge I usually call adequate or intuitive, for, if there were any inconsistency, it would appear here [i.e. in the intuitive cognition] at once.
>
> (A VI iv 543/L 231*)

[45]NE 375*.

certain agreements and disagreements may remain obscure.'[46] The underlying issue here is, again, one of individuation: if x can only be suppositively cognized, one cannot have simultaneous intuitive cognitions of *all* the simple ideas that enter into the idea of x.

VI. WILSON'S PROBLEM

In the light of the foregoing, it should be clear that when Leibniz claims, as he often does, that blue and yellow are 'ingredients' of green, or that a confused cognition is 'composed' of perceptions of which we are not aware, he should not be understood literally or strictly, as meaning (say) that the *qualia* yellow and blue are actually *parts* of the *quale* green. For the *quale* green, as he notes in the *Meditations*, is 'some new thing' over and above the *qualia* yellow and blue; that is, it is the conscious result of a subconscious perception of these two *qualia*.

The '*petites perceptions*' of which a confused cognition is sometimes said to be composed, then, are not literally ingredients of the confused cognition, according to Leibniz. Rather, when my consciousness of a complex object x is simple or qualitatively undifferentiated (and therefore clear and confused), there is a complex *sub*conscious perception of x that underlies my simple consciousness of x, my simple consciousness of x being a natural sign of this more complex subconscious perception which underlies it (in addition to being a natural sign of the idea of x). For example, the subconscious complex perception which consists in the *qualia* yellow and blue is said by Leibniz (in the *Meditations on Cognition, Truth and Ideas*) to underlie that conscious representation of the object which consists merely in the *quale* green – which is a natural sign of the more complex perception composed of the *qualia* yellow and blue. However, since the *qualia* yellow and blue are each simple, conscious representations of complex things, underlying each of them will be another complex subconscious perception, and so on, until finally one arrives at a perception of the object which distinctly represents each of its simple parts. Indeed, it is with all this in mind, I think, that we should understand Leibniz's claim in the *New Essays* that 'there is a kind of redundancy in our perceptions of sensible qualities ... it consists in the fact that we have more than one notion of a single subject'.[47]

Another important point to note in the light of the foregoing is this: since Leibniz holds that extension, shape and motion are *phenomena* – i.e. thoughts, in the broad sense of 'thought' according to which both imagistic

[46]Ibid. (my emphasis).
[47]NE 299*.

and non-imagistic representations count as thoughts[48] – the relation that obtains between (say) the shapes and motions of fire particles and the sensation of heat that such particles produce in us is not, for Leibniz, a relation that obtains between extra-mental physical entities and mental representations, as it is for the typical mechanical philosopher. It is, instead, a relation that obtains between different perceptions of one and the same thing; according to Leibniz, in other words, the relation is *intra-mental*.[49] This is why Leibniz can speak of reducing colours and such to primary qualities, notwithstanding his claim that space is ideal and reality composed exclusively of monads and their states (and perhaps also substantially unified, infinitely large collections of monads): extension, shape and motion are simply mental representations that represent extra-mental realities more distinctly than sensations of heat, redness, etc., do – though extension, shape and motion are mental representations that still contain a significant degree of confusion.

Having covered these points, let us now return to the problem that Wilson sees in Leibniz, the problem having to do with the question of what can and cannot be known about sensible qualities. Recall that, according to Wilson, Leibniz sometimes says that we can acquire distinct ideas of sensible qualities, the acquisition of such ideas being contingent on scientific developments (in the field of optics, say). Wilson thinks that Leibniz sometimes also claims that our ideas of sensible qualities must remain confused. As she reads the situation, Leibniz's inconsistency here is to be explained by appeal to an ambivalence on his part regarding the nature of sensible qualities. When he claims that we can acquire distinct ideas of sensible qualities, he is conceiving of sensible qualities as properties of physical objects. Developments in physics, on this conception of what sensible qualities are, might lead us to an understanding of such qualities, an understanding, specifically, that will allow us to enumerate marks which distinguish (say) red from other colours (and indeed from all other things). When, on the other hand, Leibniz says that our idea of a sensible quality must remain confused, according to Wilson, he is conceiving of sensible qualities as sensations; for since we can

[48]See G II 70/LA 70, which is a draft of a letter sent to Arnauld. Here, Leibniz says that 'phenomena are only thoughts'.

[49]This partly explains why, early in the *New Essays*, Leibniz has Theophile say:

> I believe indeed that all the actions and thoughts of our soul come from its own depths and could not be given to it by the senses. But in the meantime I shall set aside the inquiry into that, and shall conform to accepted ways of speaking, since they are indeed sound and justifiable, and the outer senses can be said to be, in a certain sense, partial causes of our thoughts. I shall thus work within the common framework, speaking of the actions of the body on the soul, in the way that Copernicans quite justifiably join other men in talking about the movement of the sun; and I shall look into why, even within this framework, one should in my opinion say that there are ideas and principles which do not reach us through the senses, and which we find within ourselves without having formed them, though the senses bring them to awareness.
>
> (NE 74*)

never discern the 'ingredients' out of which our sensation of red is 'composed', our idea of red can never become distinct.

In the light of the conclusions drawn in earlier parts of this paper, however, Wilson's account seems (at least somewhat) off the mark. For one thing, according to Leibniz, ideas are not, as Wilson claims they are,[50] related to perceptions in a manner analogous to that in which concepts are related to intuitions for Kant. What is more, as we have seen, ideas do not admit of various degrees of confusion or distinctness, according to Leibniz.

What, then, of Leibniz's supposed ambivalence regarding the nature of sensible qualities? As I hinted at the outset of this paper, Leibniz does not really vacillate in his conception of what a sensible quality is, although he does often use names of sensible qualities equivocally, to refer both to a sign and to something signified by that sign. Thus, he sometimes uses the term 'heat' to refer to the sensation of heat, although at other times he uses this term to refer to the complex of primary qualities that is, according to most mechanists, the extra-mental cause of our sensation of heat. The following passage makes this quite clear:

> Confused attributes are those which are indeed composite in themselves or by intellectual principles but are simple to the senses and whose definition therefore cannot be explained. These attributes can be imparted not by description but only by pointing them out to the senses. Imagine a land where men do not know the sun and fire and have blood which is cold, not warm; surely they cannot be made to understand what heat is merely by describing it, for even if someone were to explain to them the innermost secrets of nature and even interpret perfectly the cause of heat, they would still not recognize heat from this description if it were presented to them, for they could not know that this peculiar sensation which they perceived in their minds is excited by this particular motion, since we cannot notice distinctly what arises in our mind and what in our organs. But if someone kindled a fire near them, only then would they learn what heat is. Similarly a man born blind could learn the whole of optics yet not acquire any idea of light.[51]

In the first sentence of this passage, Leibniz states that heat is simple only with respect to the senses, suggesting that heat is not to be identified with the sensation of heat (which *is* simple), but with the complex of primary qualities that ostensibly gives rise to this sensation. On the other hand, in the remainder of the passage, Leibniz implies that by 'heat' he means the sensation of heat when he states that a cold-blooded man who lives in a cool, sunless country will come to know what heat is only by experiencing it. To maintain, however, that this reflects a genuine ambivalence on Leibniz's part regarding the nature of sensible qualities seems wrong-headed. Prima facie more plausible is the claim that Leibniz is simply equivocating here in

[50]Wilson, 123.
[51]A VI iv 2002–3/L 285* (slightly modified).

his use of the term 'heat'. Such a tendency to equivocate would, moreover, explain why Leibniz sometimes uses the term 'rainbow' to refer to the appearance of coloured bands in the sky,[52] even though he elsewhere uses the same term to refer to the aggregate of drops that is (ostensibly) the 'external' cause of this appearance.[53]

Wilson's problem, however, does admit of being recast in terms of the account developed here; for Leibniz seems to vacillate on the question of whether we can have clear and distinct cognitions of sensible qualities. As we have seen, Leibniz frequently claims that green is a 'mixture' of yellow and blue, or that yellow and blue are 'ingredients' of green, and this, I have said, amounts to the claim that the cognition composed of the *qualia* yellow and blue is a clear and distinct cognition of green – i.e. a clear and distinct cognition of that very item of which the *quale* green is a clear and confused cognition. (Indeed, in a letter to Thomas Burnett, just after noting that 'green is a mixture of yellow and blue', Leibniz claims that the 'notion we have of green ... is not only clear, but also distinct' precisely because we have this analysis of it into yellow and blue.[54]) The problem, however, is that in other texts he explicitly states that green, and other such sensible qualities, do not admit of being nominally defined,[55] and, as commentators have generally recognized, Leibniz equates a nominal definition with a clear and distinct (though inadequate) cognition. It seems, then, that in some texts Leibniz states or implies that we have a clear and distinct cognition of green, though in others he implies precisely the opposite.

This version of Wilson's problem admits of a solution, however, once we recall that, according to Leibniz, a nominal definition (or a clear and distinct cognition) must enable its possessor to recognize the object defined whenever that object is clearly cognized.[56] Thus, for someone who cannot see *how* green arises from yellow and blue, the cognition composed of the *qualia* yellow and blue does not count as a nominal definition of green.[57] Therefore, when Leibniz says that green does not admit of being nominally defined, he is not claiming that we cannot discover and conceive to ourselves these underlying causes of the *quale* green. Rather, he is saying that since the relation between a sensible quality and its underlying causes is unintelligible to us, a cognition of yellow and blue (say) will not enable a person who has never experienced green to say 'this is green' when finally he experiences it.

[52]See, for example, G II 58/LA 58, where Leibniz implies that a distinction is to be drawn between phenomena and aggregates and then classifies the rainbow as a phenomenon. Consider also: A VI iv 159; G II 473.
[53]See, for example, A VI iv 555/Gr 322.
[54]G III 256.
[55]See, for example, NE 298–7; C 432/MP 4; A VI iv 539–40/G VII 293/L 230; G VI 500/AG 187.
[56]Recall that a clear and distinct cognition is a species of clear cognition, and that a clear cognition (as opposed to an obscure one) must, according to Leibniz, enable its possessor to recognize the object when it is presented to her.
[57]See G VI 492–3.

Much the same goes for heat, according to Leibniz, as the passage above about cold-blooded men makes clear. For in this passage Leibniz says that even if one were to explain the cause of heat to cold-blooded men, 'they would still not recognize heat from this description if it were presented to them'.

According to Leibniz, then, the cognition composed of the *qualia* yellow and blue counts as a clear and distinct cognition of green only for a being (e.g. an angel) to whom the relation between green, on the one hand, and yellow and blue, on the other, is intelligible. Thus, when Leibniz says to Thomas Burnett that the notion we have of green is clear and distinct because we have an analysis of it into yellow and blue, he is perhaps to be judged guilty merely of overstatement: *we*, for whom the relation between green, on the one hand, and blue and yellow, on the other, is not intelligible, cannot truly be said to have a clear and distinct cognition of green. But even this element of overstatement is understandable enough when we consider the context in which Leibniz makes this remark to Burnett: Leibniz's concern is simply to explain that a cognition can be clear and distinct without being adequate, and the example of green's resolution into yellow and blue provides a handy, if not altogether accurate, illustration of this point (for the cognition composed of yellow and blue is still to some degree confused, since yellow and blue in turn admit of being resolved into certain 'ingredients').

One might, however, object at this point by noting that, according to the account developed in the first four sections of this paper, the relation that obtains between a cognition and its underlying subconscious perceptions is, according to Leibniz, a relation of natural signification – i.e. an *intelligible* relation. How, then, can the unintelligibility of the relation obtaining between green, on the one hand, and blue and yellow, on the other, be appealed to here in order to explain Leibniz's claim that sensible qualities such as green do not admit of being nominally defined?

The answer to this objection is simply this: although Leibniz thinks that the relation between a cognition and its underlying subconscious perceptions is intelligible, he does not think that it is always intelligible to human beings. This is made explicit in the *Praefatio ad Libellum Elementorum Physicae*, a work in which it also becomes clear that for Leibniz analysis just *is* that process by which increasingly complex perceptions of one and the same object are successively brought to consciousness. This conception of analysis, taken together with Leibniz's view that some relations of natural signification are intelligible to human beings, while others are not, leads him to draw a distinction between two kinds of analysis or resolution – intellectual and experimental.

In the *Praefatio*, Leibniz explains at one point that in 'intellectual resolution or in definition, one understands that which is described when the ingredients of the description are understood'.[58] He also explains that

[58]A VI iv 2006/L 287*.

corporeal attributes which admit of intellectual resolution or analysis are to be termed 'distinct attributes', with which he contrasts 'confused attributes', confused attributes not admitting of intellectual analysis. Moreover, notwithstanding Leibniz's view that confused attributes do not admit of intellectual resolution, in the same work he explains that a *kind* of resolution or analysis is possible even in the case of such attributes. As he puts it:

> there sometimes also arises a kind of resolution of confused attributes, which I call experimental, in order to distinguish it from intellectual resolution [*oritur nonnumquam et resolutio quaedam attributi confusi, quam voco experimentalem, ut ab intellectuali distinguatur*]. For example, the color green arises from a mixture of yellow and blue, no change taking place in the colored object but only in the eye. Furthermore, the separate ingredients can sometimes be distinguished with a microscope, each with its own color, yellow or blue. We cannot yet say with any certainty, however, that blue and yellow are prior to or simpler than green, for we do not understand, but merely experience, that green arises out of yellow and blue. Therefore, neither could we have foreseen it.[59]

Leibniz's distinction here between experimental and intellectual resolution (or analysis) is motivated by his recognition of the fact that it is possible to know (in some loose sense of 'know') *that* these items here are the underlying causes of some simple appearance in the mind, but without understanding *how* these same items give rise to this simple appearance ('we do not understand, but merely experience,' he says, 'that green arises out of yellow and blue'). At issue in the distinction between (i) experimental resolution and (ii) intellectual resolution, then, is the intelligibility, for humans, of the relation that obtains between different perceptions of one and the same idea. In the case of experimental resolution or analysis, the relation obtaining between (a) a clear but confused cognition and (b) the subconscious perceptions underlying it is not intelligible to the human mind, even though it is in fact intelligible *simpliciter*, or in principle, since the relation is one of natural signification. (For this reason, in the *Praefatio*, Leibniz says that since 'everything confused is by its nature resolvable into the distinct, *even though it may not always be in our power to do this*, it follows that all qualities and mutations of bodies can, according to their nature, at length be reduced to certain distinct concepts'.[60]) On the other hand, in the case of intellectual resolution, the relation between a clear but confused cognition and its underlying subconscious perceptions is intelligible, not only in itself, but also to the human mind.

[59]A VI iv 2005–6/L 287. The translation is Loemker's, except that I have altered the first sentence, which, in Loemker's translation, reads: 'there sometimes occurs another kind of resolution of confused attributes, which I call experimental to distinguish it from intellectual resolution'.

[60]A VI iv 2006–7/L 287* (my emphasis).

In the *Praefatio*, moreover, Leibniz offers the following by way of an explanation of what experimental resolution or analysis involves:

> To investigate the causes of confused attributes, however, and to obtain their resolution or an analysis of them, we must relate them to other attributes as well as to the subjects which contain them. Subjects themselves can be known only through attributes. So the bringing-together of an attribute with a subject is nothing more than the bringing-together of the attribute with an aggregate of others which concur in the same subject. Thus a confused attribute can be related either to other confused attributes or to distinct attributes. The relating of an attribute to others, however, consists in making apparent their concurrence in the same subject, their connection with each other, their compatibility, and on the other hand, how one can be changed into another or can be produced out of several others.[61]

(Immediately following this passage comes the text quoted earlier, in which Leibniz introduces us to the distinction between experimental and intellectual resolution.) Now, although one might wish that he had been a little more explicit here, it seems clear that for Leibniz experimental resolution involves the establishing of certain regular correlations between a body's various properties and activities under different conditions. The aim, in other words, is to establish, so to speak, *that* this attribute here has a regular connection with these other ones, even though its connection to these other ones is not intelligible.

Worth noting, too, is that although the expression 'experimental resolution' appears nowhere in the *New Essays*, the notion that the relation obtaining between two qualitatively different perceptions of one and the same object is not always intelligible to us can be found in this work as well. Consider, for example, the following passage:

> Since they [sc. colours] are simple only in appearance, they are accompanied by circumstances that are connected with them, *although the connection is not one that we understand*; and these accompanying circumstances provide something that can be explained and subjected to analysis, which gives some hope that eventually we shall be able to discover the reasons for these phenomena. So there is a kind of redundancy in our perceptions of sensible qualities as well as of sensible portions of matter: it consists in the fact that we have more than one notion of a single subject.[62]

Note, first of all, Leibniz's claim that 'there is a kind of redundancy in our perceptions of sensible qualities'. This amounts to the claim, familiar to us by now, that, underlying our consciousness of some colour, there is a subconscious perception of other, more basic colours, or a subconscious

[61]A VI iv 2005–6/L 287*.

[62]NE 299 (my emphasis). The translation is that of Bennett and Remnant, though slightly modified.

perception of shapes and motions. Second, take note of Leibniz's claim that 'there are other things going on which are connected to' colours, 'although the connection is not one that we understand'. This, it seems, is none other than a more general version of Leibniz's claim, in the *Praefatio ad Libellum Elementorum Physicae*, that 'we do not understand, but merely experience, that green arises out of yellow and blue'.

Leibniz, then, never rules out the possibility of our discovering the causes of *qualia* such as green and heat. His claim that we cannot nominally define sensible qualities is motivated, rather, by the view that the relation obtaining between (a) certain clear and confused cognitions and (b) the subconscious perceptions that underlie them is not intelligible for human beings, at least in this life. Only in this way, it seems, can we explain why, in one of the passages in which he explicitly denies that we can have nominal definitions of sensible qualities, Leibniz nonetheless remarks that 'we know what kind of refraction produces blue and yellow, and that the mixing of these two colors produces green'.[63]

VII. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have argued that Wilson, along with many other interpreters of Leibniz, is mistaken in her opinion that perceptions are related to ideas for Leibniz in a manner analogous to that in which intuitions are related to concepts for Kant. Leibniz's distinction between ideas and perceptions is not a distinction between discursive, abstract representations, on the one hand, and imagistic representations, on the other. Rather, Leibnizian ideas are innate and abiding *objects* of perception, cognition or thought. Moreover, I have also argued that, although Leibniz seems to say inconsistent things when it comes to the question of what can or cannot be known about sensible qualities, these apparent inconsistencies are easily resolved when we keep in mind, first, Leibniz's conception of analysis as that process by which increasingly complex representations of one and the same object are successively brought to consciousness and, second, his distinction between two kinds of analysis, experimental and intellectual, which is motivated by the view that in some cases the relation between a cognition and its underlying subconscious perceptions is intelligible to human beings, while in other cases it is not.[64]

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[63]G VI 500/AG 187*.

[64]Papers containing much of the material presented here were read at the New England Colloquium in Early Modern Philosophy (2005) and at a Philosophy Department colloquium at the University of Missouri-Columbia (2005). I would like to thank the members of both audiences for their helpful comments and criticisms. I would also like to give special thanks to both James Ross and Karen Detlefsen for their considerable help and feedback during the drafting of these earlier papers.