

Leibniz's Causal Road to Existential Independence

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Abstract: Leibniz thinks that every created substance is causally active, and yet causally independent of every other: none can cause changes in any but itself. This is not controversial. But Leibniz also thinks that every created substance is *existentially* independent of every other: it is metaphysically possible for any to exist with or without any other. This *is* controversial. I argue that, given a mainstream reading of Leibniz's essentialism, if one accepts the former, uncontroversial interpretation concerning causal independence, then one ought also to accept the latter, controversial one concerning existential independence. This is a new way to defend the 'existential independence' interpretation. Moreover, this defense provides a new approach for defending the broadly 'non-logical' interpretive camp in the longstanding debate over Leibniz's views on impossibility, against perhaps the strongest objection leveled by advocates of the opposing broadly 'logical' interpretation.

Introduction

Leibniz thinks that every created substance is causally active, and yet causally independent of every other: none can cause changes in any but itself. This is not a controversial interpretation. But Leibniz also thinks that every created substance is *existentially* independent of every other: it is metaphysically possible for any to exist with or without any other. This *is* a controversial interpretation.¹ In the present paper I argue that if one accepts the former, uncontroversial interpretation, then one ought also to accept the latter, controversial one. This is a new way to defend the existential independence interpretation. Further, in doing so I also provide a new way to defend the broadly non-logical interpretation of Leibniz's views on impossibility against perhaps the strongest objection leveled by advocates of the broadly logical interpretation.

In §1, I frame the general contours of the debate over what Leibniz means when he says that some possible substances are mutually 'impossible', and I show how this debate

¹ Cover and Hawthorne (1999) offer the most prominent defense of this interpretation, but see also McDonough 2010, Jauernig 2010, Jorati 2016 and Harmer 2018. Among those who reject this interpretation are Hintikka 1972, D'Agostino 1976, Rescher 1979, Mates 1986, Wilson 1993, and Lærke 2016.

turns in part on whether or not Leibniz accepts existential independence. I then set out a key objection leveled by one side of the debate, according to which the group of texts thought most to support the existential independence reading—the ‘World Apart’ texts—turns out to support *not* existential independence, but rather only causal independence. In §2, I briefly lay out three of Leibniz’s central views on causation, and then I present my central argument in §3: given his views on causation and essentialism—even granting the weaker, causal reading of the World Apart texts—Leibniz is committed to existential independence. Finally, in §4, I argue against a recent interpretation according to which Leibniz can distinguish between two different strengths of existential independence, which might render an existential independence reading consistent with the logical interpretation of impossibility. Importantly, my overall argument for existential independence, and by extension against the logical interpretation, does not proceed only on direct textual grounds which, as I suggest below, can more easily be resisted. Rather, I argue that existential independence—and the broadly non-logical interpretation of impossibility—follow from Leibniz’s broader metaphysical commitments.

§1 Impossibility and Worlds Apart

I will argue that Leibniz accepts:

Existential Independence: for any two possible created substances, the existence of the first necessitates neither the existence of the second nor the non-existence of the second.²

According to this claim it is strictly speaking metaphysically possible for any substance to exist whether or not any other exists. So, we can say that Existential Independence consists of a *no-pulling* thesis and a *no-blocking* thesis: for any two possible substances, God could create the first without creating the second—the first does not pull the second into existence—or God could create the first as well as the second—the first does not block the second from existence.³ The question whether Leibniz accepts Existential Independence

² For convenience, I will usually use the term ‘substance’ as shorthand for ‘created substance’.

³ In §§2-3, I argue that Leibniz accepts the no-pulling thesis. In §4, I argue that he also accepts the no-blocking thesis.

has important implications for how we understand his metaphysics. Case in point: we may view the status of Existential Independence as a dividing line in the impossibility debate—the debate over how to understand Leibniz’s claim that some possible substances are *impossible* with other possible substances. In claiming this, Leibniz disagrees with Spinozistic necessitarianism, according to which everything that could possibly exist *does* exist. Rather, Leibniz thinks, some possible substances do not exist, but could have. But why then does God choose to create only some possible substances? Why not *all*?⁴ Because, Leibniz says, although every possible substance is ‘possible in itself’ (A 6.4.1447/AG 21), not all are *compossible* with one another:

[Not] all possibles are...compossible. Thus, the universe is only a certain collection of compossibles, and the actual universe is the collection of all existing possibles, that is to say, those which form the richest composite. And since there are different combinations of possibilities, some of them better than others, there are many possible universes, each collection of compossibles making up one of them. (G III 572-3/L 662)

Some possible substances could not co-exist together. But what is the strength of ‘could not’ here? *Why* is it that some possible substances could not co-exist? The answer hinges, at least in large part, on whether or not Leibniz accepts Existential Independence. We can see this reflected in the two broad interpretive camps that have formed in the impossibility debate.⁵

The first camp advocates a broadly *logical approach* to interpreting impossibility, while the second defends a broadly *non-logical approach*.⁶ According to the logical camp, Leibniz denies Existential Independence. Possible substances are instead existentially *interdependent*—their individual natures are such that, for any two given possible substances, the existence of the first either logically requires or logically excludes the existence of the second.⁷ On this view, two substances are impossible in the sense that it

⁴ Harmer subdivides this into more fine-grained questions (2018: 8). But for my purposes vis-a-vis impossibility (see below), the more coarse-grained question concerning co-creation of possible substances suffices.

⁵ For recent overviews of these competing positions, see Messina and Rutherford 2009, McDonough 2010, and Brown and Chiek 2016.

⁶ Of course, the label ‘non-logical’ does not suggest *illogical*.

⁷ For defenses of the logical approach, see Hintikka 1972; D’Agostino 1976; Rescher 1979: 58, 2006: 5-6; Mates 1986: 75; and Chiek 2016. M. Wilson (1993) advances a logical interpretation but works to incorporate lawfulness. C. Wilson (2000) appears in places (1, 6,-7, 13) to take the logical interpretation as a point of

is *logically impossible* that both co-exist: a contradiction arises from the following two suppositions alone: God creates the one, and God creates the other.⁸ If the logical camp has it right, then Leibniz has a tidy explanation for impossibility: God's actions cannot lead to contradictions. But this also means that Leibniz must admit limits to which possible substances God can create, despite the fact that these are possible in themselves. Moreover, the logical approach sits less comfortably with texts—an important group of which I discuss below—in which Leibniz *seems* to accept Existential Independence.

For the broadly non-logical camp, by contrast, Leibniz accepts Existential Independence. And so, in terms of metaphysical possibility, God *could* create any possible substance with or without any other. On views of this sort, two possible substances are impossible if their coexistence would not be compatible with some prior constraint according to which, for instance, God would freely choose to create a world—for instance, a particular general law⁹ or a particular spatiotemporal order.¹⁰ But even so, no *immediate* logical contradiction would result from the suppositions that God creates the one and that God creates the other. Impossibility concerns only *hypothetical* possibility—the possibility of coexistence on the hypothesis that God creates according to a certain prior constraint. If the non-logical camp has it right, then Leibniz need not admit any limits to God's creative options with the possibles. God can mix and match them as God likes. Moreover, the non-logical approach can account for texts in which Leibniz appears to affirm Existential Independence.

But some commentators have mounted what is, in my view, the most promising assault

departure.

⁸ Chiek (2016: 109, 111, 112) offers a different account of compossibility and impossibility. On Chiek's view, as I read it, one substance is compossible with another if—and, probably, only if—the first is itself possible. And two substances are impossible only if—and, probably, only if—the first is itself impossible. But if so, then it seems that no non-actual substances are possible substances. Suppose that *s* is an actual substance, and that *s** is a possible but non-actual substance. Since *s* is actual, *s* is possible. Why doesn't *s** exist as well? Leibniz's answer: because *s** is impossible with *s*. But then, by the above account of impossibility, *s* is not a possible substance. And so *s* both is and isn't possible, which can't be right. So, either *no* possible substances are impossible—which Leibniz denies—or, I must conclude, something is amiss in Chiek's account.

⁹ For this general 'lawful' style of non-logical approach, see Cover and Hawthorne 1999, Brown 1987, and Hacking 1982. For my purposes, Griffin 2013, ch.4, and Jorati 2016 might also be classed here.

¹⁰ For this general 'spatiotemporal' or 'cosmological' style of non-logical approach, see Messina and Rutherford 2009 and McDonough 2010.

on the non-logical camp by arguing that just such a group of texts thought to comprise crucial textual support for Existential Independence—call these the ‘World Apart’ texts—in reality does *not* support Existential Independence. In these texts, Leibniz says that each substance is like a ‘world apart’, independent of everything but God.¹¹ For instance, he says in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*:

each substance is like a world apart, independent of all other things, except for God; thus all our phenomena, that is, all the things that can ever happen to us, are only consequences of our being. (Ak 6.4.1550/AG 47)

Similarly, in *A New System of Nature* he says:

in rigorously metaphysical language, we have a perfect independence relative to the influence of every other creature. ...our individual being...is perfectly well regulated by its own nature and protected from all external accidents, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. ... Since every mind is like a world apart, self-sufficient, independent of any other creature, containing infinity, and expressing the universe, it is as durable, subsistent, and absolute as the universe of creatures itself. (G IV 484-5/AG 144-5; cf. G IV 519/L 493; LDB 227, 241-3)¹²

On one prominent way of reading these texts—call it the ‘existential reading’—Leibniz claims that each substance is *in every way* independent of every other, so much so that each might as well be its own separate world, sufficient in itself, requiring no other substance (except God) in order to exist. In other words, each substance is existentially independent of every other.

But the objection is that in some or all of the World Apart texts, Leibniz’s claim is only that substances are *causally* independent of one another. Call this the ‘causal reading’ of these texts. According to Harmer, for instance, Leibniz’s point in the two passages above is just that no substance *causally* influences any other (2016: 41, 47, 49). Lærke makes the stronger claim that, for Leibniz, there is *no* ‘per se’ independence between substances; causal independence is the *only* sort of independence holding between them (2016: 132-4;

¹¹ Commentators who claim or suggest that World Apart texts constitute critical support for the non-logical interpretation include Hintikka 1981: 272; Messina and Rutherford 2009: 965-6; McDonough 2010: 138; Harmer 2016; and Lærke 2016: 132-4.

¹² World Apart texts span both middle and late periods in Leibniz’s corpus. On some interpretations— notably, Garber’s (2009)—Leibniz accepted corporeal substance in the 1680s, but accepted idealism only much later. My argument in this paper does not turn on this issue.

cf. Hintikka 1981: 272). Similarly, D’Agostino claims that the existential reading of the World Apart texts mistakes a strong logical independence for an independence with respect to causal influence (1976: 135). And while there are, in my view, at least a couple of World Apart texts for which the existential reading seems a better fit, it is fair to say that virtually every interpretation of Leibniz is difficult to square with at least some of his texts.¹³ So I will grant that members of the logical camp are within their rights to try to explain away a few difficult texts, or even to shoehorn them into a causal reading—especially if other World Apart texts (such as the ones above) slide more easily into that reading.¹⁴ For the above commentators, then, since the existential reading of the World Apart texts is undermined, the case for the non-logical approach to interpreting impossibility is weakened considerably.

My central argument in the sections that follow is that Leibniz accepts Existential Independence: in §2-3 I show that Leibniz accepts its no-pulling thesis, and in §4 I show that he accepts its no-blocking thesis. This also amounts to an attack on the logical camp, and a defense of the non-logical camp; but not by defending the existential reading of the World Apart texts. Instead I will assume, for the sake of argument, that the causal reading of those texts is correct. But my argument co-opts the causal reading: this reading will nevertheless indirectly support Existential Independence, since causal independence *leads to* Existential Independence, with the help of Leibniz’s views on causation and essentialism. Thus my strategy is to argue for Existential Independence—and by extension the broadly non-logical interpretation—on the basis of Leibniz’s other metaphysical commitments, rather than *solely* on direct textual grounds.¹⁵

¹³ For instance, LDB 337-39 and G IV 519/WF 81 are more difficult—but not impossible, though stretching may be required—to explain in only causal terms. For other commentators indicating these texts as a challenge for the logical approach, see Messina and Rutherford 2009: 965n12; Harmer 2018: 3; and Chiek 2016: 101-102 (though Chiek thinks these texts rule out only most versions of the logical approach, not his own).

¹⁴ M. Wilson (1993: 125-6) expresses a similar methodological suggestion, though concerning Leibniz on relations.

¹⁵ I am not suggesting that one *cannot* make a direct textual case for Existential Independence. I think one can. But such a case can more easily be resisted by logical advocates wielding the causal reading.

§2 Causal Activity, Independence, and Sufficiency

Leibniz consistently claims that *activity* is essential to the nature of substance. In the Preface to the *New Essays*, he writes that “substances ... cannot be conceived in their bare essence without activity, and that activity is of the essence of substance in general” (NE 65/A 6.6.65). Connecting substances’ activity to the production of their own accidents or modifications,¹⁶ Leibniz says that

because modifications vary, and whatever is the source of variations is truly active, it must therefore be said that simple substances are active or the sources of actions, and that they produce in themselves a certain series of internal variations. (C 14/MP 175; cf. G VI 598/AG 207; G III 657; G IV 509/AG 160)

In Leibniz’s view, then, every substance is genuinely *causally active*, capable of producing in itself its own changes.¹⁷ Call this thesis:

Causal Activity: every substance is capable of causing changes in itself.

Leibniz also insists that no substance genuinely causally interacts with or influences any other (G VI 607-8/AG 213-14; G IV 484-5/AG 143; LDV 319). While a merely ‘ideal’ causal dependence holds between substances (T §65-66/G VI 138-9; G VI 615/AG 219; LDB 275), “[s]trictly speaking, no created substance exerts a metaphysical action or influx on any other thing” (C 521/AG 33). For one substance to causally influence another would be for the first to change something internal or at least partly intrinsic to the second; and this change would come from the outside, from an extrinsic source (namely, another substance). In *Monadology* §7, Leibniz argues that for such a change to take place would be for the one substance to effect an addition, removal, or rearrangement of the other’s parts or accidents. But since substances—or ‘monads’, Leibniz’s later term for the ontologically basic substances—are simple, they can have no parts to be rearranged. And since, in Leibniz’s view, no substance can transfer any accident or modification to another

¹⁶ I follow Leibniz’s frequent practice of using the terms ‘accident’, ‘modification’, ‘mode’, and the like interchangeably. See, e.g., LDV 277; G VI 352; and NE 379/A 6.6.379.

¹⁷ God is involved, too, of course. Leibniz agrees with the standard scholastic view that only God creates *ex nihilo*, but that each created substance can produce effects in an already existing created substance (though on Leibniz’s view, only in itself). See T §395/G VI 350-1. For a clear discussion of Leibniz on the relation between God’s creative activity and creaturely causal activity, see McDonough 2007.

substance, any causal influence via transfer is “unintelligible”.^{18, 19} And so, every substance is *causally independent* of every other, in the sense that no change in one substance can be the effect of another substance’s causal activity. Call this thesis:

Causal Independence: for any two substances, no changes in the first depend on the second as a cause.

Leibniz argues further that, because each substance is causally active and causally independent, each is thus also *causally self-sufficient* with respect to its own changes. Continuing the passage from *Metaphysical Consequences* above, he writes:

simple substances are active or the sources of actions, and ... they produce in themselves a certain series of internal variations. And because there is no means by which one simple substance could influence another, it follows that every simple substance is spontaneous, or the one and only source of its own modifications. (C 14/MP 175)

His argument seems to go as follows. Substances undergo changes in modifications, and are the sources of at least some of their own changes. But no substance can be such a source for any substance other than itself, since substances are causally independent. Thus, every substance must be the *sole* causal source of its own changes. In other words, Causal Activity and Causal Independence imply that every substance is causally self-sufficient. Call this latter thesis:

Causal Sufficiency: every substance is by itself sufficient to be the sole (secondary) cause of all of its own changes.

An important clarification: my concern in this paper is restricted to the ‘secondary’ causal activity of substances. Leibniz insists, against occasionalists, that substances are indeed causally active; but he also agrees with concurrentists—against mere conservationists—that substances depend on God for this causal activity *as well as* for their creation and conservation. To their creaturely (or ‘secondary’) causation, God must also contribute God’s concurring (or ‘primary’) causation. But since these are not important for

¹⁸ In a range of texts Leibniz claims that causal influence is unintelligible, e.g., C 521/AG 33 and LDV 319.

¹⁹ Leibniz develops another interesting and possibly more robust argument against causal interaction—one not well understood until recently—which surfaces in a 1704 letter to his correspondent, Burchard de Volder. See Flatterly 2020.

my purposes, in what follows I set aside God's concurrence, creation, and conservation.²⁰

§3 Relations and Dependence

§3.1 Relations and Existential Dependence

Recall that I am arguing that Existential Independence is true on Leibniz's metaphysics, a claim that logical camp members deny. If they are correct—if Existential Independence is false, so that there *could* be one substance that existentially depends upon another—what conditions must be met? At least two conditions, I argue in this section: first, there must be some ontological link—an irreducible, intersubstantial *relation*—between two such substances; and second, this relation must be one without which the first substance could not exist. In the next section, §3.2, I argue that the first condition cannot be met on Leibniz's metaphysics, and thus that Existential Independence must be true. Call these two conditions, respectively:

Relations: there are two substances such that the first has an intersubstantial relation to the second.

Leibnizian Essentialism: for any substance, *s*, if *s* has *F* at time, *t*, then *s* could not exist without having *F* at *t*.

By an *intersubstantial relation* I mean a bit of being that links one substance to another. On Leibniz's mature fundamental ontology, the created world consists of simple substances ('monads') and their accidents (G II 622-24; C 14/MP 175; LDV 321).²¹ Thus, by Relations, if one substance is existentially dependent on another, the first must have an accident that is irreducibly relational in nature. By an accident's being *irreducibly* relational, I mean that the being(s) grounding the truth of a relational claim cannot boil down to purely monadic accidents of the related substances. (For convenience, I will usually drop the qualifier 'irreducible'.) One (or both) of the two substances must have an accident that in some

²⁰ Leibniz affirms concurrentism at G VI 440; A 6.4.2319-20. He denies occasionalism at G IV 483-4/AG 143 and G IV 498-500/AG 147-9. For discussion of Leibniz's views on these issues, see McDonough 2007. For discussion of these issues in the scholastic context, see Freddoso 1994.

²¹ Since Leibniz often uses the term 'accident' when discussing relations, I follow suit here. But again, he often uses 'accident', 'modification', and 'mode' interchangeably. See fn. 16.

way—whether by dual inherence, direct reference, constituency, or some other way—embraces the other substance. For Existential Independence to be false, it is not enough to say that one substance’s complete concept expresses another, unless this implies that the corresponding *substances* are themselves related. For if a substance’s complete concept were to specify something (e.g., a relation) not rooted in the substance itself, that complete concept would not be, as Leibniz thinks it is, a “perfect representation” (G II 20/LA 15-16; cf. T §52/G VI 131) of that particular substance.²²

A word about Leibnizian Essentialism: suppose that one substance has a relation to another. Does the first, in Leibniz’s view, *de re* necessarily have this relation to the second? That is, could the first exist—or could it have existed—*without* this relation? The answer depends on the strength of Leibniz’s essentialism. I will assume—in broad agreement with the sorts of interpretations given by Cover and Hawthorne, Mates, Mondadori, and others—²³that Leibniz’s essentialism is strong enough to ensure that, for any substance, if it has an accident, it has it *de re* necessarily.²⁴ And so, if one substance has a relation to another, it could not exist without this relation. This assumption is not gratuitous, since this sort of interpretation of Leibniz’s essentialism drives the logical interpretation of impossibility: on this view, each substance existentially depends on its world mates not merely because it expresses them, but because it *must* express them—it is part of its nature to do so.²⁵

Why think that Relations is a condition on the falsity of Existential Independence? That

²² Mates (1972: 340-1; cf. 1986: 75), for instance, thinks that all substances are existentially bound together because their complete concepts are “interlocked”.

²³ There are, of course, important differences between these commentators’ interpretations. On Cover and Hawthorne’s (1999, ch. 3) view (‘strong essentialism’), a substance’s complete concept specifies that this substance will have only intrinsic *non*-relational (i.e., monadic) properties, but no intersubstantial relational properties; thus no substance necessarily co-exists with any other. On Mondadori’s (1975) view (‘superessentialism’), substances’ intersubstantial relational properties *are* among its necessary properties, so every substance *does* necessarily co-exist with its world-mates. Mates (1986: 44, 76-77) largely aligns with Mondadori. Look (2011: 94) seems to align with Mondadori, too. As best I can tell, Adams accepts one of these two interpretations (1994: 13). Sleight’s (1990, ch. 4) ‘superintrinsicness’ is an important contrast. On his view, it’s not true that all of a substance’s complete concept-specified properties are necessary for that substance, since, he thinks, substances may have had different complete concepts.

²⁴ Leibnizian Essentialism is neutral between superessentialist and strong essentialist interpretations. However, by this paper’s end, readers persuaded by my overall argument will have reason to reject the superessentialist interpretation in favor of the strong essentialist one.

²⁵ For instance, see Hintikka 1981: 268 and Lærke 2016.

is, why think that one substance's existential dependence on another requires that the first has a relation to the second? Consider an example. Suppose that there are two substances, Abe and Babe, and that all of Abe's and Babe's respective accidents are monadic—that is, purely intrinsic, non-relational accidents. Could Abe be existentially *dependent* on Babe? It is hard to see how, since there seems to be no reason why it is not at least metaphysically possible for Abe to exist while Babe does not. Even if God perceives that the best possible world includes both Abe and Babe—and thus, even if God would never create any other world—still, there is nothing about Abe or Babe *themselves* that would make it metaphysically impossible for God to create one without the other.

For some commentators in the logical camp, the claim that each substance in a world existentially depends on every other in that world follows from Leibnizian Essentialism along with Leibniz's claim that each substance *expresses* every other.²⁶ But, for the reasons given above and in the paragraph below, this follows only if one substance's expression of another either is or implies an instance of an intersubstantial relation. Thus I take this sort of view to be covered by the Relations and Leibnizian Essentialism conditions above.

Consider another pair of putative substances, Cory and Dory, and stipulate that Cory is existentially dependent on Dory. If Cory exists, so must Dory. But Cory's existence would depend on Dory's only if the following two truths would be sufficient to give rise to a contradiction: "Cory exists", and "Dory does not exist". And in order for these two truths to give rise to a contradiction, some necessary accident of Cory—a relation—must in some way involve or require Dory, and do so rigidly: Cory requires *Dory*, and no other substance will do. Here is how the contradiction might arise. Suppose that Cory has a relation to Dory—for instance, Cory is the *same height as Dory*. (Other examples work, too, including asymmetrical relations.) Now suppose that God creates Cory but not Dory. From God's creating Cory—and Leibnizian Essentialism—it follows that Cory must be the same height as Dory. But since a relation exists only if all of its relata exist, and since Dory does *not* exist, it follows that Cory is *not* the same height as Dory. Contradiction. So, if God creates Cory, then since Cory must have this relation to Dory, God must create Dory as well. The point: if

²⁶ See Rescher 1981: 71-2; D'Agostino 1976: 135; cf. Mates 1972: 340-1. For Leibniz's statements about universal expression, see A 6.4.1541/AG 41; G VI 616/AG 220; cf. MP 71.

Existential Independence is false, then Relations and Leibnizian Essentialism must be true.²⁷

§3.2 Relations and Causation

In this section, however, I argue that Leibniz cannot accept the Relations condition. My aim here is neither to settle nor to directly engage interpretive disputes about Leibniz's views on relations.²⁸ Rather, my aim is to show that, *given* a commitment to Leibnizian Essentialism, any of the main ontological options for intersubstantial relations that would satisfy the Relations condition, would *also* rule out one or more of Leibniz's views concerning causation, namely, Causal Sufficiency, Causal Independence, and a second sort of causal independence to be discussed below. Since Leibniz certainly accepts all three of those claims about causation, he cannot accept any of the ontological options for intersubstantial relations, and thus he cannot accept Relations.

Before outlining the ontological options below, note that three important conditions hold for relations in general. First, a traditional doctrine: no relation can exist unless its relata exist. So, no intersubstantial relation can exist without the substances it relates. I am content to assume that Leibniz accepts this condition, though much of what Leibniz says about relations seems clearly to imply it, and many commentators—both those who do and do not agree with me about Existential Independence and Relations—implicitly or explicitly agree that he accepts it.²⁹ Second, on any of the ontological options below, if one substance comes to have a relation to another, this relation must be caused to exist. Third, if perhaps obviously, the full or total cause of a substance's relation—whether this total cause is one entity or multiple—must either cause the relation *and* all that upon which it

²⁷ Others—e.g., D'Agostino (1976: 133, 135); Hintikka (1981: 262-3); Ishiguro (1990: 150-1); and Cover and Hawthorne (1999, ch.4)—agree that the logical approach to impossibility, and thus the denial of Existential Independence, requires Relations.

²⁸ For recent discussions of Leibniz's ontology of relations, see Cover and Hawthorne 1999, ch.2; Jauernig 2010; and Mugnai 2012. Commentators who interpret Leibniz as accepting intersubstantial relations include Clatterbaugh 1973; Hintikka 1981: 262-3; Ishiguro 1990: 199; and McCullough 1996: 172-5. Commentators opposing this view include Cover and Hawthorne 1999 and Mugnai 2012.

²⁹ See D'Agostino 1976: 133, 135; Hintikka 1981: 262-3; Rescher 1981: 73; Ishiguro 1990: 150-1; Wilson 1993: 124; Rutherford 1995: 184; Cover and Hawthorne 1999: 87; Jauernig 2010: 181-2, 186; and Mugnai 2012: 180-1.

ontologically depends, or must cause the relation but *not* necessarily all that upon which it ontologically depends.

Broadly speaking, there are three ways in which Leibniz might understand the nature of intersubstantial relations: first, such a relation might be outside of both of the related substances; second, it might inhere in both of them; or, third, it might inhere in one but not the other of them. Consider the first way first. Leibniz clearly does think that at least some relational beings—what we might call ‘relations proper’, or polyadic properties, that is, beings that have multiple substances in common—exist outside of the related substances. Such a relation he calls a “merely mental thing [*rem mere mentalem*]” (LDB 326), or “a purely ideal thing [*une chose purement idéale*]” (G VII 401). An ideal relation is the product of a mind that considers the related substances (A 6.6.145/NE 145), but is not on that account a fabrication: the relation must have a foundation in the form of monadic accidents inhering the related substances. Can ideal relations satisfy the Relations condition? Clearly not. Recall the example of Cory and Dory above: Cory comes to be the same height as Dory. (I will continue to use this example in what follows, intending it to represent any two related substances.) Some other being—Nory, say—considers Cory and Dory, noting that Cory (who is of such and such height) is taller than Dory (who is of only so and so height). Nory’s consideration of Cory and Dory produces (or perhaps constitutes) the relation of Cory’s being taller than Dory, a relation that is itself extrinsic to, outside of, Cory and Dory. And it is no less outside of Cory and Dory for its being ‘founded on’ Cory’s and Dory’s respective monadic accidents. Thus, an ideal relation is not an intersubstantial relation in the sense required by the Relations condition. And so ideal relations cannot rule out Existential Independence: since every ideal relation is existentially posterior to the substances related, no ideal relation could ground one substance’s existential dependence on another. More than merely ideal relations are required if the Relations condition is to hold. Unsurprisingly, then, and reasonably enough, commentators who interpret Leibniz as rejecting Existential Independence argue on textual grounds that Leibniz accepts non-ideal relational entities in addition to the ideal ones.³⁰ But my argument in this section does not turn on a direct textual case for the ideality of all relations. Rather, I am arguing that

³⁰ See fn 27.

Leibniz is committed on *systematic* grounds to rejecting real intersubstantial relations.

On the second way of understanding intersubstantial relations, such a relation is an accident inhering in both of the related substances simultaneously—a *straddling accident*, with a foot standing in each substance. This approach faces two problems. First, it seems clear that Leibniz rejects it for traditional reasons. As he remarks to Des Bosses, “I do not think you would support an accident that is simultaneously in two subjects and has, so to speak, one foot in one and the other in the other” (LDB 371; cf. G VII 401/AG 338). Second, Leibniz’s distinctive views on causation give him further reasons to reject straddling accidents.³¹ To see why, suppose that Cory’s relation to Dory is a straddling accident, inhering at once in both Cory and Dory. This accident must have a cause. On the one hand, Causal Sufficiency tells us that Cory is cause of all of his changes. So, Cory causes his straddling accident. But if so, then, since a straddling accident inheres in both of the related substances, Cory thereby *also* causes Dory to have an accident, in which case Causal Independence is false. So, Cory cannot be the cause of his straddling accident. But if Cory is not its cause, then Cory is not the cause of one of his own changes, and thus Causal Sufficiency is false. Either way leads to a result that Leibniz cannot accept.

On the third way of understanding intersubstantial relations, such a relation inheres in one substance alone, but nevertheless in some way it directly links that substance to a second substance.³² Suppose that Cory’s relation to Dory is a relational accident—an accident inhering in Cory alone, but which in some way directly embraces Dory. The relational nature of this sort of accident seems best understood in terms of constituency, though I shall also consider a direct reference approach below.³³ Take the constituency approach first. On this approach, Cory’s relational accident has Dory as a constituent. What

³¹ For discussion of Leibniz’s general reasons for rejecting straddling accidents, see Mugnai 1992: 36-39. For an introduction to the scholastic background for rejecting such accidents, see Brower 2010, §3.1.

³² Commentators who interpret Leibniz as accepting relational accidents include Clatterbaugh (1973: ch.3), Kulstad (1980: 423-4), Burdick (1991), McCullough (1996: 172-77), Plaisted (2002: ch.1), and probably D’Agostino (1976). For examples of texts in which Leibniz might be taken as accepting relational accidents, see G VII 401/AG 338; LDB 371.

³³ Cover and Hawthorne (1999: 73) appear to suggest that a relational accident would be an accident that has the related-to substance as a constituent. Plaisted (2002, ch.3) argues against the constituency approach, though for reasons different than those I offer here. As best I can tell, Plaisted (2003: 3, 11) understands relational accidents as directly referring to substances.

causes Cory to have this accident? Causal Sufficiency requires that Cory be the total cause of his accident. If so, then Cory would thereby be the cause of all of his accidents' constituents as well, since presumably being the total cause of an entity requires being the cause of all of that entity's constituents; and thus Cory would be the cause of Dory. But no (created) substance has the power to cause another to exist *ex nihilo*, nor can one cause another to exist by causing an accident in a third, since on Leibniz's view substances come to exist *only* by creation *ex nihilo* (C 523/AG 34; G VI 607/AG 213). (And, in any case, this would again imply that Causal Independence is false.) Nor could Cory's relational accident have one of Dory's accidents as a constituent, since in that case Cory would still, in causing his own relational accident, thereby cause Dory's accident, implying yet again that Causal Independence is false. Nor can Cory be merely a *partial* cause of his relational accident—causing all of it except for its constituents inhering in Dory—since this would imply that Causal Sufficiency is false. Either way, the constituency approach to relational accidents—or, indeed, any approach on which Cory's causing his relational accident *ipso facto* involves causing Dory to exist or to change—leads to results that Leibniz cannot accept.

Thus, on philosophical grounds, the Relations reading required for rejecting Existential Independence already appears to be up a tree. Since neither ideal relations, straddling accidents, nor constituency-style relational accidents can succeed in supporting Relations, it is already unlikely that Leibniz can accept Relations, *independently* of the textual debate over whether he intends to do so.³⁴ But even so, perhaps there still remains a limb on which one might crawl out to support a Relations reading of Leibniz. Suppose again that Cory has a relational accident, but that instead of this accident's having Dory as a constituent, it in some way directly references Dory (or one of Dory's accidents).³⁵ On this approach, while it is true that Cory's relational accident depends on Dory for its existence—since no relation can exist without its relata—it does not itself ontologically overlap with Dory, nor is it ontologically parasitic upon Dory as an accident is upon its substance, or an aggregate upon its parts, or an Aristotelian compound substance upon its form.³⁶ And so,

³⁴ For this debate, see fn. 27.

³⁵ Plaisted (2003: 3, 11) might understand relational accidents in this way.

³⁶ A reaction some readers may have: "But if Cory's relation to Dory really is *de re* necessarily a relation to Dory, then this relation's very being—its *esse*—must be in some way bound up with Dory. In which case, it

assuming that this approach can be made sense of,³⁷ perhaps we can have our relational cake and cause it, too. Maybe Cory *can* be the total cause of his relational accident, consistent with Causal Sufficiency; and without causally interacting with Dory, consistent with Causal Independence.

This branch, however, is not one on which Leibniz himself would rest (perhaps because he thinks it would break). Even if we grant that direct reference-style relational accidents would satisfy Relations while *also* remaining consistent with Causal Independence and Causal Sufficiency, nevertheless the one substance (with the relational accident) would still depend on the other with respect to its (the first's) immanent *causal activity*. Even if Cory were to cause his relational accident without causally influencing Dory, still, Cory could not do so unless Dory were to exist, since no relation could exist without its relata. So, Cory's relational accident could not exist without Dory. Thus, distinguish what might be two kinds of causal *independence*:

Moderate Causal Independence: for any two substances, no changes in the first depend on the second as a cause.

Strong Causal Independence: for any two substances, none of the first's causal activity depends on the second.

Moderate Causal Independence is just what I have been calling 'Causal Independence'. According to this thesis, no change in a substance is the effect of some other substance's causal activity. But Strong Causal Independence goes further than its moderate cousin: it says that not only can no substance depend on another as an effect depends on its cause, but also that no substance can depend on another as a condition for its own causal activity, and thus for its being a cause.³⁸ We might say that according to Moderate Causal Independence every substance is causally independent *qua* effect, while according to

does seem to have Dory (or one of Dory's accidents) as a constituent; or at least it must be ontologically parasitic upon Dory in some way." While I have some sympathy for this reaction, still, it is worth considering the present alternative—both in the spirit of charity, but also because I'm not certain that we can't make sense of this alternative.

³⁷ It is worth noting that this is not a trivial assumption.

³⁸ Note that if Strong Causal Independence is true, then Moderate Causal Independence is true, too. (Hence the label 'Strong'.) If *s* were to cause a change in *s**, then *s*'s doing so would depend on *s**, since *s* can cause a change in *s** only if *s** exists.

Strong Causal Independence every substance is causally independent *qua* cause.

Leibniz clearly affirms Moderate Causal Independence. But does he accept *Strong* Causal Independence? If he does, then he cannot allow relational accidents. (If Cory causes his own relational accident, his doing so depends on Dory's existence as a pre-condition.) Thus, commentators who think that Leibniz accepts both Leibnizian Essentialism and Relations—many of whom, naturally, also think that Leibniz rejects Existential Independence—are under pressure to view a consistent Leibniz as rejecting Strong Causal Independence. But Leibniz *accepts* Strong Causal Independence—he denies that any substance's causal activity depends upon any other substance.³⁹ In support of the claim *that* Leibniz accepts Strong Causal Independence, I shall advance a brief textual argument, drawing on World Apart passages (again, even granting, for the sake of argument, the causal reading of World Apart). As for *why* Leibniz accepts this thesis, I shall offer only a brief speculation.

In the passage from the *New System* quoted in §1, Leibniz is clearly committed to Moderate Causal Independence: “we have a perfect independence relative to the influence of every other creature”; and we are “protected from all external accidents” (G IV 484-5/AG 144-5). But in a similar passage occurring a page earlier, Leibniz says:

we must say that God originally created the soul (and any other real unity) in such a way that *everything must arise for it from its own depths [fonds]*, through a *perfect spontaneity relative to itself*, and yet with a *perfect conformity relative to external things*. ... these internal perceptions in the soul itself must arise because of its own original constitution... occur[ing] in the soul at a given time, in virtue of its own laws, *as if in a world apart, and as if there existed only God and itself* (G IV 484-5/AG 143, my emphasis)

Here, Leibniz's point concerning causation and independence is that, with respect to its

³⁹ An intentionalist objection: all of this assumes that the ontological connections between substances are *relations*. But—on Leibniz's late metaphysics, at least—the only true substances are monads. And, given the structure of monads, any such connections between monads must either be, or hold in virtue of, monads' *perceptions*. But perceptions are *representative*: for Jan to perceive John is for Jan to *represent* John—for John to be an *intentional object* of Jan's perceptual state. But such states are *not* relations: for John to be an intentional object of Jan's perception *is not* for Jan to have a *relation* to John. John can be the intentional object of Jan's perception *even if* John does not exist. But then Jan's perceiving John needn't imply that either Causal Sufficiency or Strong Causal Independence is false, since Jan can represent John even if John does not exist. I reply that, if this is the case, then Existential Independence is true, which is the conclusion of the overall argument. And so this reply would not be a good one for those who deny Existential Independence.

causal activity, no substance depends on any other (created) substance. What a substance causes comes from itself alone, and only *conforms* to external things. Similarly, in the *Discourse* passage quoted in §1, Leibniz says:

each substance is like a world apart, independent of all other things, except for God; thus all our phenomena, that is, all the things that can ever happen to us, *are only consequences of our being* [*ne sont que des suites de nostre estre*]. (G IV 439/AG 47, my emphasis)

What happens to a substance follows from its nature alone; it is a consequence of itself only, not itself along with another.

Further, here is Leibniz in the *Theodicy*, echoed by a later letter to Des Bosses:

the soul has in itself a perfect spontaneity, so that it depends only upon God and upon itself in its actions. (T §291/G VI 290)

a monad, like a soul, is, as it were, a certain world of its own, having no relationship of dependence except with God. (LDB 227)

According to the kind of causal independence expressed in these passages, substances have no direct causal dependence *whatsoever* on one other, strongly suggesting Strong Causal Independence.

Finally, if, on the causal reading of World Apart—held by commentators who read Leibniz as rejecting Existential Independence—we take seriously Leibniz’s claim that each substance is *like a world apart*, then it is not enough to see Leibniz as accepting only Moderate Causal Independence; we must read him as affirming Strong Causal Independence as well. Each substance’s causal activity is perfectly spontaneous, proceeding from only its own internal laws, “as if in a world apart, as if there existed only God and itself” (G IV 484-5/AG 143). Thus, with respect to a substance’s causal activity, *we can suppose that* no other (created) substance exists, even if others in fact do exist. As Leibniz himself states quite plainly, “whatever happens to each one of them would flow from its nature and its notion even if the rest were supposed to be absent” (G VII 312/MP 79).

Moreover, my interpretation here begs no questions concerning Existential Independence, since my claim is not that it is possible *all things considered* for God to create a lonely substance. Rather, my claim is that, supposing God *could* have made one substance

but no others, it would have made no difference to the causal activity of the lone substance. Thus, no substance is a precondition on the causal activity of any other, which is just to say that Strong Causal Independence is true.

Why does Leibniz accept Strong Causal Independence? In the passages above, he does not make this clear. One possibility: Leibniz accepts it because he accepts Existential Independence. After all, if Existential Independence and Leibnizian Essentialism are true, then so is Strong Causal Independence. This possibility squares with the texts above, and looks plausible—at least for pro-Existential Independence commentators. Obviously, however, in the context of my argument in this paper I cannot, without begging the question, draw on this possible explanation.

Here is another possible explanation: perhaps Leibniz accepts Strong Causal Independence because he thinks it is, at bottom, just a special case of Moderate Causal Independence (in which case my labels would be less apt). Suppose that Ed's existence is a precondition on Fred's producing in himself a certain experience of Ed (and let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that an *experience of* is to be construed as involving a relational accident).⁴⁰ But perhaps the only reason that Fred would depend on Ed in this way is if Ed somehow were to causally interact with Fred—for instance, perhaps Fred's causing the experience in himself could depend on Ed *only if* Fred's causing it were to depend on (a) Fred's *also* having some other internal state, and (b) Ed's being the cause of Fred's having that other internal state. If Leibniz has in mind something like that, then 'Strong' Causal Independence reduces to 'Moderate' Causal Independence, in which case we arrive at my conclusion by a shorter route. In any case, for my purposes here, it is enough to see that Leibniz *does* accept Strong Causal Independence.

To sum up: I argued in §3.1 that, for Leibniz, if Existential Independence is false, then both Relations and Leibnizian Essentialism must be true. I accept that Leibniz endorses Leibnizian Essentialism. But, as I argued here in §3.2, Leibniz cannot accept Relations. On any of the ontological options for real intersubstantial relations, one or more of Causal Sufficiency, Moderate Causal Independence, and Strong Causal Independence must be false.

⁴⁰ Readers repelled by construing experiences as involving relations may substitute other examples.

But Leibniz accepts all three. Ideal relations alone will not satisfy Relations. Leibniz already rejects straddling accidents for other reasons; but even if he did not, he must, since accepting straddling accidents implies that either Causal Sufficiency or Moderate Causal Independence is false (or both). Relational accidents on a constituency account violate Moderate Causal Independence. A last hope for a Relations reading seemed to be some sort of direct reference account of relational accidents, which Leibniz can accept only by rejecting Strong Causal Independence. But Leibniz accepts Strong Causal Independence. Thus, because he also accepts Causal Sufficiency and Moderate Causal Independence, he cannot accept Relations.⁴¹ But then, every substance must be existentially *independent* of every other after all. It turns out, then, that the World Apart passages—even granting a causal reading of them—still provide strong support for Existential Independence. And so the causal reading of these passages does not undermine the non-logical approach to interpreting impossibility, but rather supports it.

With respect to this last point, however, there is an important potential source of resistance: even if my argument establishes that every substance is existentially independent of every other, perhaps this conclusion can be *compatible with* the logical approach to impossibility; and thus perhaps it does not amount to decisive support for the non-logical approach. In the final section below, I argue that there is no such compatibility.

§4 Different Strengths of Existential Independence?

I argued above that Existential Independence is true on Leibniz's metaphysics and that this result is inconsistent with the logical approach to impossibility. But if it turns out that my argument supports only a *weaker* version of Existential Independence, one that *is* consistent with the logical approach, then logical advocates need not fully break camp even if my argument above goes through. In this closing section, however, I argue that this

⁴¹ D'Agostino (1976: 135) briefly considers an argument bearing passing resemblance to mine, but dismisses it quickly on the grounds that it confuses (Moderate) Causal Independence with Existential Independence. But my argument cannot be dismissed in this way, since my argument grants that causation is directly at issue in the World Apart passages, and yet still concludes that Leibniz must accept Existential Independence. Further, I argue that in World Apart passages Leibniz endorses both Moderate and Strong Causal independence.

weakening approach is not open to Leibniz, for three reasons: first, my argument in §§3.1-3.2 already rules out this approach; second, cases appealing to superlative properties without direct relations do not succeed; and third, the weakening approach implies that non-actual substances are *not* possible substances, a result that Leibniz steadfastly denies.

§4.1 Weak Existential Independence requires Relations

Recall that Existential Independence consists of a no-pulling thesis and a no-blocking thesis: the existence of no possible substance requires (pulls) or precludes (blocks) the existence of any other. But since the logical approach holds that two possible substances are impossible precisely because the existence of the first *blocks* the existence of the second, perhaps logical advocates need only deny the no-blocking thesis, but can accept the no-pulling thesis.⁴² Since my argument above focuses on supporting the no-pulling thesis, perhaps room can be made for the logical approach by carving out a distinction between two different varieties of existential independence: a stronger variety that includes both the no-pulling and no-blocking theses, and a weaker variety that includes only the no-pulling thesis.⁴³ We might distinguish between the two varieties as follows:

Strong Existential Independence: for any two possible created substances, the existence of the first necessitates neither the existence of the second nor the non-existence of the second.⁴⁴

Weak Existential Independence: for any two possible created substances, the existence of the first does not necessitate the existence of the second.

If Leibniz can accept Weak but *not* Strong Existential Independence, then the logical approach might still hold its ground. The weaker variety allows that, even if one possible substance could exist while a second does *not*, it may still be that the existence of the first

⁴² Advocates of the logical approach, however, typically take both pulling and blocking as a package deal. See, for instance, Mates 1986: 75-78; Rescher 1979: 49-50, 58.

⁴³ Harmer (2016) is, so far as I know, the first to suggest this distinction as a way to defend the logical approach. Harmer later (2018: 3), however, argues on textual grounds (viz., G IV 519/ WF 80 and DSR 65) for Strong Existential Independence, and thus against the logical approach. Naturally, I agree with Harmer about this. But again, I think that it is reasonable for those entrenched in the logical camp to resist an existential reading of these couple of texts.

⁴⁴ This is just Existential Independence as defined in §1.

blocks the existence of the second. So, even if the suppositions that the first exists and that the second does not are logically consistent, it may still be that the suppositions that the first exists and that the second *also* exists are *not* logically consistent.⁴⁵

But Leibniz cannot accept this distinction—while he can accept that *both* Strong and Weak Existential Independence are true, he cannot accept that the Weak variety is true while the Strong variety is false. The only textual grounds, so far as I am aware, for suspecting that Leibniz could accept this distinction are that, in passages that seem most strongly to support Existential Independence, his words do not strictly rule out the possibility that Weak (but not Strong) Existential Independence is true. For instance, Des Bosses objects that on Leibniz's pre-established harmony, if God creates any one of a group of harmonized monads, then God cannot avoid creating all of the rest (LDB 333-5).⁴⁶

Leibniz responds:

The ... objection is this: ... God could not have created any of those monads that now exist without having produced all the others, etc. The response is easy and has already been given: *he could absolutely, but not hypothetically*, because he decided to act always most wisely and most harmoniously. (LDB 339)

While Leibniz's response seems to express the no-pulling thesis, it does not obviously express the no-blocking thesis. And so, according to this line of thought, it is open to Leibniz

⁴⁵ Chiek argues that we can square Strong Existential Independence with the logical approach (2016: 104-5; cf. 106; 111; 113-14; 118). If I understand correctly, Chiek claims that substances *themselves* bear no irreducible relations, and thus, strictly speaking, no contradiction would arise from the existence of any two substances. So, no threat of logical contradiction of that sort constrains God's creation. However, Chiek argues, substances' complete concepts *do* have irreducible *conceptual* relations: every substance's complete concept fully contains those of other substances. So, if one complete concept were to contain another in such a way that the first doesn't perfectly express the second, a contradiction *would* arise, just by *thinking* either concept by itself. Thus, God can't think these concepts as related, and so can't create the corresponding substances. This is clever, but in the end, I think, mistaken. However, even granting that it's correct, it doesn't help the logical approach. Take any actually existing substance, *s*. Question: is there any possible but non-actual substance, *s**, whose complete concept doesn't at all express or contain *s*'s, and isn't expressed or contained by *s*'s? If not, the actual world is the only possible world. (If *s* and *s** perfectly express or contain each other, they're compossible, and thus *s** exists. If they imperfectly express each other, God can't think either one.) But Leibniz certainly denies that ours is the only possible world. If there *is* such a possible but non-actual substance, *s**, though, then it's difficult to see how *s* and *s** are impossible, since each would be conceptually unrelated, and so God's thinking of both would involve no contradiction.

⁴⁶ More precisely, Des Bosses's objection is that, on Leibniz's view, all of the perceptions of every existing monad correspond to every other. But if so, then God's creating any one monad *requires* God to create all of its world-mates; otherwise, the monads that God *did* create would have mistaken perceptions. His point, as was Descartes's in the *Meditations* (AT VII 53-4, 62, 80/CSM II 37-8, 43, 55), is that God's creating us so that we have widespread and uncorrectable error would amount to God's being a deceiver; and God is not a deceiver.

to accept Weak but not Strong Existential Independence. For the sake of argument, I grant that Leibniz's words in the passage above do not settle the matter. But nevertheless, Leibniz cannot accept this distinction, and largely for reasons already given in the sections above, reasons grounded in Leibniz's broader metaphysical commitments.⁴⁷

If this distinction open to Leibniz, then it must be possible for one substance to be existentially independent of another in the weak sense but not the strong sense. And for that to happen, the no-pulling thesis must be true while the no-blocking thesis is false: the existence of the first would not require, but *would* block, the existence of the second. But one substance's existence blocks another's only if a contradiction would arise from the following two truths together: the first exists, and the second exists. And such a contradiction would arise only if it is necessary for the second, blocked substance to have a relation to the first, blocking one.

In order to illustrate, let us extend the example of Cory from §3.1. Cory's nature specifies that he is 174 cm tall. Nory's nature specifies that she is 175 cm tall, *and* that she has the relation: *same height as Cory*. Given Leibnizian Essentialism, neither Cory nor Nory could exist while being otherwise. (Let us bracket complications concerning growth, etc.) Suppose God creates Cory. So, Cory is 174 cm tall. But then, were God to create Nory as well, contradictions would quickly follow: for instance, that Nory is both 175 cm tall *and* 174 cm tall, and that she both is and is not the same height as Cory. Thus, given Cory's existence, God cannot create Nory—Nory's existence is blocked. However, by the argument of the preceding sections, no substance *could* have such a relation.⁴⁸ Thus, no contradiction would arise from the suppositions that Cory exists and that Nory exists. So, generalizing, no substance could block another's existence, in which case the distinction between Weak and Strong Existential Independence collapses. There is Strong Existential Independence or

⁴⁷ Again, I think there are at least a couple of texts that are difficult to square with Weak but not Strong Existential Independence. For instance, *prima facie*, G IV 519/WF 80 and DSR 65 don't sit well with the no-blocking thesis. But again, I think that it's reasonable for logical campers to try to explain away a few tough texts, especially if other texts better fit their general interpretation (and since one can find a few tough texts for virtually any interpretation).

⁴⁸ Note that appeal to Leibniz's universal expression thesis doesn't change matters, since universal expression entails Existential Independence (Weak or Strong) *only if* Relations and Leibnizian Essentialism are also true. See §3.1 and fn. 25 above.

none at all.

§4.2 Cases with superlative properties

Rescher (1981: 71) and Wilson (1993: 124) give cases meant to show that one substance, in virtue of having a superlative property, blocks the existence of other possible substances, and without the former having any intersubstantial relations to the latter. Although on first glance these sorts of cases seem to sidestep my argument above, on subsequent glances they do not. Consider a case adapted slightly from Wilson (1993: 124). Doc Gooden, assuming God creates him, is the fastest pitcher on the New York Mets during the 1980s. (He could not be otherwise, given Leibnizian Essentialism.) But the same is true of another possible substance, Sidd Finch. Thus God cannot create both Gooden and Finch, since if God were to do so, contradictions would arise. (Each of them both would and would not be the fastest pitcher on the 1980s Mets.) And so, given that God has in fact created Gooden, Finch cannot exist—Finch is blocked from existence. It appears, then, that Gooden is weakly (but not strongly) existentially independent of Finch, without either of them having any direct relation to the other.

But this case does not really constitute a counterexample to my argument. The relation in this case—namely, being the fastest pitcher on the Mets during the 1980s—boils down either to nonrelational properties or to intersubstantial relations. Suppose, as seems plausible—at least to a friend of the non-logical approach—that the case reduces to nonrelational properties of each of the relevant pitchers. Gooden has the non-relational property of throwing 98 mph fastballs. Every other pitcher on the 1980s Mets has a property of throwing at some speed less than 98 mph. (Ron Darling threw at a top speed of 90 mph, Bob Ojeda at 92 mph, and so on.) But then the existence of Gooden, Darling, Ojeda, and the rest, along with their nonrelational properties of throwing at such and such top speeds, is sufficient for reducing Gooden’s property of being the fastest pitcher on the Mets during the 1980s. And so there need be no real pressure to suppose that either Gooden’s or Finch’s natures *do* specify the relational property of being the fastest pitcher on the Mets during the 1980s. Gooden and Finch pitch as fast as they pitch, and their pitching faster or slower than other pitchers depends on what other pitchers God has created. Thus, if being

the fastest pitcher on the 1980s Mets is a reducible relational property, then this case is *not* a case of weak but not strong existential independence.

On the other hand, suppose that Gooden's being the fastest 1980s Mets pitcher boils down to a set of relations Gooden must have: he has R to Darling, R* to Ojeda, and so on. If so, then this *would* purport to be a case of weak but not strong existential independence. But again, such relations are just what my argument in the preceding sections rules out. And so this case does not constitute a counterexample to my claim that a relation must be involved in order for a contradiction to arise from supposing the existence of two possible substances.

§4.3 Weak Existential Independence and impossible substances

A final reason to reject the distinction between Weak and Strong Existential Independence is that it implies that blocked substances are not possible substances. Recall Cory and Nory: Cory, if he exists, must be 174 cm tall. Nory, if she exists, must be 175 cm tall *and* the same height as Cory. God creates Cory, and so Nory's existence is blocked. But even had God decided to create Nory first, contradictions would follow from the truth of 'Nory exists' alone, given Leibnizian Essentialism. From 'Nory exists' it will follow that Cory, too exists, and thus that Nory is 175 cm tall and the same height as Cory. But then Nory would have to be 174 cm tall *and* Cory 175 cm tall—contradictions both. Thus from Nory's nature alone—indeed from the nature of any blocked substance alone—contradictions follow. So, on the logical approach to impossibility, combined with the distinction between Weak and Strong Existential Independence, no blocked substance is a possible substance after all; and since on the logical approach *all* non-actual substances are blocked substances, no non-actual substance is a possible substance. But this result implies that God has no options among possibles prior to creation, and thus that God has no free choice in creation. This is a result that Leibniz certainly rejects (T §235/G VI 257; A 6.4.1447/AG 21).

Thus, I conclude that my argument in the preceding sections *does* support Strong Existential Independence. While this result leaves room for different ways to understand the particulars of a non-logical interpretation of impossibility, it rules out the logical

approach.⁴⁹

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