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Leibnizian Aggregates Are Not Mind-Dependent Entities[1]

By

GIOVANNI MERLO (BARCELONA)

- Abstract -

Unlike individual substances, Leibniz's *entia per aggregationem* do not have *per se* unity and their being is said to be 'mental' or 'semi-mental'. Some have inferred from this that Leibniz regarded aggregates as mind-dependent entities. It will be argued that this inference is mistaken and that the best way of thinking of an aggregate is as a *plurality* of entities. It follows that aggregates are just as real as the entities they contain and that there are or, at any rate, there could be aggregates that are entirely mind-independent.

-      Résumé -

Contrairement aux substances individuelles, les *entia per aggregationem* de Leibniz n'ont pas d'unité *per se* et leur être est dit 'mental' ou 'semi-mental'. Certains auteurs en ont conclu que Leibniz tenait les agrégats pour des entités dépendantes de l'esprit. Je vais soutenir que cette inférence est incorrecte et que le meilleur moyen de penser un agrégat est de le concevoir comme une

pluralité d'entités. Il suit que les agrégats sont tout aussi réels que les entités qu'ils contiennent et qu'il y a ou, dans tous les cas, il peut y avoir des agrégats entièrement indépendants de l'esprit.

1. Introduction

Leibniz sometimes speaks as if everything there is could be exhaustively classified into two complementary categories of entities. Entities that are endowed with true or *per se* unity fall into the first category, that of *substances*. Entities that constitute a unity only accidentally or by an extrinsic denomination fall into the second category, that of *aggregates*.

A pile of logs, a pair of diamonds, a heap of stones, a stack of wheat grains, a herd of sheep, an army of soldiers or a pond full of fish are all examples of aggregates. These examples involve animate or inanimate material bodies that exist at the same time and occupy contiguous regions of space, but Leibniz provides us also with more exotic cases. He is happy to speak of a battle or a dispute as an aggregate of actions[2], to define motion as an 'aggregate' of different times[3] and mutation as an 'aggregate' of two contradictory states.[4] Interestingly, one can have aggregation even in the absence of temporal and spatial contiguity: "it is sufficient that [many entities] are considered at the same time. So, for example, we can make an aggregate out of all the Roman emperors" (A VI, 4, 627).[5]

While substances form the core of Leibniz's ontology, the metaphysical status of aggregates is somewhat more dubious. According to Leibniz, an aggregate is not truly *one*

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[2] A VI, 4, 1069.

[3] A VI, 4, 162.

[4] A VI, 4, 556.

[5] Where no translation is cited among the references, the English translation is my own.

being and what is not truly *one* being is not truly one *being* either.[6] But if aggregates are not truly beings, what are they exactly? In this paper, I wish to focus on a certain 'phenomenalist' interpretation of Leibnizian aggregates according to which, necessarily, if something is an aggregate, that thing is a mind-dependent entity of some sort, an entity that exists *in virtue of* certain mental operations and would not exist, were it not for these operations.[7,8] My aim will be to show, against this phenomenalist interpretation, that there are or there could be aggregates that are entirely mind-independent. I shall start by presenting the reasons generally adduced for endorsing the phenomenalist view (§ 2). I will then proceed to distinguish two different variants of phenomenalism about Leibnizian aggregates- *strong* and *weak* phenomenalism (§ 3,4). Both yield what seems to me an unsatisfactory account of Leibniz's theory of aggregation. In § 5, I will argue and provide textual evidence in favour of an alternative account, according to which aggregates are best thought as *pluralities* and are not necessarily mind-dependent.

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[6] "Ce qui n'est pas veritablement *un* estre, n'est pas non plus veritablement un *estre*" (GP II, 97); *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, ed. and transl. by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, Indianapolis – Cambridge 1989 (hereafter: Ariew/Garber), p. 86.

[7] According to Benson Mates, the region comprising *entia rationis* and other mental things "should not be thought of as a domain of entities somehow hovering above the real world of monads" (B. Mates: *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, Oxford 1986, p. 49). Those who agree with this claim will think that, according to Leibniz, there are no such things as 'mind-dependent entities' and that statements that appear to be about such entities are no more than *compendia loquendi*. As will become clear in due course, I am not at all opposed to this reading, although I don't think it can be successfully applied to aggregates (see § 3 below).

[8] If some version of theism akin to that endorsed by Leibniz is true, then arguably the entirety of reality might be said to exist in virtue of God's original intention to create the world. Perhaps this observation shows that the definition of phenomenalism I gave calls for some refinement, but it certainly does not mean that we should be altogether skeptical about any generic notion of mind-dependence, as applied to Leibniz's metaphysics. Leibniz distinguishes sharply between the mind-independent status of substances and that of relations and other *entia rationis* "that have a reality dependent upon the mind, like truths" (A VI, 6, 265).

2. The Argument from Unity

Phenomenalist interpretations of Leibnizian aggregates are not without textual support. In his letter to Arnauld of April, 30 1687, Leibniz writes that "we can say of composites and similar things what Democritus said so well of them, namely, they depend for their being on opinion or custom" (Ariew/Garber, p.89).[9] In the same letter, he dismisses aggregates and composites as 'fictions of the mind' and put them on a par with abstractions and relations. On innumerable occasions, Leibniz classifies aggregates as 'phenomena'.[10] Often, he even goes as far as to define them as beings of reason or of imagination.[11] In any case, he explicitly says that *entia per aggregationem* are beings "in which there is something imaginary and dependent on the fabrication of our mind" (Ariew/Garber, p. 79).[12]

Direct textual evidence aside, the thesis that all aggregates are mind-dependent has also been underpinned by arguments. One argument often heard in this connection draws on the fact that aggregates lack *per se* unity. I shall therefore refer to this argument as 'the argument from unity'. Though seldom presented in a formal fashion, the argument from unity is fairly straightforward and can be seen as resting on the following three premises:

   (i) Aggregates have no *per se* being.

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[9] "On peut donc dire de ces composés et choses semblables ce que Democrite en disoit fort bien, sçavoir *esse opinione*, *lege*, ⑤⑥❷④❸⬚ " (GP II, 101).

[10] See, for instance, GP, II, 251 and G VI, 625.

[11] GP, VI, 586.

[12] "Peuple, armée, societé ou college […] sont des estres moraux, ou if y a quelque chose d'imaginaire et de dependant de la fiction de nostre esprit" (GP II, 76).

(ii) The only accidental being that an aggregate possesses is supplied by the mind.

(iii)   The accidental being that the mind supplies the aggregate with is a relation.

Let me examine each of these premises in turn.

Premise *(i)* affirms that, unlike substances, aggregates do not have *per se* being. This may be taken to follow from two further assumptions: first, that aggregates lack *per se* unity, and second, that what lacks *per se* unity lacks *per se* being. Both assumptions find wide support in Leibniz's writings. An aggregate lacks *per se* unity because it is not one entity, but many entities[13] and no physical contact, mechanical connection, spatial or temporal contiguity can turn many entities into something that is *unum per se*: at most, those entities will be *unum per accidens*.[14] But what is not *unum per se* is not even a *being per se*, given Leibniz's famous thesis of the convertibility of unity and being.[15] Therefore, aggregates do not have *per se* being.

Premise *(ii)* says that the only accidental being possessed by an aggregate is supplied by the mind. This can be seen, once again, as a consequence of the axiom of the convertibility of being and unity. This time, however, the axiom is applied to the thesis that the only accidental unity possessed by an aggregate is supplied by the mind. It is the mind that "notices or conceives some true substances, which have certain modes; these modes involves relations to other substances, so the mind takes the occasion to join them together in thought and to make one name account for all these things together" (Ariew/Garber, p. 89).[16] But one

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[13] A VI, 4, 1464; A VI, 4, 1622.

[14] A VI, 4, 1506.

[15] GP II, 304.

[16] "Nostre esprit remarque ou conçoit quelques substances veritables qui ont certains modes, ces modes enveloppent des rapports à d'autres substances d'où l'esprit prend occasion de les joindre ensemble dans la pensée et de mettre un nom en ligne de compte pour toutes ces choses ensemble" (GP II, 101). See also A VI, 4,401.

must not forget that "being and unity are convertible, and when a being is brought about through aggregation it is also one in this way" (G II, 304). Thus, since it is the mind that supplies the aggregate with its accidental unity, it is the mind that supplies the aggregate with its accidental being.

Premise *(iii)* identifies the nature of the accidental being that the mind provides the aggregate with: that being is nothing but a relation. One of the most explicit statement of this thesis can be found in the *New Essays*, where Leibniz famously writes that "this unity that collections have is merely a respect or relation, whose basis lies in what is the case within each of the individual substances taken alone".[17] Replace 'unity' with 'being' and the result is precisely the claim that the being that an aggregate obtains from the mind consists in a certain relation that holds among the aggregate's constituents.

Premises *(i)-(iii)* together entail that the being of an aggregate consists in a relation. But relations, as Leibniz conceives them, are *entia rationis*, objects that have a reality dependent upon the mind.[18] Therefore, if one accepts the premises of the argument from unity, one should conclude that the only being of aggregates is supplied by the mind for convenience in reasoning and is mental in nature. Notice that this still leaves open a number of questions. It has become commonplace to speak of the mind performing a 'mental act of aggregation' from which the aggregate arises, but there is little agreement as to whether this mental act is simple or complex, conceptual or non-conceptual, voluntary or involuntary. Nor is it completely clear whether such act is performed by all minds, by all finite minds or only by those finite minds that are capable of relatively distinct perceptions. Further questions concern the relation between Leibniz's theory of aggregation and his general account of

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[17] *G. W. Leibniz: New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. and transl. by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, Cambridge 1996, (hereafter : Remnant/Bennett) p. 146; "Cette unité des collections n'est qu'un rapport ou une relation dont le fondement est dans ce qui se trouve en chacune des substances singulieres à part" (GP V, 133).

[18] A VI, 6, 265.

mental or ideal objects like relations. According to some, there is no fundamental distinction between the mental act of aggregation and the act through which relations and other *entia rationis* are apprehended by the mind.[19] According to others, relations are perceived through an act of God's understanding, whereas aggregates obtain their being as a result of a distinct mental act of 'treating as a unity' which is performed exclusively by some finite minds and for pure reasons of convenience in reasoning.[20]

Permit me not to take a stand on these delicate issues. What is relevant for our present discussion is that the argument from unity, or at least its conclusion, have been taken to provide evidence in favour of a phenomenalist interpretation according to which, necessarily, all aggregates exist in a mind-dependent fashion. Here are (in chronological order) Robert Adams, Donald Rutherford and Paul Lodge arguing for the claim that Leibnizian aggregates are mind-dependent because their unity and their being are mental:

"Leibniz was a conceptualist about abstract objects in general and also about relations, believing that they have their being only in the mind (especially in the divine mind). The

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[19] According to Donald Rutherford, this act is performed, once and for all time, when God's supreme intelligence apprehends relations among monads: "insofar as God apprehends relations among monads, complex beings- *entia per aggregationem*- result" (D. Rutherford: "Leibniz and the Problem of Monadic Aggregation", in: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 76 (1994), p. 75). Let me note in passing that it is not entirely clear how to square this reading with Leibniz's suggestion that an aggregate arises when the mind 'notices' certain relations among true substances. The use of the verb 'to notice [*remarquer*]' suggests that the relation is something that is there independently of the activity of the mind that notices it.

[20] This account has been advocated by Lodge (P. Lodge: "Leibniz's Notion of an Aggregate", in: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 9 (2001) No. 3, pp. 467-486). Notice that aggregates are, in a sense, doubly mind-dependent according to this account: first, because they depend for their being upon the mental act of 'treating as a unity' and, second, because they would not exist were it not for God's eternal apprehension of relations among monads.

same treatment is to be accorded to the unity of an aggregate and, hence, to the aggregate itself. [...] [Aggregates] exist in the mind and are dependent on being thought of".[21]

"Leibniz's claim that the existence of aggregates is necessarily mind-dependent follows directly from his theory of relations. [...] Since on Leibniz's view relations are only supplied by the mind, and since the designation of any group of individuals as an aggregate requires that they be related in specific ways such that if these relations cease to hold their unity as an aggregate is also destroyed, it follows that aggregates can only exist as things which are perceived or thought".[22]

"Leibniz is making two [...] assumptions. The first is a thesis about the ontological status of relations. Relations are not features of the real world for Leibniz. They exist in the minds of beings that apprehend similarities between intrinsic features of individual things. [...] Since the unity of aggregates is to be identified with a relation- the complex relation in which all its constituents stand- the unity of aggregates will exist only in the mind. The second thesis is [...] that being and unity are convertible. [...] From these two assumptions, Leibniz infers that the being of aggregates is mind-dependent as well".[23]

In § 5, I will argue that, *pace* Adams, Rutherford and Lodge, neither the premises of the argument from unity nor its conclusion license an inference to the truth of the phenomenalist interpretation. For the moment, however, let me concentrate on the picture of aggregation sponsored by these authors. In the next two sections, two different variants of phenomenalism about Leibnizian aggregates will be distinguished- *strong* and *weak*

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[21] R. M. Adams: *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, Oxford 1994, pp. 246-247.

[22] Rutherford, "Leibniz and the Problem of Monadic Aggregation", pp. 70-71. See also D. Rutherford: "Phenomenalism and the Reality of Body in Leibniz's Later Philosophy", in: *Studia Leibnitiana* 22 (1990) No. 1, p. 19.

[23] Lodge, p. 472.

phenomenalism. In both cases, I will point out the reasons of my dissatisfaction with the proposed account.

3. The Strong Phenomenalist Interpretation

Some endorse the general thesis that, necessarily, all aggregates are mind-dependent entities, because they endorse what might be called a S*trong Phenomenalist Interpretation* of Leibnizian aggregates. According to the Strong Phenomenalist Interpretation, necessarily, if something is an aggregate, that thing is an entity whose existence metaphysically depends upon the operations of one or more minds *and on nothing else*.

It takes little reflection to see that the Strong Phenomenalist Interpretation admits important counterexamples. Consider, for instance, the case of a particular kind of aggregates: aggregates of substances. When Leibniz identifies certain objects as aggregates of substances, he takes himself to be discarding the possibility of treating these objects along the principles of a strong phenomenalism. This is especially clear in the case of inanimate material bodies. According to Leibniz, "the body by itself, without the soul, has only a unity of aggregation" (Ariew/Garber, p. 88), it "is not a substance, but an aggregate of substances" (Ariew/Garber, p. 103).[24] This does not mean, however, that a material body is a purely mental entity. In effect, on many occasions, Leibniz suggests quite the opposite:

> "[If it were of the essence of body not to have a true unity], it would then be the essence
> of body to be a phenomenon, deprived of all reality, like an ordered dream, for
> phenomena themselves, like the rainbow or a pile of stones, would be completely

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[24] "Le corps à part, sans l'ame, n'a qu'une unité d'aggregation" (GP II, 100); "Corpus non est substantia sed aggregatum substantiarum" (A VI, 4, 1668).

imaginary *if they were not composed of beings with a true unity*". (Ariew/Garber, p. 86, my emphasis) [25]

"*Unless* there are certain indivisible substances , bodies *would* not be real, but *would only be appearances or phenomena* (like the rainbow), having eliminated the very basis from which they can be composed". (Ariew/Garber, p. 103, my emphasis)[26]

"It therefore follows that either there are no corporeal substances and bodies are just phenomena that are true or mutually consistent like the rainbow or a perfectly coherent dream or in every corporeal substance there is something analogous to the soul, what the ancient called 'forma' or 'species'". (A VI, 4,1622)[27]

The thought behind these passages seems to be clear: bodies are more real than *any* purely mental phenomena, even the most 'ordered', 'coherent' or 'true' ones.[28] Bodies *would be* no more real than coherent mental phenomena, *were it not for the fact* that they are aggregates of

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[25] "Il sera donc de l'essence du corps d'estre un phenomene, depourveu de toute realité, comme seroit un songe reglé, car les phenomenes memes comme l'arc en ciel ou comme un tas de pierres seroient tout à fait imaginaires, s'il n'estoient composés d'estres qui ont une veritable unité" (GP II, 97).

[26] "Hinc nisi dentur substantiae quaedam indivisibiles corpora non forent realia, sed apparentiae tantum seu phaenomena sicut Iris, sublato quippe omni compositionis fundamento" (A VI, 4, 1668).

[27] See also A VI, 4, 1622; A VI, 4, 559; GP II, 78 and G IV, 482.

[28] Admittedly, this thought is in tension with what Leibniz writes to Des Bosses in 1712: that "if the substantial chain [*vinculum substantiale*] for monads did not exist, all bodies [...] would be nothing but well-founded phenomena, like a rainbow or an image in a mirror" (Ariew/Garber, p. 198-199; GP II, 439). Here the idea seems to be that, even if bodies have substances as constituents, this will not rescue them from the threat of phenomenalism, unless there is a thing called '*vinculum substantiale* for monads'. But it is widely acknowledged that the positions Leibniz adopted or toyed with in the context of discussing the doctrine of the *vinculum substantiale* are very much *sui generis*: if there is such a thing as a Leibnizian orthodoxy about the status of bodies, it is represented by the passages quoted above, or so I submit.

beings endowed with *per se* unity. In line with this thought, the case of bodies appears to contradict the Strong Phenomenalist thesis that, necessarily, all aggregates are *purely* mind-dependent entities, existing *solely* in virtue of the operations of one or more minds. There is little doubt that inanimate material bodies qualify as *entia per aggregationem*, but since they are aggregates of beings endowed with true unity (namely, aggregates of substances), they are *not* purely mind-dependent and cannot be said to exist *solely* in virtue of certain mental operations.

In an attempt to rescue the intuition behind the Strong Phenomenalist Interpretation and better capture the thought that aggregates have their unity, and therefore their being, *only* in the mind, Robert Adams proposed to identify them with the *intentional objects* "of a story told approximately by perception, common sense and science" (p. 219). Although Adams is concerned primarily with Leibniz's treatment of a particular kind of aggregates, inanimate material bodies, his recipe is meant to be entirely general: according to this recipe, "aggregates, by virtue of their disunity, are only phenomena" (p. 245) and 'phenomena' "can be understood as the intentional objects or representational contents of our perceptions" (p. 220). Of course, one has to distinguish between 'well-founded' or 'real' and 'imaginary' or 'false' phenomena, but ultimately the ontological status of all phenomena, and hence of all aggregates, is mental: "aggregates have [...] their being *only* in the mind, and that is true even of aggregates of real things. [...] They exist in the mind and are dependent on being though of" (pp. 246-247, my emphasis).[29]

I agree that aggregates form an essential component of the way some minds represent the universe as being. But I remain unconvinced by Adams's interpretation. The problem, as I see it, is that saying that aggregates are intentional objects does nothing to settle the

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[29] See also R. M. Adams: "Phenomenalism and Corporeal Substance in Leibniz", in: *Contemporary Perspectives on the History of Philosophy*, ed. by Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr. and Howard K. Wettstein, Minneapolis 1983, p. 247.

metaphysical question as to what aggregates are, let alone the question whether or not they are mind-dependent entities. Suppose I tell you that I am thinking that a certain object called 'Bob' is P. You now know that Bob is the intentional object of my thought. But you still do not know what Bob is, metaphysically speaking: Bob could be a real entity (e.g. the Tour Eiffel) or a mind-dependent entity (e.g. a sense datum) or, perhaps, a Meinongian non-existent entity (e.g. the Golden Mountain). Similarly, the thesis that aggregates are intentional objects leaves us completely in the dark as to what kind of entities aggregates are.

Of course, Adams's thesis would be no longer metaphysically neutral if it were supplemented or identified with the stronger claim that Leibnizian aggregates are *purely* intentional entities. This would imply that the metaphysical status of aggregates is that of *intentional inexistents*, that aggregates do *not* exist in reality, even if they do exist according to a story told by perception and common sense. One could even put this in Cartesian terms, by saying that the only reality that aggregates have is the *objective* (as opposed to the *formal*) reality of our perceptions as of aggregates. Aggregates would exist only as *intelligibilia* or *percipibilia*: their reality would be exhausted by the fact that we (can) perceive or conceive them.[30]

If this is what Adams's interpretation amounts to, it is not clear to me that it represents a viable interpretation. Although he certainly does not regard aggregates as substances, Leibniz does not go as far as saying that there exist no aggregates or that aggregates are mere *intelligibilia*. In fact, he *cannot* go as far as saying this, for more than once he uses the existence of certain aggregates- aggregates of substances- as a premise in his most cherished argument that reality must contain 'beings endowed with true unity' from which these aggregates result. This argument is a recurrent motif in Leibniz's writings. It appears, in a condensed form, in §2 of the *Monadology*, where Leibniz writes that "there must be simple

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[30] This is the kind of existence that, according to Benson Mates, Leibniz reserves to "metaphysical paraphernalia such as concepts, propositions, properties, possible objects, and so on" (p. 173).

substances, since there are composites; for the composite is nothing more than a collection, or *aggregate*, of simples" (Ariew/Garber, p. 213; GP VI, 607). The same argument is presented in the third proposition of the Fardella Notes (Ariew/Garber, p. 103; A VI, 4 1668) and forms the subject matter of this famous passage from the letter Leibniz writes to Arnauld on April, 30th 1687:

> "Every being by aggregation presupposes beings endowed with true unity, because every being derives its reality only from the reality of those beings of which it is composed, so that it will not have any reality at all if each being of which it is composed is itself a being by aggregation, a being for which we must still seek further grounds for its reality. [...] *If there are aggregates of substances, there must also be true substances from which all the aggregates result*".(Ariew/Garber, p. 85; my emphasis)[31]

Only under the assumption that reality contains at least some aggregates can this argument work as an argument for the existence of 'substances that have true unity'. If aggregates are only *believed* or *perceived as* existing, if their reality is exhausted by the *objective* reality of our beliefs and perceptions as of aggregates, the argument is simply a non-starter. For certainly one cannot infer the *formal* reality of substances endowed with true unity from the *objective* reality of our perceptions as of aggregates of substances. So, if I'm right, Adams's interpretation is either silent on the metaphysical status of aggregates or it entails that aggregates do not exist. In the first case, it brings no grist to the strong phenomenalists's mill. In the second, it invalidates an argument that Leibniz clearly regarded as valid and important.

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[31] "Tout estre par aggregation suppose des estres doués d'une veritable unité, parcequ'il ne tient sa realité que de celle de ceux dont il est composé, de sorte qu'il n'en aura point du tout, si chaque estre dont il est composé est encor un estre par aggregation, ou il faut encor chercher un autre fondement de sa realité […] S'il y a des aggregés des substances, il faut bien qu'il y ait aussi des veritable substances dont tous les aggregés resultant" (GP II, 96); see also C 523.

4, The Weak Phenomenalist Interpretation

One can endorse the generic thesis that the existence of aggregates metaphysically depends upon certain mental operations, and yet insist that the aggregate's existence does not depend *only* upon those operations. Once can, for example, accept a *Weak Phenomenalist Interpretation* on which, necessarily, if something is an aggregate of certain things, it is an entity whose existence metaphysically depends *both* on the existence of those things *and* on the apprehension by the mind of certain relations among those things. Weak phenomenalists pride themselves on being able to make perfect sense of Leibniz's claim that the being (and unity) of an aggregate is "semimental" (G II, 304) and that aggregates are "semi-beings" (LH 4.3.5e Bl. 23). On their picture, the existence of an aggregate is mind-dependent without being *purely* mind-dependent (unless, I take it, all of the aggregate's constituents are themselves mind-dependent).

While disagreeing on the particular nature of the mental act of aggregation, Paul Lodge and Donald Rutherford have both advocated a weak phenomenalist approach according to which the aggregate depends "in an essential way *both* on its individual constituents *and* on the perceived relations among these constituents" (Rutherford, "Phenomenalism and the Reality of Body in Leibniz's Later Philosophy", pp. 18-19).[32]

Two main considerations can be brought against this line of interpretation. The first is, quite simply, that the picture of aggregation advocated by Rutherford and Lodge is both philosophically unappealing and unLeibnizian in spirit. I find little plausibility in the idea that, just by considering certain real-world substances and performing some basic operations, one's mind can bring into existence a 'hybrid' entity that has those real-world substances as

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[32] See also Lodge, pp. 472-473.

constituents. This idea sounds also deeply unLeibnizian to my ears: it fails to reflect Leibniz's

dismissive attitude towards the metaphysical status of aggregates. This attitude is well

exemplified in the following passage:

> "No regularity will ever be found which can make a true substance out of several beings by
> aggregation. [...] Why should several rings, interlaced as to make a chain, compose a
> genuine substance any more than if they had openings so that they could be separated? [...]
> These are all fictions of the mind [...]. I am waiting for a notion of substance or of being
> which can include all of these- after which mock suns and perhaps even dreams will
> someday lay claim to reality unless very precise limits are set for this *droit de bourgeoisie*
> that is to be granted to beings formed by aggregation". (Ariew/Garber, pp. 89-90)[33]

What are the *real* criteria of persistence of an aggregate? When do several rings, interlaced as

to make a chain, cease to compose a chain? For Leibniz, any answer to these questions will be

either completely arbitrary (e.g. the chain's existence depends on 'the future skill of whoever

may wish to disentangle [the rings]') or utterly trivial (e.g. the chain ceases to exists when all

of the rings are destroyed). Leibniz implicitly warns us against any attempt to find non-

arbitrary or non-trivial answers: such attempts would betray a failure to grasp the crucial point

that aggregates are not 'true beings' and are not to be given 'droit de bourgeoisie'. But notice

that this is precisely what Rutherford and Lodge try to do: they endow aggregates with criteria

of persistence that are neither trivial nor arbitrary. On the weak phenomenalist picture,

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[33] "On ne trouvera jamais rien de reglé pour faire une substance veritable de plusieurs estres par aggregation.
[…] Plusieurs anneaux entrelassés pour faire une chaine, pourquoy composeront ils plustost une substance
veritable, que s'ils avoient des ouvertures pour se pouvoir quitter l'un l'autre? […] Fictions de l'esprit par tout
[…] e j'attends la notion d'une substance ou d'un estre, qui puisse comprendre toutes ces choses, apres quoy et
les parties et peutestre encor les songes y pourront un jour pretendre, à moins qu'on donne des limites bien precis
à ce droit de bourgeoisie qu'on veut accorder aux estres formés par aggregation" (GP II, 102).

aggregates come into existence whenever certain things are related in a certain way and a mind apprehends the relation in which they stand. They then cease to exist as soon as the mind stops apprehending the relevant relation. These criteria of persistence make reference to the unifying activity of a mind, but are not conventional, mind-dependent or arbitrary criteria. And certainly they are not trivial.

There is also a second, notorious problem with any weak phenomenalist interpretation of Leibnizian aggregates. The claim that the existence of an aggregate depends, even if only in part, on the unifying capacity of some mind stands in prima facie tension with the idea that an aggregate is nothing 'over and above' its various constituents. As Leibniz writes to De Volder, "an aggregate is not anything other than all those things from which it results [*aggregatum nihil aliud est quam ea omnia simul sumta ex quibus resultat*]" (G II, 256). We've seen that, at least in some cases, 'all those things' from which an aggregate results are entities whose existence is *not* mind-dependent. So, how can *all* aggregates indiscriminately be mind-dependent, if an aggregate is nothing else than 'all those things' from which it results?

5. Pluralities

In this section, I wish to argue, against the phenomenalist interpretation, that not all Leibnizian aggregates are mind-dependent entities. More precisely, my view is that it is possible for an aggregate to be entirely mind-independent, because an aggregate is nothing more than a plurality of things. I shall start by briefly explaining what I mean by a 'plurality'. Next, I will have to show how the view I'm defending can be reconciled with the argument

from unity. It will then remain to be seen what textual, historical and philosophical reasons can be cited in support of a non-phenomenalist interpretation of the kind I'm proposing.

By 'plurality' of entities I simply mean *many entities*. A plurality is not a *set* of entities. More important, a plurality is not a *mereological composite* that stands in a whole-part relations to its constituents.[34] The plurality simply *is* those entities: if I refer to the plurality, all I am referring to are those many entities. (To be absolutely clear on this point: when I say that the plurality *is* those entities, I am *not* postulating any one-many identity relation. In my usage, 'the plurality' can be regarded as a *pseudo-singular term*, a syntactically singular phrase that is semantically plural, referring to many things, not one. The same is true, in my view, of Leibniz's usage of 'the aggregate'. Thus, claims like 'the plurality is those entities' or 'the aggregate is those substances' are no more mysterious or problematic than the sentence 'The Beatles are Paul, John, George and Ringo').[35]

Now, quite predictably, since the plurality simply *is* those entities, its metaphysical status is the metaphysical status of those entities. Thus, a plurality of sense-data will be as mind-dependent as are the sense data. But a plurality of mind-independent substances will be just as mind-independent as are the substances in it. I believe that Leibnizian aggregates should be thought of as pluralities. If I'm right, then, a mind-independent aggregate is not a

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[34] In this sense, my proposal differs substantially from the 'mereological' account of aggregation explored by G, A. Hartz : "Leibniz's Phenomenalism", in: *The Philosophical Review* 101 (1992) No. 3: pp. 511-549.

[35] The idea of a many-one identity relation can be found in D. L. M. Baxter: "Many-One Identity", in: *Philosophical Papers* 17 (1988) No.3, pp. 193-216. I borrow the notion of a 'pseudo-singular' term from A. Oliver and T. Smiley: *Plural Logic* (forthcoming). There is no principled reason for thinking that one cannot refer to many entities without referring to the set or the mereological fusion of those entities. The idea is, of course, central to the project of any plural logic: plural terms are to pluralities what singular terms are to single individuals and plural quantification allows us to do with pluralities what ordinary quantification allows us to do with single individuals. Arguably, plural referring expressions can be found also in natural languages: 'the Twin Towers', 'the even numbers', 'the square roots of 4' or 'the pair' can all be naturally regarded as plural terms.

contradiction in terms. On the contrary, when Leibniz says that bodies are aggregates of substances, he is identifying bodies with mind-independent pluralities. This may sound strange, for we've seen that there's a valid argument, the argument from unity, to the effect that all aggregates have their being in the mind. Doesn't this rule out the very possibility of mind-independent aggregates? I think not. I agree with Lodge that "having being need not be the same thing as having reality" (p. 483). Unlike Lodge, however, I want to suggest that what should be relevant in assessing the metaphysical status of *x* is, first and foremost, the reality of *x* and not the being of *x*. Let me explain.

Careful consideration of what Leibniz says regarding the 'being' and the 'reality' of an *ens per aggregationem* shows not only that being and reality need not be the same thing, but that they are not and cannot be the same thing. Consider first some already familiar passages in which Leibniz presents his views regarding the 'being' (*entitas*, *estre, entité*) of aggregates:

> "Being [*ens*] and unity [*unum*] are convertible and when a being is brought about through aggregation, it is also one in this way, even if its unity and its being [*entitas*] are semimental".
> (G II, 304)

> "The only perfect unity that these entities by aggregation have is a mental one, and consequently their very being [*Entité*] is also in a way mental, or phenomenal, like that of the rainbow". (Remnant/Bennett, p. 146; GP V, 133)

Whether or not one endorses the argument from unity, it seems difficult to deny that these passages commit Leibniz to the thesis that the being of aggregates is mental or semi-mental.

Regarding the 'reality' (*realitas*, *realité*) of aggregates, Leibniz's position is also unequivocal:

"In an army, there is nothing real [*nullum reale*] that does not come from the reality of the things of which the army is an aggregate [*ex partium unde aggregatur realitate*]". (A VI, 4,556)

"I have shown, first, that what can be divided in many parts is composed of many parts and is an aggregate. Second, what is aggregated from many parts has only a mental unity [*non sunt unum nisi mente*] and does not have any reality [*realitatem*] over and above that which is borrowed from the things of which it is an aggregate. Third, it follows that what can be divided in parts cannot have any reality [*realitatem*] if they do not contain entities that cannot be divided. Hence, they do not have any other reality than that of the unities they contain [*nullam habent aliam realitatem quam eam quae est Unitatum quae insunt*]". (G II, 261)

Of the 'being' of aggregates, Leibniz says that it comes *only* from the mind. Of the 'reality' of aggregates, he says that it comes *only* from the unities they contain. How are we to make sense of these apparently conflicting claims? Of course, one might take Leibniz to be contradicting himself or speaking carelessly. Even less plausibly, it might be suggested that Leibniz changed his mind several times or that he wavered between different accounts of the ontological status of aggregates. But a more natural explanation is that 'being' and 'reality' are used to designate different things: while being is bestowed upon the aggregate by an external mind, the reality of an aggregate is entirely 'borrowed' or 'inherited' from the reality of the things of which the aggregate is composed.[36] If this hypothesis is correct, before we can settle the question as to whether or not aggregates are mind-dependent, we need to understand the difference between the *being* and the *reality* of something.

The first thing to be said about Leibniz's notion of 'being' is that to have being (*entitas*, *estre, entité*) is not enough for having existence (*existentia*, *existence*). For something to have being is simply for it to be *possible* or *conceivable*: "an *ens* is something that can be

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[36] G II, 267.

conceived in a distinct way" (A VI, 4, 869) and "what has being or is possible [*ens seu possibile*] is what does not involve A-and-not-A" (A VI, 4,631). [37] Coordinately, something does not have being if and only if it is impossible.[38] More importantly, something can have being (i.e. be possible) and yet not exist: "everything that exists is possible, but something possible does not exist" (A VI, 4,931). This is because "what exists is possible, but has something over and above possibility […]: we conceive actual existence as something added to possibility or essence" (A VI, 4, 762).

The observation that to have 'being' is not yet to have 'actual existence' should already cast doubt on the claim that aggregates have a mind-dependent existence *because* their being is mental. Such doubts are further strengthened when we move to consider the claim that aggregates are just as real or have just as much 'reality' as the substances they contain. Although there's more than one sense in which Leibniz uses the term 'reality',[39] I agree with Benson Mates that "*reality*, in the most fundamental sense of that term, is regarded as consisting exclusively of individual substances", whereas abstract entities, such as relations and concepts, though generally classified as '*entia*',[40] are not *real* or have no actual existence.[41] Even in contexts where he uses the term 'reality' in a weaker sense, to designate no more than the *degree* of possibility or perfection of something, Leibniz always connects the 'reality' of an entity to its existence in the actual world: this is because the degree of reality of something coincides with its degree of perfection (A VI, 4 1358; A VI, 4, 1429)

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[37] See also A VI, 4, 864 and A VI, 4, 1500.

[38] A VI, 4, 935.

[39] See A. Heinekamp: "Zu den Begriffen Realitas, Perfectio und Bonum Metaphysicum bei Leibniz", in: *Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa* 1 (1968), pp. 207-22.

[40] At C 437 Leibniz says "abstracta sunt entia", and he does the same at LH IV iii C 85r.

[41] According to Rescher (2003), "Leibniz espoused a theory of "(real) existence" according to which only substances and their properties are real" (N. Rescher: *On Leibniz*, Pittsburgh 2003, p. 71). This is, Rescher suggests, essentially the theory of Avicenna, Aquinas and Scotus.

and "perfection or essence is a demand for existence, a demand from which follows existence" (A VI, 4, 1446).

If we now go back to Leibniz's claim that aggregates 'inherit' their reality from their internal constituents, we can see that a natural consequence of that claim is that aggregates are *not* necessarily mind-dependent. The aggregate of *a* and *b* will inherit or borrow all of its reality from *a* and *b*: if *a* and *b* have a mind-independent existence, so will their aggregate. Hence, aggregates of substances will belong to *reality* (in the most fundamental sense of the term) just as much as substances themselves. (If, on the other hand, we interpret 'reality' as indicating the degree of perfection of something, again we reach the conclusion that aggregates 'strive' for or 'stretch out' to actual existence to the same degree as the many things out of which they are composed). These considerations fit nicely with the hypothesis that aggregates are no more than pluralities. By contrast, they seem to be difficult to square with the idea that all aggregates are mental or semi-mental entities. Notice that Leibniz never says that an aggregate inherits reality from its constituents only when some mind performs a mental act of aggregation. And surely he would not consider mental entities to be as real (or, for that matter, as perfect) as individual substances.

This leaves us with the problem of understanding the sense in which the 'being' of aggregates- that is to say, their possibility or distinct conceivability- is a product of 'opinion or custom', reflects the needs of 'convenience in reasoning' and is ultimately 'mental'. To facilitate this task, it might be useful to start by considering the kind of 'being' possessed by individual substances and then contrast it with that of *entia per aggregationem*.

Individual substances are Leibniz's chief example of e*ntia per se*: entities that have unity and being by virtue of their own nature. Now, if for something to have 'being' is for it to be possible or distinctly conceivable, what could be meant by saying that individual substances have *per se* being? The idea should be that an individual substance is conceivable

in a distinct way just by virtue of existing and being the entity it is. Given Leibniz's account

of substances, it is not difficult to see why this must be so. One central feature of Leibnizian

substances is that each of them comes equipped with a complete individual concept, a concept

that contains all of its predicates, past, present and future. Since all true predication has some

basis in the nature of the thing itself (GP IV, 433), the complete individual concept of a

substance perfectly reflects its nature. Thus, if x is an individual substance, there is at least

one concept under which x can be distinctly conceived- it complete individual concept- whose

satisfaction conditions need not be set by the mind or by opinion or custom, but are set, so to

speak, by the nature of a real thing, namely x itself. For example, if Adam is an individual

substance, it is Adam himself that, just by virtue of existing and being the substance it is,

dictates the conditions under which reality can be distinctively conceived as containing

Adam: no room is left for any arbitrary or conventional choice.

Let's now move to consider the being of aggregates. An aggregate is just many things,

plura entia. For many entities to have being is for them to be possible or distinctinctly

conceivable. Now, in order to distinctly conceive many things, we have to conceive them in

the manner of one, and to conceive them in the manner of one we have to conceive them as

'the things that are arranged college-wise' or 'the things that are arranged army-wise' or 'the

things that are arranged heap-wise' and so and so on. These concepts differ from complete

individual concepts in at least two important respects. The first is that the choice of the

particular relation that features in the concept of 'the college', 'the army' or 'the heap' is

entirely conventional. Of course "there are sometimes more, and sometimes fewer, grounds

for supposing that several things constitute a single thing, in proportion to the extent to which

these things are connected" (Ariew/Garber, p. 86; GP II, 96): to use Leibniz's examples, it is

more appropriate to craft a single concept or name for the things arranged society-wise or

machine-wise than it is to craft one concept or name for the things to be found in a confused

mob (Ariew/Garber, p. 89; GP II, 100). Yet, ultimately, reality offers no ground for preferring one or another way of grouping and distinctly conceiving pluralities: the choice is determined ⑤⑥❷④❸▢, not ⌁❶❷⑩⤳⓪. This is the sense in which, as we say in § 2, the only the being that an aggregate possesses is supplied by the mind for convenience in reasoning, according to opinion or custom (premise *(ii)* of the argument from unity). The second respect in which the concepts of 'the college', 'the army' or 'the heap' differ from any complete individual concept is that there is literally nothing in metaphysical reality whose nature these concepts describe or reflect: these concepts do not express intrinsic properties of real things, they pick out many things in terms of some *relation* holding among them and the relation common to many entities "is a merely mental thing, whose foundations are the modifications of the single individuals" (GP II, 486). This is the sense in which the accidental being that the mind supplies the aggregate with consists in a relation (premise *(iii)* of the argument from unity) and is, therefore, mental. The upshot is that aggregates are not *per se* distinctly conceivable and, hence, have no *per se* being: when what needs to be distinctly conceived are many entities, it takes the activity of a mind to craft a concept apt for the purpose.

It is important to see that, even if the concepts of a 'heap', a 'college' or an 'army' are crafted by our mind for convenience in reasoning and make essential reference to mental entities like relations, this does not mean that what these concept refer to- heaps, colleges and armies- are mind-dependent entities. For even if the conditions that a plurality needs to satisfy in order to qualify as a heap of stones are conventionally fixed by the mind and spelled out in relational terms, this does not yet entail that a plurality's fulfilling or not fulfilling those conditions is a fact requiring the operations of one or more minds: given our choice of certain conventions for the concept of 'heap', the things in the plurality may well be arranged 'heap-wise' simply in virtue of the way they are related to each other.[42] To this it will be objected

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[42] This, in turn, implies the natural result that whether or not there are possible worlds or conceivable scenarios containing colleges, armies and heaps of stones need not depend on the actual or possible existence of a mind

that it depends on the mind whether or not certain things are related among themselves one way or another, precisely because relations are ideal or mental things. But this objection rests on a misunderstanding of Leibniz's doctrine of the ideality of relations. It is clear enough that, when construed as accidents that inhere simultaneously in two distinct subjects, Leibniz believes that in reality there are no such things as relations. So, for instance, the relation *being father of* exists only as an ideal entity, if it exists at all. But this certainly does not mean that the truth of the claim that 'David is the father of Solomon' depends on the mind. Relations might be ideal, but the intrinsic grounds for such relations would exist even if, per impossibile, there were no perceivers. David would not cease to be the father of Solomon just because we stopped entertaining or thinking about the ideal entity corresponding to the two-place relation *being father of*. Similarly, the elements of a given plurality need not cease to be arranged '*k*-wise' (and, therefore, need not cease to be a *k*-aggregate: a college, an army or a heap) just because some perceivers stopped apprehending the relation corresponding to their being so arranged.[43]

A different objection arises from considering Leibniz's argument that "if there are aggregates of substances, there must also be true substances from which all the aggregates result" (Ariew/Garber, p. 85). The view that aggregates are just pluralities of entities would seem to trivialize that argument: for if an aggregate is just many entities, what could be more obvious than the observation that the aggregate's existence requires the existence of those

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that conceives a plurality of entities under the relevant concept. The possibility of a plurality is mental or conventional without being, in any important sense, mind-dependent.

[43] It might be that, in the case of inanimate material bodies, the conditions that certain substances need to satisfy in order to be arranged 'body-wise' make explicit reference to how those substances appear or would appear to us in perception. In this sense, one might think that whether or not certain substances are arranged 'body-wise' is a mind-dependent fact. Even if this is indeed the case, however, it is difficult to see why the same should be true for all kinds of aggregates. And even if it was true for all kind of aggregates, this would still be compatible with *aggregates themselves* being entirely mind-independent.

many entities?[44] My answer to this objection is that Leibniz's argument is more subtle than it seems. One must not forget that the polemical target of that argument is the view of those who think that the infinite divisibility of matter poses no substantial threat to the reality of inanimate material bodies. According to Leibniz, holding this view is tantamount to thinking that reality might be constituted by pluralities 'all the way through'. Thinking that each plurality might be, in turn, a plurality of other pluralities generates what Leibniz considers a vicious regress. His view is that we must necessarily come down to beings endowed with true unity. True unities are therefore immediate conceptual and metaphysical 'requisites' (*requisita immediata*) for the existence of pluralities.[45] The most explicit presentation of this thesis is, to my knowledge, the following:

> "For indeed, if there are many substances [*plures substantiae*], then it is necessary that there be one true substance [*una vere substantia*]. Or, to put the same thing another way, is there are many created things [*plura Entia creata*], it is necessary that there be some created thing that is truly one. For a plurality of things [*Entis pluralitas*] can neither be understood nor can exist unless one first understands the thing that is one, that to which the multitude [*multitudo*] necessarily reduces". (A VI, 4, 1668)

The thesis that aggregates are just pluralities of beings seems to me to have more secure conceptual foundations than any view on which aggregates such as material bodies are 'hybrid' entities with a mind-dependent existence and mind-independent constituents. A non-phenomenalist account of the kind I'm proposing is also more consonant with Leibniz's dismissive attitude towards questions regarding the conditions of persistence of an aggregate.

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[44] Thanks to Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra here.

[45] A VI, 4, 627; A VI, 4, 998; A VI, 4, 1001. If Leibniz's thesis were a thesis about language, it could be expressed as the view that plural terms conceptually presuppose singular terms, or, perhaps, that reality cannot be satisfactorily described using only plural terms.

What the account entails is that *no* proper entity comes into existence when many substances are conceived in the manner of one by a single act of the mind: all there is is the plurality of those entities, which may, for all we know, exist independently of the various conventional ways in which we conceptualize their existence. It remains to be seen whether or not the view I've tried to sketched- beside being conceptually viable and prima facie compatible with the spirit of Leibniz's remarks on aggregates- can also form the basis of an historically supported and textually plausible interpretation. This is what I will try to show in the remainder of the paper.

Let me start with the textual evidence. Numerous passages suggest that Leibniz took aggregates to be no more than pluralities of entities. So, for example, consider the claims, quoted earlier, that "an aggregate is not anything other than all those things from which it results [*nihil aliud est quam ea omnia simul sumta ex quibus resultat*]" (G II, 256) and that "what does not have more unity than a pile of logs or bricks is not, properly speaking, one entity, but rather many entities [*non esse proprie Unum Ens sed potius Entia*], even though a single name is used to designate them all" (A VI, 4,1464). Recall § 2 of the *Monadology*, where it is said that "the composite is nothing more than a collection, or *aggregate*, of simples" (Ariew/Garber, p. 213; GP VI, 607). Or take the *Principles of Nature and Grace*, whose opening paragraph states that "a *composite substance* is a collection of simple substances" and that composites and bodies are "multitudes" (Ariew/Garber, p. 207; GP VI, 598). If Leibnizian aggregates are nothing over and above pluralities of entities, these passages can be given a literal reading. But if every aggregate is in fact a *single* mind-dependent entity, we have no choice other than saying that Leibniz was careless or inaccurate in insisting that an aggregate is nothing more than the many things entering it.

It is also useful to look at what Leibniz writes about inanimate material bodies and, more in general, about what he calls 'secondary matter'. We are told that "[secondary] matter

is an aggregate or the resultant of substances" (Ariew/Garber, p. 274). But we are also told

that "matter or extended mass is nothing else than many entities [*plura entia*]" or "a multitude

of substances" (GP II, 119). Leibniz writes to Bernoulli, even at the risk of sounding slightly

ungrammatical, that "secondary matter, or mass, is not a substance, but substanc*es* [*materia*

secunda seu massa non est substantia, sed substantiae]" (A III, 7, 885; my emphasis). And

expressing himself along analogous lines, he explains to De Volder that "matter is indeed this

very plurality of things itself [*ipsae illae res plures*]" (GP II, 195). That the mind has no

crucial role to play in the metaphysical constitution of these pluralities is suggested by what

Leibniz says on at least one occasion, when he writes to Princess Sophie that "a mass [*masse*]

of matter [...] (leaving the understanding aside) is just an aggregate, a pile [*amas*], a multitude

of an infinity of true substances" (GP VII, 564).

Original as it may sound, the view of aggregates that emerges from these passages fits

well with what Leibniz writes in a text dating from 1685, that "in effect, from many distinct

parts one can *never* compose an entity that is really one, and every substance is indivisible,

and what has parts is *not* an entity, but a phenomenon" (A VI, 4, 627, my emphasis). Notice

that Leibniz's view is *not* that several distinct entities *could* give rise to a composite with the

help of an external mental act of aggregation. His view seems to be that what we call

'composites' are not even entities, because composition *never* occurs: a plurality is and will

always remain no more than a disconnected jumble of *plura entia*.[46]

This view is not completely unprecedented. On the contrary, the terms employed by

Leibniz ("assemblage" ,"amas", "multitude") are impressively reminiscent of the terminology

used by Cordemoy in his 1666 treatise *On the Distinction between Body and Soul*, which

contains the exposition of an atomistic theory of matter. Cordemoy says that a portion of

matter is a "collection [*assemblage*]" or "mass [*amas*]" of innumerable unperceivable bodies.

So, for instance, "what we call our body is in effect a mass of one million bodies [...] even if

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[46] This is, in essence, a form of *mereological nihilism*.

we regard this collection of bodies as though it were a single entity, for the simple reason that all of its components concur to the same purpose".[47] These and other similarities between Leibniz's and Cordemoy's words are no coincidence. Leibniz acknowledges more than once that his argument that "if there were no substantial unities, there would be nothing substantial or real in the collection" (Ariew/Garber 142; GP IV, 482) is, in effect, the same argument used by Cordemoy to infer the truth of atomism.[48] It should therefore come as no surprise that Leibniz also follows Cordemoy in thinking that "it would be completely inappropriate to suppose that a new entity is brought into existence" when several atoms are considered together in various arrangements (Clair/Girbal, p. 105).

One last point in favour of the thesis that Leibnizian aggregates are just pluralities of entities comes from considering Leibniz's theory of extension. According to this theory, "extension is not an absolute predicate" but rather a mode, that "is relative to that which is extended or diffused, and therefore cannot be separated from the nature of that which is diffused any more than a number can be separated from that which is counted" (Ariew/Garber, p. 251; GP IV, 394). The approach I'm recommending allows us to make perfect sense of this theory as well as of the idea that some aggregates (i.e. inanimate material bodies) are extended. For if an aggregate is just 'those many things' (*ipsae illae res plures*), presumably it can only be extended in the sense that "the same nature is diffused through many things [*per multa*] at the same time, as for example malleability or specific gravity or yellowness is in gold [or] whiteness is in milk" (ibid.). If bodies are aggregates, aggregates are pluralities, and extension is a feature of bodies, what could be more obvious than that "extension is not the attribute of a substance, but of a multitude [*multitudinis*]" (A VI, 4,186), as Leibniz writes in his comments upon Malebranche's *De la Recherche de la Verité*? By

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[47] *Géraud de Cordemoy: Œuvres philosophiques*, ed. by Pierre Clair and François Girbal, Paris 1968 (hereafter : Clair/Girbal), p. 101.

[48] G II, 78 and C 523.

contrast, if what it takes for a body to be an aggregate is for it to be a *single* mind-dependent entity with many real-world constituents, Leibniz's insistence that extension is not an absolute predicate would be unmotivated: extension could simply be a mind-dependent property of a *single* mind-dependent entity.

6. Conclusions

The difficulties affecting what I called 'phenomenalist' interpretations of Leibnizian aggregates must not be underestimated. In its crudest version, strong phenomenalism contradicts Leibniz's point that at least certain aggregates are not mere coherent appearances, deprived of all reality. As for the more sophisticated strong phenomenalist approach proposed by Adams, it invalidates Leibniz's argument that *if* there are aggregates of substances, *then* there must also be substances from which all the aggregates result.

Weak phenomenalist interpretations are no better off. Even ignoring the fact that they commit Leibniz to a bizarre ontology of 'hybrid' entities, while failing to appreciate his deflationary attitude towards *entia per aggregationem*, it is difficult to see how they could be reconciled with Leibniz's peremptory claim that "an aggregate is not anything other than all those things from which it results" (GP II, 256).

The non-phenomenalist account I'm proposing does not face any of these difficulties. On the contrary, there are at least three advantages in construing Leibnizian aggregates as pluralities. First, this is in line with the spirit and the letter of Leibniz's remarks about aggregation and, more in particular, about the '*being*' and the '*reality*' of aggregates. Second, it seems perfectly natural to find Leibniz advocating a 'nihilist' solution to the problems of mereological composition: a similar solution had already been defended by Cordemoy.

Finally, an account that identifies aggregates as pluralities provides a key to understanding Leibniz's prima facie puzzling theory of extension.

    I conclude that any phenomenalist interpretation of Leibnizian aggregates is false: aggregates have a mental being, but something can be an aggregate without being a mind-dependent entity.