

LEIBNIZ'S PREFERENCE FOR AN INTENSIONAL LOGIC
(A REPLY TO MR. PARKINSON)

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While Leibniz's interpreters have never disputed the fact that he preferred to interpret his logic intensionally, there has been, and continues to be, disagreement over the reasons for this preference.

The great French interpreter of Leibniz's logic, Louis Couturat, held that it was Leibniz's excessive respect for Aristotle which led him to prefer the intensional point of view.¹ C. I. Lewis has said that the preference was derived partly from habit and partly from rationalistic inclination.² More recently, G. H. R. Parkinson has disputed Couturat's claim, and insisted that Leibniz had a far better reason for his preference.³

Parkinson claims that, while Leibniz mentions his agreement with Aristotle, this is not the same as accepting a particular position *because* Aristotle held it; and furthermore, that if this were the only reason for Leibniz's choice, it would do him no credit.⁴

This is quite correct. Leibniz did hold Aristotle in high regard as a logician, and often mentioned his concurrence with Aristotle's views;⁵ but this is no good reason to suppose that Leibniz's position is based upon Aristotle's authority.

Instead, Parkinson contends, the reason for Leibniz's preference is to be found in his statement that "concepts do not depend upon the existence of individuals."⁶ Parkinson interprets this to mean that Leibniz's desire to deny existential import to universal propositions led him to adopt the intensional approach. While Parkinson grants that it is "the commonly held

1. *La logique de Leibniz* (Paris, 1901), p. 438.

2. *A Survey of Symbolic Logic* (Berkeley, 1918), p. 14.

3. *Logic and Reality in Leibniz's Metaphysics* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 17-22.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

5. For example, regarding the intensional interpretation, see sec. 16 of "General Investigations Concerning the Analysis of Concepts and Truths," in: Louis Couturat, *Opuscules et fragments inédits de Leibniz* (Paris, 1903), p. 366.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 387, sec. 130.

view that Leibniz ascribed existential import to universal propositions,"⁷ he believes this view is refuted by a passage from *Difficultates quaedam Logicae*⁸ in which Leibniz resolves the problems of justifying subalternation and *conversio per accidens*, not by attributing existential import to universal propositions, but by denying it of particular propositions. Parkinson asserts, "this seems clear confirmation of the view that for Leibniz the universal affirmative proposition does not have existential import."⁹

Parkinson's position is defective for two reasons. First, it depends upon taking the statement in *Difficultates quaedam Logicae* as definitive. Secondly, it rests upon a faulty interpretation of Leibniz's statement that "concepts do not depend upon the existence of individuals."

Parkinson dismisses as inconclusive all the evidence which Couturat propounded for his position. But there is other good evidence that Leibniz did sometimes take positions inconsistent with that which Parkinson attributes to him. In the "General Investigations" (1686), Leibniz attempted several different formulations for a logical calculus. In one of these formulations he did attribute existential import to particular propositions,¹⁰ and in the final formulation of this treatise he assigned existential import to universal propositions.¹¹ Since this work dates from the period of Leibniz's mature thinking, and shows no consistent position on the question of existential import,¹² it seems more plausible to assume that Leibniz did not adopt a definitive attitude on this issue. And even if he did, the one paper from 1690 would not be sufficient evidence.

Leibniz's statement that "concepts do not depend upon the existence of individuals" must be interpreted in connection with his doctrine that the fundamental relation between concepts in a proposition is that of containment.¹³ In the case of truths of reason, this relation can be shown to hold by an analysis involving only a finite number of steps, and so we can determine this for ourselves. However, in the case of truths of fact an infinite number of steps are involved, and this analysis cannot be accomplished by us, but only by God. Truths of reason, then, are known through concepts alone without any need to appeal to the existence of individuals denoted by the concepts. Truths of fact can be known by us only through an appeal to experience, but by God through concepts alone. Thus, it is human

7. He cites *La logique de Leibniz*, p. 349, and W. and M. Kneale, *The Development of Logic* (Oxford, 1962), p. 323.

8. *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. C. I. Gerhardt (Berlin, 1875-90), VII, 211. ". . . 'Some man is a laugher' is true in the region of ideas, *i.e.*, if you take 'laugher' for a certain species of possible being." (This paper dates from *c.* 1690 -- the third major period of Leibniz's work in logic.)

9. Parkinson, p. 20.

10. Secs. 165, 167 (in *Opuscules et fragments*, p. 394).

11. Sec. 199 (in *Opuscules et fragments*, p. 398).

12. Parkinson cites the *General Investigations* on several occasions, but seems not to notice the passages in question.

13. E.g., "General Investigations," sec. 184 (in *Opuscules et fragments*, p. 395).

limitations that make it necessary to appeal to the existent; all truths would be truths of reason for us were it not for our limitations.

Given Leibniz's understanding of the nature of the proposition and his predilection for divine knowledge, he was led quite naturally to an intensional interpretation of logic. His preference for the intensional viewpoint was not based upon a certain position regarding existential import because Leibniz never made up his mind on this point. He was influenced primarily by rationalistic considerations though no doubt the example of Aristotle was also of some consequence.

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