

General Observations¹²

Translated by David Blumenfeld and Donald Rutherford

Something, such as *A*, likewise *B*, likewise *C*.

If *N* is not *A*, and *N* is not *B* and *N* is not *C*, and so forth, *N* will be said to be Nothing.

This is what people commonly say: Nothing has no attributes.

It is also evident from this that for the purpose of defining simple terms it is necessary sometimes to presuppose propositions.

A simple proposition: *A is B*, where *A* is called the subject, *B* the predicate, *is* the copula.

A conditional proposition: *If A is B, [then] C is D*, where the proposition *A is B* is called the antecedent, and the proposition *C is D* is called the consequent.

A simple proposition is true, if the predicate is contained in the subject, that is, if when the terms *A* and *B* have been resolved (which occurs by substituting other more distinct equivalent terms), it is clear that the content, or the concept of the predicate, is contained in the subject. For this reason, Aristotle too is accustomed to say that the predicate is in the subject.

A conditional proposition is true if the consequent is contained in the antecedent, that is, if when the terms of the antecedent as well as the consequent have been resolved, it is clear that the consequent is contained in the antecedent; that is, he who asserts the content of the antecedent by that very fact asserts the consequent or the content of the consequent, though it may sometimes happen that one will assert something more in the antecedent.

First absolute inference: *A is B [and], B is C, therefore A is C*, that is, *if C is in B and B is in A, C will be in A*.

First hypothetical inference: *If A is B [then] C is D. Now A is B. Therefore, C is D*.

If *A is B* and *B is A*, then *A* and *B* are called the same. Or *A* and *B* are the same, if they can be substituted for each other everywhere (except however in those cases where what is at stake is not the thing but the manner of conceiving, where they certainly differ. Thus, *Peter* and *the Apostle who denied Christ* are the same, and one term can be substituted in place of the other, except when I consider the manner of conceiving that person, which some people call reflexive. For example, when I say *Peter insofar as he was the apostle who denied Christ, to that extent he sinned*, I certainly cannot substitute *Peter*, that is, I cannot say *Peter insofar as he was Peter sinned*).

If *B is A*, and *C is A*, and yet *B* and *C* are the same, then this is not said to be so unless there is one A; but if *B* and *C* are not the same, then there are many As. For this reason, it is evident that the definition of one and many presupposes the definition of the same and different, as of things that are simpler.

¹ LH IV 7C Bl. 103-104. A VI.4, N. 131, pp. 550-557 (Latin). The Akademie editors suggest a date between summer 1683 and the beginning of 1685. The piece is commonly

² Leibniz's note: "By letters I understand concrete terms, by propositions universals, unless otherwise indicated."

If *B* is *A* and *C* is *A*, and *B* and *C* are not the same, [then] there are said to be two *As*. If moreover it is added that *D* is *A*, and none of *B*, *C* and *D* are the same as any other of those same things, it will be said that there are three *As*, and so on.

It seems that the creed [*Symbolum*] attributed to St. Athanasius conflicts with this definition. In it it is said: *The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; and the Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit, and the Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son* (that is, of these three, none is the same as any other from among the same things) and nevertheless there will not be three but still one. In that case it should be admitted that if *God* were being understood in the same full sense when it is said *The Father is God*, etc., as when it is said *God is one*, then clearly it either implies a manifest contradiction or it changes the received concepts of one and many, which would not be to explain the mystery but to speak nonsense. It should be known, then, that when it is said *There is only one God*, *God* is to be understood absolutely, that is, as is commonly said, taken essentially, of whom there are three persons in a single essence. But when it is said *The Father is God, the Son is God*, etc. *God* is not understood absolutely, taken as containing all the persons, that is, as containing three persons, for it cannot be said that the Father or the Son contains three persons, rather *God* is understood relatively, or, as they say, is taken personally, that is, as some one person of the divinity. In the same way, the Holy Trinity does not conflict with the principle that those which are the same three in one are the same as each other, for when the Father and the Son are said to be the same *God*, then *God* does not signify the triune *God*, nor does it signify a person of the divinity, but the same or the One *God* is said of the same thing with a number [of persons] participating in the divine essence.

If the same thing is *B* and is also *C* and likewise *D* etc. because it is *A*, or if the term *A* involves all the terms *B* and *C* and *D*, etc. which can be said of the same thing, then the term *A* expresses the singular substance itself, that is, the concept of a singular substance is a complete term containing everything that can be said of it. So if someone is strong and rash and learned, and a king and a leader of an army, and victor of the battle at Arbela, and other things of this sort that are said of Alexander the Great, then *God* at any rate, when intuiting the singular essence of Alexander the Great, will see a certain complete concept in which all of those things are contained virtually, that is, from which all of those things follow. *King* cannot be inferred from *strong*, nor can *victor* be inferred from *leader*, but *strong* and *king* and *leader* and *victor* can be inferred from the concept of Alexander. And that there is indeed such a concept is obvious from the definition of a true proposition explained a little earlier. For when we say *Alexander is strong*, we mean nothing other than that *strong* is contained in the notion of Alexander, and the same is the case for the rest of Alexander's predicates.

From this it further follows that singular things, in fact, are lowest species and that there cannot ever be two singular things that are similar in all respects, and accordingly that the principle of individuation is always some specific difference, which St. Thomas used to say about intelligent beings, but the same is true of any individuals whatsoever. We note, however, that when I say that men differ as lowest species, I don't mean by the word 'species' (as is commonly done) some group of things that produce things similar to themselves, such as the species of men, dogs, or roses (though that notion is far from clear and it can be doubted whether wolves and dogs, and different breeds of dogs, differ by species); and it is also not a universal, or a term composed from a finite number of

terms, but a term whose particular concept differs from the concept of other terms. And certainly the concepts of Alexander the Great and of Julius Caesar differ, and it cannot be denied that we can infer many things from the concept of the former or that of the latter. Nevertheless, if anyone wants and is able to define a species so that it cannot be ascribed to singular things, I do not intend to quarrel with him about the use of words. It suffices that it cannot be said that there are two singular things similar to one another in every respect, for example, two eggs, for it is necessary that some things can be said about the one that cannot be said about the other. Otherwise, they can be substituted for one another, and there will be no reason then why they cannot rather be said to be one and the same. Now, if they have different predicates, then their concepts certainly are different, because those predicates will be in them. From this one point, however, many extremely important things follow in physics, which one may not easily foresee now.

‘Universal substance’ signifies any singular substance having some common determination, just as when I say *human being*, I mean any singular substance having an organic body and using reason.

It seems that it still must be explained why a human being is said to be a substance [and] warm is said to be an accident, when on the contrary nothing prevents us from understanding by ‘warm’ any warm singular substance; and indeed I admit that inquiries of this sort concern the manner of conceiving and are not of much philosophical importance; if someone nonetheless thinks that it is worth the effort, we may say that the following secondary notions [*notiones secundas*] are correctly defined: *warm* is an adjective, or something that must be completed in order to produce a complete meaning [*integer sensus*], namely, *warm subject*, *warm substance*; but *human being* [*homo*] is a substantive, and when one says *human being*, a subject is already involved and one cannot be added without a tautology; for it is useless to say *human being subject*, but we rightly say *human subject* or *subject endowed with humanity*. Nor do I see that anything prevents us from being able to say *calorio*, in the sense of *warm thing*, just as one says *homo*, that is, *thing endowed with humanity*, and *capito*, that is, *thing endowed with a large head*, or *large-headed animal*, if usage or linguistic analogy supports this; and *calorio*, *mugil*, *capito*, *naso* are substances as much as *homo* is, although there is no genus or species capable of reproducing proper to things with a big nose [*nasonum*] in the way there is for human beings, for here we are taking ‘species’ not in a physical sense, but in a more general sense.

A singular substance is that which cannot be said of another thing. That is, if a singular substance is said of something, it will be the same thing. Of course, if from the fact alone that *A* is *B*, it can be inferred also that *B* is *A*, that is, that *A* and *B* are the same, [then] *A* or *B* will be said to be a singular substance, that is, a thing subsisting per se. So, if it is said that *Peter is the apostle who denied Christ*, and from this, because it is known that there is only one such apostle, or because it can be inferred from that also, conversely, that *the apostle who denied Christ is Peter*, it follows that the apostle who denied Christ will be a person or a singular substance.

The distinction between real and apparent being, and real and apparent quality, merits being examined. And, in fact, we call those things which appear in dreams false or apparent, not so much because the cause of them is within us and there is nothing external corresponding to them (for, as I say elsewhere, nothing would preclude that), but rather because the things we dream agree neither with each other nor with other

phenomena that agree among themselves. I think that a rainbow, a parhelion, and other things of this sort can be called real phenomena, just like beings through aggregation such as a pile of wood or an army, for a rainbow is an aggregate of drops which joined together produce certain apparent colors in us. Apparent qualities are those which are not absolutely in things but insofar as they act on us, and so the same water will seem cold or lukewarm or hot, depending on how my hands are disposed. Nevertheless, there is this in it that is real: that it is naturally suited for producing this sensation in me when I am so disposed. It follows from this that a rainbow is on two counts of diminished reality, for it is both a being through aggregation from drops and the qualities by which it is known are apparent, or at least of that kind of real thing which is relative to our senses. Furthermore, I will show in the proper place that all bodies in which there is no soul or substantial form are only appearances, like dreams, which do not have any certain and determinate nature; and that all the attributes of bodies of this kind are only phenomena that lack a subject. From this it follows either that bodies are not real beings, or that all bodies are in some way animated.

We should examine also how a being through aggregation, like an army or even an unordered multitude of men, is one, and how its unity and reality differ from the unity and reality of some man. The most important difference to be noted seems to be in the attributes and operations. Some attributes are said equally of the whole and of the parts, such as that the army seized a place on the battlefield of Marathon, which is true also of the individual soldiers; others can be said of the whole alone, such as that the army is thirty thousand [strong], and that it is arranged in a crescent-shaped battle line; still, all these things can be asserted and expressed even if the multitude is not regarded as one, so that I can say that thirty thousand soldiers are present and that one soldier is situated in such a way with respect to another, just as the shape of the battle line we described requires that something be as far from some fixed point as other things are. But what in a man makes those parts one, and have attributes, which cannot be asserted without that union? Clearly, a faculty of sensing and appetite. But what is most important is that an army, accurately considered, is not the same for even a moment, for there is nothing real in it that does not result from the reality of the parts from which it is aggregated; and because its whole nature consists in number, shape, arrangement and similar things, with these changed it is not the same; but the human soul has its own reality and so it cannot end however the parts of the body are changed.

A thing can remain the same even though it may change, if from its very nature it follows that the same thing must have different successive states. Doubtless, I am said to be the same [individual] who existed earlier, because my substance involves all my past, present and future states, and in this way it is not ruled out that contradictories can be said of me; for this is the very nature of time, that contradictories can be true of the same thing according to different times.

Change is an aggregate of two contradictory states. But these states necessarily are understood to be immediate with respect to each other, since there is no third thing between contradictories.

A passion is a change in which perfection decreases, an action, a change in which perfection increases or is conserved.

But perfection is pure reality or what is positive and absolute in essence. Conversely, imperfection consists in limitation.

It can be doubted whether change can be attributed to God; and, indeed, change which involves imperfection cannot be attributed to God; still, variation or opposing predicates cannot be denied of him, thus today God produces something which a thousand years earlier he did not produce but was going to produce.

Just as the principle of individuation is a specific difference, so the principle of existence is the essence of things. Indisputably: every essence or reality demands existence just as every effort demands movement or effect, unless of course something stands in the way. And every possible thing involves not only possibility but also an effort to actually exist. It is not as if those things which do not exist possess an effort, but because the ideas of essences which actually exist in God make such a demand after God freely decided to choose that which is most perfect. Hence, just as any single weight on a balance makes an effort and pushes down on its side of the scale in accord with the measure of its weight and demands descent unless it is prevented, but what is heavier prevails, so every possible thing exists unless it interferes with the existence of something more perfect. From these considerations it is evident that essences of things depend on the divine nature, existences on the divine will, for they cannot acquire existence by their own force, but by a decree of God.

The cause of evil is due to the original imperfection of things, that is, the limitation of creatures, which is such that the perfection of which things are capable cannot be obtained without faults and punishments intervening, just as certain things cannot be obtained without incommensurable lines and motions being employed. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that sins do not exist unless the evils from the acts of sinning result in the greater good by means of other events.