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PHILOSOPHY

# Locke and Leibniz on Substance

Edited by  
Paul Lodge and Tom Stoneham



# **Locke and Leibniz on Substance**

**Edited by Paul Lodge  
and Tom Stoneham**

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# Locke and Leibniz on Substance

*'Locke and Leibniz on Substance* is an excellent volume. It is focused on two giants of the seventeenth century, their treatment of a topic of central importance in early modern philosophy, and it contains first-rate papers by leading scholars'.

—Laurence Carlin, *University of Wisconsin Oshkosh*

*'An outstanding collection of essays on a central topic in early modern philosophy'.*

—Brandon C. Look, *University of Kentucky*

*Locke and Leibniz on Substance* gathers together papers by an international group of academic experts, examining the metaphysical concept of substance in the writings of these two towering philosophers of the early modern period. Each of these newly commissioned essays considers important interpretative issues concerning the role that the notion of substance plays in the work of Locke and Leibniz, and its intersection with other key issues, such as personal identity. Contributors also consider the relationship between the two philosophers and contemporaries such as Descartes and Hume.

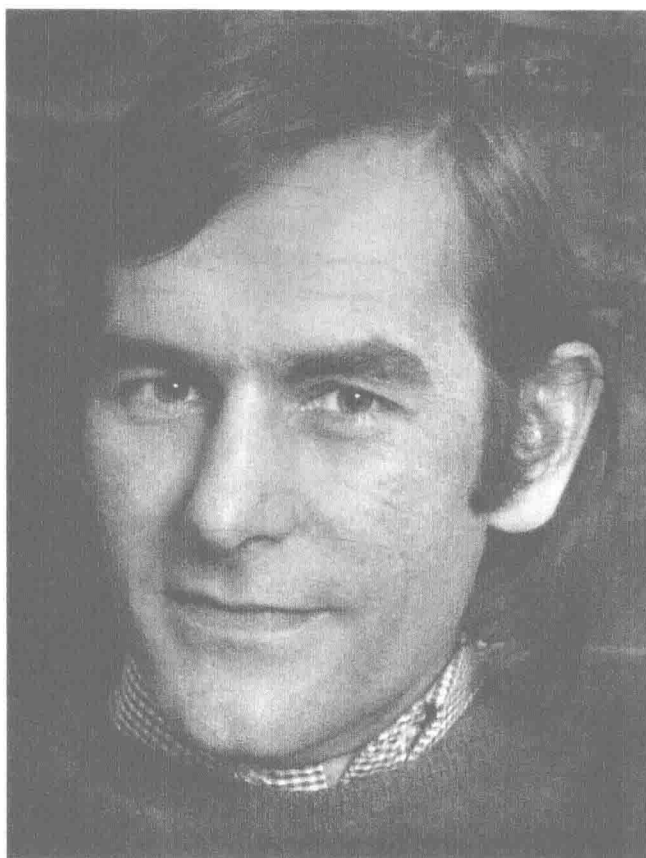
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Tom Stoneham is Professor of Philosophy at the University of York. He has written extensively on Berkeley, including a monograph (*Berkeley's World*, Oxford University Press, 2002), journal articles and contributions to handbooks (e.g. *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, 2009; *Debates in Modern Philosophy*, Routledge, 2013). He has been interviewed for *Philosophy Bites* with Nigel Warburton and *In Our Time* with Melvyn Bragg. He also writes on modal metaphysics and perceptual and phenomenal consciousness.

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**In memory of Roger (R. S.) Woolhouse, 1940–2011:  
teacher, colleague, friend**



# Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the text:

- A        Leibniz, G. W. *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften (Darmstadt and Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1923–). Cited by series, volume, and page (e.g. A VI.ii, p. 229).
- AG        *Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).
- AT        *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 12 Vols., Nouvelle présentation, ed. C. Adam and P. Tannery (Paris: J. Vrin, 1964–76). Cited by volume and page (e.g. AT VIII.1, p. 71).
- CSM        *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 Vols., ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothof, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–91). Cited by volume and page (e.g. CSM i, p. 235).
- D        *Gothofredi Guillelmi Leibnitii Opera Omnia*, 6 Vols., ed. L. Dutens (Geneva: De Tournes, 1768; reprint ed. Hildesheim: Olms, 1989). Cited by volume, part, and page (e.g. D II.i, p. 33).
- DNR        Hume, David. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980). Cited by part number (e.g. DNR 10).
- ECHU        Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Cited by book, chapter, and section (e.g. ECHU 4.3.6).
- EnHU        Hume, David. *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (1748; Oxford University Press, 2007). Cited by section and paragraph number within section (the paragraphing is the same for Nidditch/Selby-Bigge and Millican editions though only the latter includes the numbers) (e.g. EnHU 4.19).
- G        *Die Philosophische Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, 7 Vols., ed. C.I. Gerhardt (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875–90; reprint ed. Hildesheim: Olms, 1960). Cited by volume and page (e.g. G VI, p. 264).

- GM** *Leibnizens Mathematische Schriften*, 7 Vols., ed. C.I. Gerhardt (Berlin: Asher and Schmidt, 1849–63; reprint ed. Hildesheim: Olms, 1971). Cited by volume and page (e.g. GM II, p. 231).
- Grua** Leibniz, G.W. (1948) *Textes inédits d'après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Provinciale de Hanovre*, 2 Vols., ed. G. Grua, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Huggard** Leibniz, G.W. *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, ed. Austin Farrar, trans. E.M. Huggard (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985).
- L** Leibniz, G. W. *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Leroy Loemker (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969).
- LA** *The Leibniz–Arnauld Correspondence*, ed. and trans. H.T. Mason (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967; reprint ed. New York: Garland, 1985).
- LBr** *Leibniz Briefwechsel* (manuscripts): Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, Hanover; as catalogued in Eduard Bodemann, *Der Briefwechsel des Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz* (Hanover, 1889; reprint ed. Hildesheim: Olms, 1966). Cited by file and sheet (Blatt) number (e.g. LBr 57 2).
- LDB** Leibniz, G.W. (2007) *The Leibniz–Des Bosses Correspondence*, ed. and trans. Brandon C. Look and Donald Rutherford (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).
- LDV** Leibniz, G.W. *The Leibniz–De Volder Correspondence*, ed. and trans. Paul Lodge (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).
- LS** Locke, John, *The Works of John Locke*, Vol. 3 (1794).
- NE** Leibniz, G. W. *New Essays on Human Understanding*, ed. and trans. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- OC** *Oeuvres Complètes de Christiaan Huygens*, 22 Vols. (La Haye: Matinus Nijhoff, 1888–1950). Cited by volume and page (e.g. OC i, p. 27).
- OCM** *Oeuvres complètes de Malebranche*, ed. A. Robinet (Paris: Vrin, 1958–1978). Cited by volume and page (e.g. OCM XII, pp. 156–8).
- PHK** Berkeley, George. *Principles of Human Knowledge*. Cited by section number (e.g. PHK 147).
- PWL** *Philosophical Works of Leibnitz*, ed. and trans. George Martin Duncan (New Haven, CT: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1908).
- SO** *Benedict de Spinoza: Opera*, 4 Vols., ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Winter, 1925). Cited by volume and page (e.g. SO ii, p. 45).
- THN** Hume, David. *Treatise on Human Nature*, Vol. 1, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). Cited by book, part, and section (e.g. THN 1.2.2).
- WF** *Leibniz's 'New System' and Associated Contemporary Texts*, ed. and trans. R.S. Woolhouse and Richard Francks (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).



# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

*Paul Lodge and Tom Stoneham*

A memorial conference for Roger (R.S.) Woolhouse (1940–2011) was held in 2012 at the University of York, where Roger had taught for most of his career. The conference was organized by the editors and many, though not all, of the chapters in this volume are based upon versions of papers that were given at that conference. The theme of the memorial conference was *Substance in Early Modern Philosophy*, a topic with which Roger had concerned himself in a number of his published articles and in his 1993 book *Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz: The Concept of Substance in Seventeenth Century Metaphysics* (Routledge). Although it was not by the organizers' design, it can hardly have been a coincidence that all but one of the speakers chose to talk about the notion of substance as it appears in the two philosophers on whom Roger was leading authority for many years, namely Locke and Leibniz. In addition to numerous papers, Roger wrote three books on Locke as well as editing the Penguin edition of Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (ECHU), and producing (with Roland Hall) *80 Years of Locke Scholarship: A Bibliographical Guide* (Edinburgh University Press), an invaluable tool when it appeared in 1983's pre-Internet days. He only wrote one book about Leibniz, but managed to edit four collections of scholarly essays, including the four-volume *Leibniz: Critical Assessments* (Routledge), which contains no fewer than ninety-seven articles, and to edit and translate (with Richard Francks) two collections of Leibniz's writings.

Roger was both an important and original scholar and superb communicator of philosophy to a more general audience, and his work on Locke and Leibniz provided his focus for these gifts. His first book, *Locke's Philosophy of Science and Knowledge* (Blackwell, 1971), is a model of analytic history of philosophy, his *Locke: A Biography* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) will be the standard account of Locke's intellectual development for many years to come, and the edition of *Leibniz's New System and Associated Contemporary Texts* (Oxford University Press, 1997) that he produced with Richard Francks is one of our most important English-language resources for understanding Leibniz's mature philosophy. But Roger was no less skilled in presenting Locke to a student audience. His contribution to the 'Philosophers in Context' series *Locke* (University of Minnesota Press,

## 2 Paul Lodge and Tom Stoneham

1983) remains one of the best introductions for undergraduates, and his final work *Starting with Leibniz* (Continuum, 2010) is one of the few successful attempts to introduce Leibniz. His contribution to the study of early modern philosophy was immense.

In his *New Essays on Human Understanding* (NE) Leibniz represents the basic contrast between his own views and those of Locke in the voices of Philalethes (representing Locke) and Theophilus (representing Leibniz) as follows:

Philalethes. The ideas of substances are such combinations of simple ideas, as are taken to represent distinct particular things subsisting by themselves; in which the obscure notion of substance is always considered to be the first and chief, and is supposed without being known, whatever it may be in itself.

Theophilus. The idea of substance is not as obscure as it is thought to be. We can know about it the things that have to be the case, and the ones that are found to be the case through other things; indeed knowledge of concrete things is always prior to that of abstract ones—hot things are better known than heat.

(NE, p. 145)

In this passage, we find Leibniz offering a paraphrase of ECHU 2.12.6, in which Locke presents an account of substance that can be regarded as initiating a tradition of scepticism about the idea that there should be a place at all for the category of substance in metaphysics. Our ideas of substances, it seems, are combinations of ideas of other things which are ‘taken to represent distinct particular things’ which have a ‘subsistence by themselves’. But what it is that accounts for this subsistence is ‘supposed’ rather than being ‘known’. And if the substantiality of substances is a mere supposition, then the need for such a supposition is something that one might find oneself wondering about, and perhaps rejecting. By contrast, Leibniz insists that our understanding of substance, and substances, is far less problematic. As Theophilus observes, our idea of it is such that we can come to know many of the essential features of the things that fall under the concept. And as is clear from many of Leibniz’s writings, he holds that there are an infinite number of such things in existence.

These contrasting considerations set the stage for the chapters in this volume. The chapters examine a variety of different issues that have arisen in connection with the notions of substance employed by Locke and Leibniz and the role that these notions play in their understanding of other issues that have been the focus of recent scholarly debates. In the case of both Locke and Leibniz, we find chapters that discuss aspects of their accounts of the notion of substance in its more abstruse guise, but move seamlessly into more applied issues. The volume is divided into two parts. The first half comprises chapters on Locke and the second on Leibniz. In each case the

volume begins with chapters that are concerned with aspects of the philosopher's treatment of the notion of substance itself before moving on to the way in which the concept is related to other aspects of their philosophical programmes.

Peter Millican's 'Locke on Substance and Our Ideas of Substances' considers the role our ideas of substance and substances play in Locke's epistemology from the very beginning of 'Draft A' of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (dated 1671) to the final additions made to the posthumous fifth edition of the *Essay* in 1706. With so much textual material at our disposal, one might expect that scholars would by now be clear at least on the core of Locke's philosophy of substance, but nevertheless it remains one of the most contentious aspects of his thought and Millican attempts to resolve these difficulties of interpretation by presenting Locke's position as clearly as possible, and mainly in his own words. The essay thus gives us an excellent overview of the key passages and directions in the debate while constructing an argument for Millican's view that Locke's primary interest in talk of substance is to explicate our commitment to, but ultimate ignorance of, the substratum or 'stuff' of which things are made.

In 'The Supposed but Unknown: A Functionalist Account of Locke's Substratum', Han-Kyul Kim offers a new reading of the notion of the substratum that Locke speaks of as a component in our ideas of substances. As Kim notes, there are two rival accounts of this notion that have been standardly offered. According to the first, Locke is thinking of a 'bare substratum', which is the bearer of all of the substance's features, whereas the second identifies substratum with what Locke terms 'real essence', that is, 'a real Constitution of the insensible Parts' of the substance. Kim rejects both of these interpretations and argues instead for a functionalist account, according to which whatever performs the role of 'unifying' the bundle of qualities that a particular sort of substance displays thereby counts as its substratum. The substratum, so understood, is regarded as a functional entity, which is realized in (but not identified with) a particular constitution of the insensible particles.

The third of the chapters in the volume, 'Hume on Substance: A Critique of Locke', by Donald Baxter, is also concerned with Locke's account of substance in a general sense. However, Baxter approaches the issue by considering the ways in which Hume develops his own view against the background of a systematic rejection of Locke's position. While Hume's views on substance are often mentioned by commentators, they are not usually discussed in any detail, and Baxter's chapter remedies this by providing a systematic treatment. As Baxter notes, it is Hume's view that the complex unities traditionally identified as substances are only fictitiously unities. This view follows from Hume's thoroughgoing critique of the theory of substance as he finds it presented in Locke. On Hume's reading, Locke uses the word 'substance' in two senses: 'individual substance' and 'pure substance'. Baxter discusses the seven main parts of Hume's view as emerging in reaction to

this: (i) that we have no idea of pure substance; (ii) that there is no complex individual substance, except in a loose sense; (iii) that the fiction of complex individual substance arises in a way parallel to that of the fiction of identity through time; and (iv) results in the fiction of pure substance; (v) that simple qualities and perceptions satisfy the definition of individual substance; (vi) that there is no such thing as inherence; and (vii) that there is no such thing as pure substance.

Martha Brandt Bolton's 'Locke's Account of Substance in Light of His General Theory of Identity' turns the focus to the crucial relationship between Locke's views on substance and his views on diachronic identity. As Bolton observes, Locke's account of the identities of such things as bodies, oaks, horses, and persons has been charged with a number of inconsistencies which are supposed to follow more or less directly from his theory of substance. In particular, they derive from the supposed fact that oaks, horses, human beings, and (perhaps) persons are substances according to ECHU 2.23, 3.3, and 3.6. As Locke's critics understand this doctrine, it generates inconsistencies in context of his account of individuation and identity (ECHU 2.27). Bolton argues that these charges misfire because they misunderstand Locke's theory of substance. According to her, Locke recognizes basic substances and derivative 'substances'; the latter are analogues of the former in that they support certain combinations of qualities. Basic substances include bodies and (perhaps) immaterial finite spirits; a basic substance is a substratum in which several basic powers subsist. Substance analogues are things like oaks and horses, which are inner constitutions comprising several basic substances and structural modifications which affect the causal powers of the composites. Bolton argues that this theory of substances and their analogues is to be expected in view of Locke's provisional adherence to the corpuscular hypothesis. Furthermore, she makes the claim that this hypothesis gives modes and relations a more robust metaphysical status than do versions of mechanism that reduce all composites and causal powers to monadic accidents (or modes) of individual particles (substances). Finally, she argues that the theory of substance, so construed, avoids the inconsistencies charged against Locke's account of the identity of oaks and the like.

The next two chapters on Locke continue the theme of the relation between substance and identity. However, they are concerned with the more particular issue of personal identity. In 'Locke on Substance, Consciousness, and Personal Identity' Lex Newman calls into question the view that Locke held a *Same Consciousness* account of personal identity over time. On *Same Substance* accounts, I am the same person who performed an earlier action just in case the *substance* constituting myself, now, is identical with the substance constituting the self who performed the earlier action. On *Same Consciousness* accounts, I am the same person just in case the *consciousness* by which I am myself, now, extends to the earlier action. The received view within Locke scholarship is that he means to be arguing against *Same*

*Substance* accounts in favour of a *Same Consciousness* account. Newman distinguishes two main kinds of interpretations of Locke: metaphysical interpretations have it that Locke's goal is to clarify the real *truth* about personal identity—regardless of what ideas and beliefs people might have about it; descriptive interpretations have it that his goal is to clarify the nature of our experiential *ideas* and *beliefs* about personal identity—regardless of whether they capture the real truth about it. Newman argues that Locke's account should be understood in the context of a descriptive interpretation. Thus the point of his numerous, imaginative thought experiments is to clarify our ideas and beliefs about personal identity, but not its real metaphysical basis.

In 'Are Locke's Persons Modes or Substances?' Samuel C. Rickless starts from the recognition that Locke's discussion in ECHU 2.27 provides an account of the synchronic and diachronic identity of persons, but not an *official* ontology of persons. As he observes, this omission raises the question of whether Locke is committed to a particular account of the nature of persons, a question that has generated no end of controversy among Locke scholars. As Rickless points out, in the *Essay*, Locke takes over from the scholastics the tripartite ontology of substance, mode, and relation, and one widely held view is that Locke's persons are substances. None the less, there is a dissenting tradition which follows suggestive remarks of Locke's eighteenth-century follower, Edmund Law, but goes further in arguing that Locke's persons are modes. In this chapter, Rickless argues that some of the best reasons for thinking that Locke considers persons to be modes, particularly those offered recently by Antonia LoLordo, are not compelling. Instead Rickless suggests that we should hold that Locke's views on the connection between persons and powers, and on the connection between powers and substances, commit him to the view that persons are *bona fide* substances.

Lisa Downing considers metaphysical issues in 'Locke's Choice between Materialism and Dualism' and defends the view (held by many of Locke's contemporaries, but relatively few recent scholars) that Locke had distinctly materialist sympathies on the question of what it is that thinks within us. Downing does not, however, suggest that Locke was a dogmatic materialist, insisting that we must take him at his word when he maintains that we cannot know whether dualism or materialism is true of us. To diagnose Locke's inclinations with respect to Cartesian dualism versus materialism about the human mind, she argues that we need to consider his views about beasts and about angels, as well as the subtle question of how Locke understands the hypothesis of thinking matter.

The first two chapters in the second part of the volume are concerned with general features of Leibniz's conception of substance. In 'Leibniz on Substance in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*', Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra offers a clarification of Leibniz's notion of substance in one of his most famous works, with a view to explaining how that definition successfully



distinguishes between substances and accidents. In the *Discourse on Metaphysics* Leibniz puts forward his famous complete-concept definition of substance. Sometimes this definition is glossed as stating that a substance is an entity with a concept so complete that it contains all its predicates, and it is thought that it follows directly from Leibniz's theory of truth. It would seem that any adequate definition of substance should not apply to accidents. However, as Rodriguez-Pereyra points out, if Leibniz's theory of truth is correct then an accident is an entity with a concept so complete that it contains all its predicates. He goes on to argue that the distinction between substances and accidents can, none the less, be preserved because there is a sense in which accidents have complete concepts and a sense in which they do not, while there is no sense in which substances do not have complete concepts. Central to his argument is the claim that, according to Leibniz, a substance is its own subject.

In 'Perception and Individuality in the Leibnizian Conception of Substance', Anne-Lise Rey takes her lead from discussions of the place of perception in Leibniz's conception of substance by Ohad Nachtomy and Brandon Look. Both these commentators defend, albeit in different ways, the idea that Leibniz accounted for activity of substance in terms of domination and subordination, and that Leibniz focused on the unity of substance. For Rey, what is particularly important in these two studies of monadic domination is the way that they exhibit the close link between such domination and the action of substance. In her chapter she develops the importance of perception within the Leibnizian system, not only as a concept mediates between action, on the one hand, and the relations of domination and subordination on the other, but also as a crucial means for understanding the individuality of created substances.

The next two chapters are concerned with Leibniz's understanding of the relation between substance and activity. In 'Leibniz on Created Substance and Occasionalism', Paul Lodge considers a number of ways in which Leibniz's views about the nature of substance feed into his rejection of occasionalism against the background of a well-known paper by Donald Rutherford. Crucial to the discussion is a supposition that Rutherford's way of conceptualizing the objection masks a number of complexities that must be examined further if we are to understand the ways in which Leibniz thought that his occasionalist opponents faced difficulties reconciling their doctrine with the notion of substance. For it is the occasionalists' doctrine of created, rather than finite, substance that is Leibniz's main focus.

Continuing with this theme, John Whipple notes that Leibniz claims to have a theory of creaturely and divine causation that provides a principled alternative to occasionalism and mere conservationism. However, the exact form of Leibniz's causal theory has proved difficult to determine and some of his comments on this topic have been taken to suggest positions that threaten to collapse back into occasionalism or mere conservationism. In 'Leibniz on Substance and Causation' Whipple has three aims: first, to