Chapter 2: “Descartes and Leibniz as Readers of Suárez”

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Taking two Suárezian doctrines in which Suárez aligns himself with neither Thomas nor Scotus, one can detect both his influence and the limitations of that influence in Descartes and Leibniz. The second paper discusses the relation between Suárez’s theory of distinctions and Descartes’ philosophy and then his principle of individuation and Leibniz’s views.

Suárez argues for a third distinction between real and of reason, that is, a modal distinction, as opposed to the Scotist formal distinction. And for Suárez, like Descartes, two-way separability is a sign of a real distinction of a thing from another thing; one-way separability is a sign of a modal distinction of a thing from its mode; and mutual inseparability is a sign of a distinction of reason of a thing conceived in some way from the same thing conceived in a different way. Was Descartes a reader of Suárez on the theory of distinctions? It seems plausible to presume so, though the paper concludes that if he read him, it was after he had written the *Meditations*, at the end of 1640, beginning of 1641.

With Leibniz we have a different kind of reader. Leibniz wrote a Bachelor’s thesis in 1663 in which he affirmed Thomasius’ position that the principle of individuation is the Suárezian whole entity—not just the substantial form. By 1668 he wrote a tract on the Eucharist in which he defended for himself (and his employer) the position that the principle of individuation is the substantial form, something less than the whole entity. With a few significant modifications, the Scotist position is the one Leibniz kept in his mature philosophy.

Leibniz and Descartes were both greatly influenced by the currents of late scholastic metaphysics, especially by the metaphysics of the great Jesuit philosopher Francisco Suárez, though each in his own fashion.