By *Leibniz's Law*' – Remarks on a Fallacy

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Abstract:

The article is an investigation of a certain form of argument that refers to *Leibniz's Law* as its inference ticket (where *Leibniz's Law* is understood as the thesis that if *x*=*y*, then all properties of *x* are properties of *y*, and *vice versa*). Arguments of this form are often used to establish certain categorial distinctions, e.g. a distinction between kinds and properties, or a distinction between processes and events. But it is shown *that* and *why* there can be deficient arguments of this form. It is then argued that the interesting philosophical cases of this argument form are unconvincing since they cannot be seen as clear cases of the *unproblematic* variety of this argument form.

Structure:

1. Leibniz's Law & Leibniz's Law arguments
2. Some Philosophical *Leibniz's Law*-Arguments
3. The Marta-Argument
4. Metalinguistic Statements in Disguise & *Leibniz's Law*
5. Objections & Further Remarks
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1. Leibniz's Law & Leibniz's Law arguments

a. *Leibniz's Law*

The argument form I am interested in makes use of a characteristic inference ticket. The transition from the premises to the conclusion is marked by the phrase 'by Leibniz's Law'. What is meant by 'Leibniz's Law' here is often also called 'Principle of the Indiscernibility of the Identical'. Using 'exemplify' as a technical term for the relation in which objects stand to their properties, the principle can be put as follows:

(LL) $\forall x \forall y\,(\,x = y \rightarrow \forall z\,(x \text{ exemplifies } z \leftrightarrow y \text{ exemplifies } z)\,)$.

I have three cautionary remarks to make on that:

Firstly, there are several other principles that are sometimes referred to as *Leibniz's Law*: forget about them for the time being. They will play no role in this article.

Secondly, a remark on the nomenclature: both of the common titles of (LL), 'Leibniz's Law' and 'Principle of the Indiscernibility of the Identical' are at best misleading. (LL) is *not* concerned with any notion of (in)discernibility: to discern things is a *cognitive* procedure of which no mention is made in (LL).[1] And the reference to Leibniz is usually backed up by some passages of his that do not contain any formulation of (LL). Instead, they seem to contain a metalinguistic principle about the *substitutivity* of terms;[2]– but (LL) is no such principle.[3] (Later on, I will return to this point, which will then be not only of historical interest but bear substantially on the issues discussed.)

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[1] On notions of discernibility see ch.1 of T. Williamson, *Identity and Discrimination* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

[2] A rivalling reading of the relevant passages takes them to be concerned with the identity of *concepts*; see F. Feldman, 'Leibniz and "Leibniz's Law" ', *Philosophical Review*, **79** (1970), pp. 510–522. Also under this reading, Leibniz' statements would be clearly distinct from (LL) above. As to the exegetic question, see pp. 123–132 of B. Mates, *The Philosophy of Leibniz – Metaphysics and Language* (Oxford University Press, 1986) for an overview.

[3] For a careful distinction between *Leibniz's Law* and metalinguistic principles about the substitutivity of terms see R. Cartwright, 'Identity and Substitutivity', in M. K. Munitz, *Identity and Individuation* (New York University Press, 1971), pp. 119–133, repr. in Cartwright's *Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge MA & London: The MIT Press, 1987), pp. 135–147.

Thirdly, a remark on the logic of (LL): all variables in (LL) are *first-order* variables. Of course, the third variable ('z') should range (perhaps, among other things) over properties, otherwise the formula would be trivially true. But (LL) is often identified with a certain *second*-order principle:[4]

(LL*) $\forall x, y\, (x=y \rightarrow \forall F\, (Fx \leftrightarrow Fy)\,)$.

This identification, however, hinges on a particular view about the semantics of second-order logic that has been contested recently (namely, on the view that higher-order variables range over properties).[5] But I need not decide this issue: if there are any substantial differences between (LL) and (LL*), they would not be relevant to the arguments I shall discuss. Those arguments could, in any case, rely on either principle.

b. *Leibniz's Law-arguments*

As the majority of philosophers, I accept (LL) as some kind of basic truth about identity. Now, if (LL) is valid, it apparently justifies the transition from premises of the form

(i)   *x* is *thus-and-so*, and

(ii)   *y* is not *thus-and-so*,

to the corresponding instance of

(C)   *Ergo*: $x \neq y$.

Indeed, such arguments are often employed in everyday reasoning. Imagine a little conversation: 'I just met a strange old lady in front of your house.' – 'Oh, that was probably Ms Martin, my neighbour from the first floor.' – 'Well, is Ms Martin rather tall and lean?' – 'No. She's not exactly tall and by no means lean.' – 'Then it wasn't her, for the lady in the street was lean.' – Or, systematically:

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[4] This identification is widespread. See, for instance, p. 201f. of R. Cartwright, 'Indiscernibility Principles', repr. in his *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 201–215 (orig. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, **4** (1979), pp. 293–306), or P. Forrest, 'The Identity of Indiscernibles', in E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2002 Edition).

[5] See A. Rayo & S. Yablo, 'Nominalism Through De-Nominalization', *Noûs*, **35** (2001), pp. 74–92.

(1)   The lady in the street is lean.

(2)   Ms Martin is not lean.

(C-1)   ∴ The lady in the street ≠ Ms Martin.

This is an impeccable piece of reasoning. Furthermore, the argument can be seen as making, at least implicitly, use of *Leibniz's Law* (or of a restricted variant of it, such as: if the lady in the street = Ms Martin, then the lady has all the properties Ms Martin has).

2. Some Philosophical *Leibniz's Law*-Arguments

Now it is time to introduce the arguments that I shall criticize. They are meant to establish some ontological difference between entities of two sorts by recourse to *Leibniz's Law*; indeed, they can be phrased in the same form as the Ms Martin-argument.

My first example is an argument which is (to my knowledge) originally due to Richard Cartwright, and which has recently been endorsed by Wolfgang Künne:[6] the argument allegedly shows that we should never identify the meaning of some sentence *s* with what is said in a particular utterance of *s*, i.e. with the *proposition* expressed in that utterance (the term 'proposition' is used here as a technical term for things that could be said in utterances; only this usage of 'proposition' is relevant to the following). It runs as follows:

> What Ann said […] may be plausible or implausible, remarkable or trivial, well supported or completely unsubstantiated, but a sentential meaning does not have any of these virtues or vices. What Ben […] said may be confirmed or repudiated, endorsed or challenged, it may be universally acknowledged or contradicted in some quarters, but no sentence-meaning ever undergoes any of these vicissitudes. What is said in an utterance of a sentence has ever so many properties that are not shared by the meaning of the sentence uttered […]. Hence, by Leibniz's Law, propositions are not sentential meanings. (Künne, *loc. cit.*)

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[6] See p. 50 of R. Cartwright, 'Propositions', repr. with *addenda* in his *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 33–54 (orig. in R. J. Butler (ed.), *Analytical Philosophy*, 1st series (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 81–103) and W. Künne, *Conceptions of Truth* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 372. Cp. furthermore p. 69 of A. R. White's 'What We Believe', in N. Rescher, *Studies in the Philosophy of Mind* (*American Philosophical Quarterly* Monograph Series **6**) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), pp. 69–84.

By generalising from a particular example, this argument tries to establish a strict difference between propositions and sentential meanings. I am not interested in the soundness of the generalisation and shall treat it as unproblematic.

Formulated for the special case, the argument runs as follows:

(3)   The proposition expressed in an utterance of a sentence S (that what is said in a given assertoric utterance) can be implausible, remarkable etc.

(4)   The meaning of S cannot be implausible, remarkable etc.

(C-2)   ∴ The proposition expressed in an utterance of S ≠ the meaning of S.

The same type of argument has been used by Nicholas Wolterstorff to show that the kind K is not identical to the property of being a K (the 'K' serves as a placeholder for a sortal term; Wolterstorff uses the combination of the definite article with a sortal term, such as 'the Lion', as a singular term for a kind):[7]

> The Apple Blossom is the state flower of Michigan, but certainly it is not the case that the property of being an apple blossom is the state flower of Michigan. And the Lion is a symbol of strength, whereas it is not the case that the property of being a Lion is a symbol of strength.

As in the case above, Wolterstorff's argument seems intended to establish a categorial distinction by establishing the distinction for a certain example in a way that, in principle, could be generalised. The structure of the argument is analogous to the structure of Künne's argument:

(5)   The Apple Blossom is the state flower of Michigan.

(6)   The property of being an apple blossom is not a state flower.

(C-3)   ∴ The Apple Blossom ≠ the property of being an apple blossom.

A third argument of this kind has been proposed by Helen Steward:[8]

> […] processes have properties which it would be inappropriate to ascribe to events, and vice versa. For example […] the humming of my computer in the *process* sense can be *persistent*; but it does not really make sense to think of an event as persistent. And events, it is natural to say, *take* time, while the same does not seem to be true of processes. Smith's pushing of the cart to the top of the hill, for example, took four hours; but his pushing of the cart for hours did not *take* four hours, though it lasted four hours. Arguments from Leibniz's Law,

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[7] *On Universals* (The University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 260.
[8] *The Ontology of Mind* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 96.

then, can be straightforwardly brought to bear against any proposals for the identification of processes with events.

As before, the reasoning divides into an argument concerning a specific example (supposedly showing that a certain event is not identical to the correlated process) and the generalization thereof (arriving at a general distinction between events and processes). The specific argument goes:

(7)   Smith's pushing of the cart to the top of the hill took four hours.

(8)   Smith's pushing of the cart for hours did not take four hours.

(C-4)   ∴ Smith's pushing of the cart to the top of the hill ≠ Smith's pushing of the cart for hours.

Those are but three examples of arguments of this type that can be found in the philosophical literature.[9] Their proponents either implicitly, or (as in Steward's and Künne's case) explicitly, claim their arguments to be warranted by *Leibniz's Law* (in the sense introduced above as principle (LL)). In what follows, I shall argue that the arguments fail to establish what they are meant to establish and try to give a general account of this failure.

   One remark in advance. There is the rough division of philosophers interested in ontology into two camps: those who work in a *descriptive* spirit and try to uncover the ontological frame underlying ordinary thought and discourse, and those who work in a more *revisionary* spirit and try to design some ontological frame apt for certain theoretic purposes. It is more or less agreed that both are involved in distinct endeavours, such that apparently contradictory results stemming from both areas may often be reconciled by acknowledging the different nature of enterprise they serve.

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[9] To name but three further examples, see J. Levinson, 'Properties and Related Entities', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, **39** (1978), pp. 1–20, at p. 4, where colours (e.g. the colour red) and colour properties (e.g. the property of being red) are distinguished, P. F. Strawson 'Concepts and Properties *or* Predication and Copulation', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, **37** (1987), pp. 402–406, at p. 404, where concepts and properties are distinguished, and finally R. Stout, 'Processes', *Philosophy*, **72** (1997), pp. 19–26, where events and processes are distinguished (though the distinction differs from Steward's). In a later article, Stout grew suspicious about this kind of argument: see p. 155f. of his 'The Life of a Process', in G. Debrock (ed.), *Process Pragmatism* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 145–157 (I owe this reference to an anonymous referee).

Arguments like those introduced above should certainly be attributed to the descriptive enterprise; therefore, they would not directly bear upon the questions ontological revisionists are concerned with. But it is important to see that the question whether one should be bothered by those arguments or not does *not* coincide with the question of one's ontological goals. A decision between the descriptive and the revisionary enterprise will only have consequences for the question about *whether* the data embodied in the premises should be accounted for: a revisionary attitude will render them (more or less) irrelevant. But whether the arguments are *convincing* does not only depend upon *whether* the data should be accounted for, but it also depends upon the different question about *how* the data should be accounted for. And that question is not to be settled by philosophical *taste* but by arguments. I shall hold that the data do not constitute a good case for the conclusions drawn in the presented arguments.

3. The Marta-Argument

a. *Another Leibniz's Law-Argument*

To prepare for another argument of the specified type, let me invite you to engage in a little thought experiment. Imagine that in some fictitious society the ways in which you talk about some particular person heavily depend upon the social ranking of the person and of the addressees of your utterance. Marta, for example, is a judge, and whenever she is mentioned in the presence of people not belonging to her family she is called 'her majesty'. But when only members of her family are around, she is simply called 'Marta'. Furthermore, there are different sets of predicates that are used to describe her activities for both occasions. Where her majesty is, for instance, said to *dine*, Marta is simply said to *eat*. These rules of speech are never broken; they are strictly integrated in the ways people talk. Thus, certain combinations of subject and predicate are never used, such as 'Marta is dining'. They have no use in conversation and would, if ever uttered, presumably evoke only laughter or frowning and be corrected.

One time, a member of this society, a philosopher called McX, made a discovery: Marta is not identical to her majesty. He came to this astonishing conclusion by way of the following argument:

(9)   Her majesty is used to dine.

(10)   Marta is not used to dine (but rather used to eat).

(C-4) ∴ Her majesty ≠ Marta.

McX thus meant having established the non-identity of her majesty and Marta by recourse to *Leibniz's Law*. After all, Marta lacks a property that her majesty possesses, which implies, if (LL) is valid, that we are confronted with two persons, not one.

Of course, we know that McX errs. Marta is noone else but her majesty, as we see from the setting of the story. But McX is not simply dogmatic; he presented an argument in favour of his judgement that seems to exhibit the same structure as the *Leibniz's Law*-arguments introduced above. Since I take it that at least the Ms Martin-argument is impeccable, the Marta-argument should better exhibit a relevant difference. A clear statement of this difference will be relevant to the fate of the philosophical *Leibniz's Law*-arguments introduced above – their convincingness depends upon whether, in the specified respect, they rather side with the Marta-argument or with the Ms Martin-argument.

b. *Varieties of Negation*

The basic point to make about the Marta-argument starts from an observation on the use of negation. In natural language, negation can be used to express a number of things. The standard case is certainly the following: we utter a negated sentence as to assert a proposition that is true iff the proposition that would have been expressed by an utterance of the *non*-negated sentence is false.

But, as has been widely acknowledged by linguists, this is *not* the only occasion on which we use a negated sentence.[10] Generally speaking, the point of using negation is to mark the sentence negated as somehow defective and non-assertable (perhaps: in a given context). Such a defect can arise on the level of *content*, i.e. because a sentence expresses a false proposition. But there are other possibilities: we can, for instance, use the negation of a sentence *S* to reject some (conventional) *implicature* of *S* rather than its truth-valuable content. 'What the heck is this cur

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[10] For an overview, see L. Horn, *A Natural History of Negation* (The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

doing?' speaker *x* barks. 'This is not a cur, it is my dog,' speaker *y* replies.[11] Or, to cite another case: 'Kane was rich but unhappy,' a newsman says. 'No,' her colleague replies, 'He wasn't rich *but* unhappy; he was unhappy *because* he was rich.'[12]

Another purpose for which negation is sometimes used, is to correct linguistic mistakes. 'I will become a great toy for Christmas,' the German pupil tells his teacher. By confusing 'get' and 'become', he commits a mistake which is typical for English learning Germans. Accordingly, he is corrected: 'No. You will not *become* a toy, you will get one.' The point of using the negation here is not primarily to deny what the child has asserted but rather to point out that the boy has chosen the wrong word for the assertion he wanted to make. An interesting feature of this use of negation is that the negated sentence need not even express a proposition, as is shown by the example: 'I didn't trap two mongeese, I trapped two mongooses.' The word 'mongeese' lacks a proper usage in English; since the sentence that is negated therefore fails to express a proposition, the target of the negation is obviously not the *content* of the sentence. It is rather the *sentence* itself that is rejected. The negated sentence is uttered to convey something like: people don't talk like that; or perhaps: I don't talk like that; or even: do not talk like that! But instead of making an explicitly metalinguistic remark, the speaker chooses to simply negate the utterance that she wanted to correct or repudiate (where the "choice" is presumably made without much reflection on possible alternatives to it, or on the differences between the available options).

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[11] H. P. Grice already drew attention to this phenomenon; see his *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 81ff. and see also L. Karttunen & S. Peters, 'Conventional Implicature', in D. Dinneen & Ch.-K. Oh, *Syntax and Semantics* (*Vol. 11*: *Presupposition*) (New York: Academic Press, 1979), pp. 1–56, at pp. 46f.

[12], As Michael Woods pointed out in his *Conditionals* (Oxford University Press 1997; at p. 68), the possibility of using negation in this way sometimes makes the simple denial of a statement ambiguous: the mere 'no', uttered in response to the statement 'He certainly travelled to Siena,' can be understood in two ways: either it denies that the person in question travelled to Siena or it questions that the conditions for the confidence that is signalled by the 'certainly' are fulfilled.

c. *The Marta-Argument Rebutted*

The observation on negation opens a way of explaining the obvious failure of the Marta-argument. Its second premise, 'Marta is not used to dine (but rather used to eat)', involves a deviant use of negation. Its point is best brought out by the metalinguistic statement:

(10*)　　　'Marta dines' lacks assertibility; what you can say is 'Marta eats'.

But from this truth, together with (9) and *Leibniz's Law*, we cannot (legitimately) infer the conclusion that Marta is not identical to her majesty. The combined premises (9) and (10*) do not even have the right *form* for *Leibniz's Law* to come into play.

So, the Marta-argument allows for two readings: in one of them, it is valid but not sound, since the second conclusion is false (because 'dine' describes the same action as 'eat'). In the other reading, we can account for the acceptability of the second premise, understood as a kind of metalinguistic negation; but then, the argument is not valid.

4. Metalinguistic Statements in Disguise & *Leibniz's Law*

a. *A Philosophical Example of Metalinguistic Negation*

We happen to make deviant uses of negation, and usually we do not reflect about it. It would be a folly to think that philosophers, even when they are trained to carefully choose their words, are an exception to this. They are not, as I will show by an example. In her already cited book, Steward writes:

> Gerundive nominals seem to need to be prefaced by the phrase 'the property of …' before they can be said to refer to properties. For properties ought to be things which an individual can be said to have – and a thing cannot have being solid, though it can have the property of being solid. (*Ontology of Mind*, p. 107, n. 4)

Steward seems to argue as follows:

(11)　　A property is something that a thing can be said to have.

(12)　　A thing cannot have being solid.

(C-6) ∴ If it is not prefaced by a phrase such as 'the property of …', the gerundive nominal 'being solid' does not denote a property.

Interestingly, the argument proceeds from two apparently non-metalinguistic premises to a metalinguistic conclusion.[13] But if the argument were sound, we could easily use its second premise in a *Leibniz Law*-argument with a conclusion formulated in the object-language. We would get:

(11*)   A thing can have the property of being solid.

(12*)   A thing cannot have being solid.

(C-6*) ∴ Being solid is not a property.

I take it that (C-6*) is false. There is a simple proof of this: being solid, we may correctly say, is a property highly desirable for chocolate bars. Now, whatever is a property highly desirable for chocolate bars is, evidently, a property. So, being solid is a property. The argument, therefore, cannot be sound.

We should furthermore see that if (C-6*) is false, then (C-6) is false too. When I wrote the sentence 'being solid is a property', I correctly used 'being solid' as a designator of a property. Hence, Steward's original argument is not sound.

The failure of the argument has to do with the mismatch between the use of object- and meta-language in the components of the argument. As can easily be seen, premise (12) only makes sense on a metalinguistic reading: it contains the awkward phrase 'have being solid', which is not a proper predicate but an ill-formed arrangement of English words. If the negation in (12) were meant to be a case of ordinary (content-)negation, then (12) would only express a proposition if the sentence that is negated, i.e. 'things can have being solid', expressed one. But this sentence is ungrammatical and fails to express a proposition, and therefore (12), taken as an ordinary negation, fails to express any content; accordingly, it would not allow to infer any conclusion whatsoever. Nevertheless, Steward certainly makes a point by using (12), since the negation can be understood in a metalinguistic way.

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[13] The status of (11) is not absolutely clear: (11) could perhaps be understood metalinguistically as well (roughly as: you can say the following: "Things possess properties."). But it rather seems that (11) is a *de re* statement about properties, meaning as much as: 'You can claim of any property that it is possessed'. The construal of (11), however, will play no important role in what follows.

Her point can, less ambiguously, be made by an explicitly metalinguistic premise such as the following:

(12*) The phrase '*x* has being solid' is not a well-formed open sentence (of the English language).

But while the inference from (11) and (12) could (mistakenly) be regarded as being licensed by *Leibniz's Law*, (12*) has not the right form for being combined with *Leibniz's Law* at all (except if we wanted to derive some non-identity statement *about* the *phrase* that is mentioned in (12*)). So, in the metalinguistic reading, *Leibniz's Law* proves to be an invalid inference ticket for the proposed conclusion.

To infer from (12*) that (i) 'being solid' does not denote a property, or that (ii) being solid is not a property, (12*) would have to be supplemented not with *Leibniz's Law* but with some additional metalinguistic premise, as for instance the following:

(13) If an expression *e* can be used to denote a property, then the concatenation of '*x* has' with *e* results in a well-formed open sentence.

But this is a false empirical hypothesis about the English language. Its falsity immediately becomes apparent if we remember that 'being solid' has been shown to possess a usage in which it denotes a property (recall statement (C-6*)) while '*x* has being solid' is ill-formed. So it seems that, all things considered, not much interesting follows from (12*) at all.

Let me take stock: Steward's argument fails. In a non-metalinguistic reading, its second premise is ill-formed; hence, it should be interpreted as the rejection of a certain from of speech conveying that 'something has being solid' is a phrase without established use. Its point therefore is better captured by the metalinguistic premise (12*) which does not support the inference anymore.

Thus, Steward's argument suffers from the same defect as McX's Marta-argument: both involve a premise that is at best interpreted as an unperspicuous attempt at rejecting a certain form of speech, whereas they would need a non-metalinguistic premise instead. In both cases there are clear indications that this is so: Steward's premise is the negation of a sentence which is grammatically ill-formed, while in the Marta-case the relevant premise is easily seen as a rejection that is justified only by some conventions of etiquette. But there might be other, less telling grounds for the non-acceptability of sentences; I shall develop this idea in the following section.

b. *The Evolution of Language*

Natural languages are social entities with a complex history. In course of this history, different fragments of a language have evolved in different directions, for different purposes, and on different occasions. Keeping that in mind, we must acknowledge that the following scenario is a possibility: discourse about some entities, say, properties, may have developed in two different strands. In addition to the ordinary terms for properties, a further categorial term for them, such as 'stanse', could have come into use, in combination with some characteristic binding phrase, such as 'to be in the'. Then, people would have found '*x* is in the stanse of wisdom' just as acceptable as '*x* has/possesses (the property of) wisdom'. To continue the scenario, if we assume that respective phrases developed independently of each other, then we may furthermore assume that speakers would have learned to use the respective phrases only separately, such that '*x* is in the property of wisdom' would have been as rejectable as '*x* possesses the stanse of wisdom'.

In such a situation (that could certainly have arisen), a philosopher such as McX could have argued that stanses and properties are entities of a different type. After all, you can *be in* stanses, but not in properties, and you can *have* properties, but not stanses. McX would have erred, just as he has erred with the Marta-argument. Indeed, his reasoning would have suffered from the same defect. He has some right to claim that you cannot have stanses, but only be in them. *Some* right – which is because the negation can be interpreted as deviant.

Notice that the *grammar* of the sentence that McX negates is flawless, unlike the grammar of the sentence 'things have being solid', the negation of which was employed by Steward. Herein the two arguments differ: while we can show that Steward's premise *must* be understood metalinguistically, we could not easily *demonstrate* that McX relies on a metalinguistic premise, if we were *part* of the described scenario (rather than talking about it).

(By the way: isn't the *stanse*-scenario, albeit possible in principle, utterly unrealistic? No; instead, it is modelled on a real case. The term 'state' exhibits roughly the usage described above for the term 'stanse'. Thus, I take it that whether states *are* (a particular kind of) properties cannot be decided because of the availability of the linguistic form 'is in the state of', in which 'state' cannot be substituted with 'property'.)

c. *Dubious Leibniz's Law-arguments*

Let us now return to the three philosophical arguments with which I started (i.e. the arguments for the non-identity of propositions and meanings, kinds and properties etc.). I have highlighted the deviant use of negation that consists in rejecting certain forms of speech. A negated sentence that serves this purpose cannot figure as the second premise of an argument that correctly proceeds from statements of the form

(i) x is *thus-and-so*, and

(ii) y is not *thus-and-so*,

to a conclusion of the form

(C) *Ergo*: $x \neq y$.

Of course, the *ordinary* use of negation licenses exactly that transition. This is why the Ms Martin-argument from the beginning is incontestably sound. The negation employed in its second premise is certainly non-deviant. So the important question about the philosophical arguments described above is whether they are Ms Martin-cases, such that the negation employed in their respective second premise can be seen as uncontroversially non-deviant, or whether they might be Marta-cases. My contention is that they are not trustworthy, because they are not clear Ms Martin-cases. They might rather be kindred to McX's argument about stanses, relying on some brute facts about usage which does not reflect any difference in the things designated; this is why they should be rejected as unconvincing.

5. Objections & Further Remarks

So far, I have developed a criticism of the *Leibniz Law*-arguments introduced before. I shall now discuss some doubts about this form of criticism and in due course sharpen my position a little further.

That the discussed arguments may appear to confuse a point about the usage of some expressions with a point about the objects that the expressions refer to had been anticipated clearly by Cartwright, who wrote with respect to the argument about propositions and sentential meanings:

> [The critics of my argument] will grant that we never in fact speak of sentential meanings in the ways just mentioned; but they will claim that this is, somehow, only a point of usage – a linguistic accident which could well be avoided […] ('Propositions', p. 50)

However, Cartwright thought that this reply is no good. His rebuttal reads:

> But in spite of its familiarity, this objection is not easily understood. One wonders in the first place how it could be a mere fact of usage that, for example, meanings cannot be asserted. Usage of what? The fact that meanings cannot be asserted, if it *is* a fact, is not a fact about particular words in some particular language […]. And one wonders, in the second place, how to tell those points of usage which are *merely* that from those which are something more. (loc. cit.)

Let me address both of Cartwright's points in turn, thereby showing the weaknesses of his defence:

Cartwright's first worry: the critics of his *Leibniz Law*-argument, Cartwright said, may claim that what he points to in his argument is merely a matter of usage. He expresses his bewilderment at this remark, when he asks: 'Usage of what?' Recalling the diagnosed weakness of the Marta-argument helps providing an answer to this question. Whether or not meanings can be asserted, is, as Cartwright rightly points out, *not* a matter of linguistic usage, but a fact about meanings. But whether we find claims such as 'the meaning of sentence *S* is well supported / repudiated / etc.' acceptable or not, may well be a matter of usage. It may well be that we do not find the sentences acceptable *only because* they have no established usage – despite the fact that meanings are propositions and can, *a fortiori*, be well supported etc.

Compare McX's arguments: it is *not* a matter of linguistic usage, whether Marta is dining or not. It *is*, however, a fact about usage whether the sentence 'Marta

dines' has an established usage and counts as acceptable. It is, equally, not a matter of usage whether stanses can be possessed. But even if they can be possessed, it would remain a matter of usage whether the open sentence '*x* possesses the stanse of wisdom' is acceptable. We have seen how McX, not realising this distinction, brought forward fallacious arguments. Critics of the philosophical arguments cited may urge that their proponents are just like McX in the Marta-scenario. Their move from a correct linguistic observation about the acceptability of certain sentences to facts about the entities that the sentences are about is unjustified and, if the critics are right, mistaken.

Cartwright's second worry: how can we tell points of usage which are merely that from those which are something more? To be frank, I must admit I do not know any answer to this that I would deem seriously helpful. However, the question perhaps demands too much from the critics of the discussed arguments. Certainly, if somebody could show that one of the premises employed is only true if we give the negation a deviant reading (in Cartwright's words: that the premise makes merely a point about usage), then she had reason to reject the argument. While I cannot show this in any of the above cases, I do think there is still good reason to reject them; this is due to the circumstance that there are factors because of which it is at least *doubtful* whether the premises make a point about the relevant entities or merely a point about usage. The force of the discussed arguments *depends* upon the involved negation being *non*-deviant. So, if we have good reasons to think that the premises *may* make only a point about usage, the philosopher who employs the argument needs to show that this is not the case – otherwise, he cannot claim his argument to be successful. Of course, Cartwright could modify his initial question and ask instead: how can we tell points which might well be merely points of usage from those which are certainly something more? This question deserves to be answered, so I shall give it a go.

Let us begin by an important observation about the crucial premises of the arguments: if they were ever made, they would sound so queer that people would probably declare them to be nonsensical. Indeed, Cartwright, from whom Künne borrowed his argument, had judged exactly like that, when he wrote

> [...] it is obvious on very little reflection that ever so many things predicable of what is asserted cannot (on pain of nonsense) be predicated of the meaning of a sentence. (1962: 50)

'On pain of nonsense'; it is hard to make *any* sense of sentences such as 'the meaning of sentence *S* is well supported', 'the meaning of sentence *S* is repudiated', etc. These sentences are very unlike a sentence such as 'pigs often jump over houses', where it is perfectly clear *what* the sentence says, while what it says is evidently false. Rather, it is obscure what these sentences are supposed to mean, because we are not used to such combinations of words. This may be due to the fact that what they express is, after all, false, and even absurd, such that we would never even think about forming such sentences and find it hard to believe that anybody could take them seriously. But it may also be due to some idiosyncratic feature of English.

But bizarre as the said sentences may be, there is nevertheless one way to make sense of them. Unfortunately, it proceeds *via* a covering identity-statement. If we believe that (i) in general, there is some entity to which we refer by phrases such as 'what sentence *S* says', and if we further believe that (ii) such an entity is just what we refer to by 'the meaning of sentence *S*', then we could make sense of 'the meaning of sentence *S* is well supported'. We would predicate of the particular sentence-meaning whatever we predicate of a proposition by saying that it is well supported. So, if the relevant identification of meanings and propositions would become common ground within a linguistic society, the use of statements that mix idioms from the two discourses may become installed and loose its impression of nonsense.

Consider the following case: numbers, some mathematicians think, are sets. They may be wrong; but can we show them to be wrong by making use of *Leibniz's Law* as follows?

> Apart from the empty set, sets have members. But neither the number 2 nor the number 3 have members. Therefore, they cannot be sets (they could, at best, be the empty set, but they cannot *both* be the empty set).

No, we cannot. The confidence that the number 2 has no members may either stem from the fact that we never use sentences such as '2 has members', or else from the belief that numbers are no sets while only sets have members. The first possibility makes the reasoning attackable as a Marta-case. The second is impeccable, but presupposes the very non-identity that it was supposed to establish (the non-identity between numbers and sets).

Now, what seems important for the possibility to rebut the reasoning as a potential Marta-case is *firstly* that the relevant fragments of language, discourse about numbers and discourse about sets, have developed independently and a mixture of them sounds, at first, close to nonsense. *Secondly*, it seems important that the relevant identification has not become common ground within the relevant linguistic society. After all, mathematicians who endorse the orthodox view about numbers and sets do *not* regard statements such as 'the number 2 has members' as nonsensical but accept them and write them down in course-books.

Or take another, even more philosophical, case: properties, some philosophers have thought, are sets. Can such a position be repudiated by pointing out that sets have members while properties have none? No; if a property *were* a set, it would have members. Nevertheless, even if properties were sets, the phrase 'wisdom has members' could still lack an established use in English. It would do so, if (i) property-talk and set-talk have emerged rather independently (which, in fact, they have) and as long as (ii) it is not widely acknowledged that properties are sets. The combination of these assumptions would explain why 'wisdom has members' lacks assertibility, while it may nevertheless be true that properties are sets and, therefore, have members.

Let me return now to our initial question: we have a class of arguments with the same surface form, arguments for the non-identity of some entities *A* and *B*, which use *Leibniz's Law* as their inference tickets. We know that some of them could be Marta-cases. But how can we tell potential Marta-cases from clear Ms Martin-cases? In light of the above discussion, the following answer emerges: potential Marta-cases are marked by premises which negate sentences that lack any established usage and that rather seem nonsensical than evidently false. Nevertheless, you can make sense of them by a covering identity-statement, which is, however, exactly the identity-statement disputed by the argument. Admittedly, the proposed criterion (apparent nonsensicality) is not a *hard* criterion; but such a criterion is not needed for my case. After all, I do not positively argue that certain cases *are* Marta-cases (then, a stronger criterion would be needed). I only argue that they are *potential* Marta-cases, which suffices to hold that arguments like those of Cartwright, Künne, Steward, and Wolterstorff cannot establish their points.

6. Conclusion

I take stock: I have not directly addressed the question about whether propositions are meanings, whether processes are events etc. In particular, I have not argued that such entities should be identified. But the arguments *against* such identifications, which I discussed, should be rejected, because they involve premises that might require a reading in which they are covertly metalinguistic, which would render the arguments invalid. Of course, their proponents would deny that their premises are metalinguistic. But simply claiming this is not sufficient for their case. Compare McX's errors again: what if he had defended himself from the charge of using a deviant type of negation? what if he had said: 'I see, you think I make only a metalinguistic claim. But I ain't. I really mean what I say: you cannot possess stanses.' It would have been hard to convince McX of his error, then. Nevertheless, we know he had been wrong. And although Cartwright etc. certainly *intend* their premises to make some true and *non*-metalinguistic claims, they might be in the same situation as McX: perhaps, the only *true* claim they can make with their premises are, after all, metalinguistic.

So, in the end, what has emerged is a question about the burden of proof. It is not that the crucial premises of the arguments are *evidently* metalinguistic statements in disguise. But they *could* well be so, because they are supported by the observation that they are negations of sentences that are hardly sensical. That, however, is a *signal* of metalinguistic infection; it is a signal that could be ignored if we had further, uncontroversial data. But then, these other data would suffice to make the point. Thus, the arguments cannot establish what they are meant to establish, and if they are supplied with additional premises, those premises will do the job. The arguments themselves are of little worth.

Notice finally that my line of reasoning is independent of the distinction between descriptive and revisionary ontology. The moral is that even a descriptivist should not take all linguistic differences as constituting philosophically important differences. Some verbal differences may indeed be *merely* verbal.