The interpretations of "nihili nullae sunt proprietates". A text from Rubio.

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In this paper I intend to improve the classification of the various interpretations of the principle "nothingness has no properties" that I have presented in an earlier essay (En torno al principio). Also, I plan to refine some observations regarding the interpretation of the principle in Descartes. As an appendix, I quote a text from Rubio (one of Descartes' sources) that has some relevance for the analysis of the principle, and favors a particular reading of it.

1. CARTESIAN AND OTHER FORMULATIONS

In Descartes' works, as well as in later authors, the principle occurs in Latin and in French. Here are the various formulations I have found:

1) lumine naturali esse notissimum, nihil nullas esse affectiones sive qualitates; atque ideo ubicunque aliquas deprehendimus, ibi rem sive substantiam, cujus illae sunt, necessario inveniri (Descartes, Principia Philosophiae, I, 11, Oeuvres, VIII, 1, p. 8).
2) le néant n'a aucunes qualitez ny proprietez (Descartes, French translation of the preceding passage, in Oeuvres, IX, 2, p. 29).
3) per communem illam notionem, quod nihil nulla sint attributa, nullaeve proprietates aut qualitates (Descartes, Principia Philosophiae I, 52, Oeuvres, VIII, 1, p. 25).
4) quia naturali lumine notum est, nullum esse posse nihilis reale attributum (Descartes, Secundae responsiones, in Rationes Dei... , Oeuvres, VII, p. 161).
5) le néant n'a point de proprietez (Malebranche, Entretiens, in Oeuvres, vls. 12-13, p. 32-33).
6) nihil nulla enim est affectio (Geulincx, Annotata ad Metaphysicam, Opera vol. 2, p. 267)
7) le néant n'a aucune proprieté (Régis, Cours, I p. 69).
2. SEVEN INTERPRETATIONS.

I will distinguish seven possible ways of interpreting the principle.

[1] There is, first, an interpretation that may be called nominal, according to which the principle says that there is an object called "nothing[ness]" which has no properties. This nominal reading is favored by the article "le" in the French version, but certainly a quantificational (instead of nominal) reading appears to be more reasonable.

[2] Some English translations ("nothing has no properties"), more than the Latin originals, may suggest the following quantificational reading (mentioned as possible but then rejected as trivial by Mates, Leibniz on possible worlds): there is no object that lacks properties, that is, every object has at least one property.

[3] As quantificational version this seems better: for every property there is an object that has that property. But this version, without further precisions, would remain ambiguous, since the relation “to have a property”, in classical ontology, can be understood in two ways, quite different: in one way, “property” means the same as “universal” (“x is a property of y” means the same as “x is a universal with respect to the individual, or inferior, y”); in the other way, “property” means the same as “accident” (“x is property of y” means the same as “x is an accident with respect to the substance y”). The same

1 Keeping in mind the linguistic wisdom expressed in remarks such as the following: iste terminus 'nihil' est terminus [...] praegnans [...] cum subordinetur uni tali complexo: 'nulla res' (Paulus Venetus, 2a).

2 Mates has referred to the principle in other works; a noteworthy occurrence is the preface to the second edition of his logic textbook.
individual can be substance with respect to an accident (subiectum inhaesionis) and inferior with respect to a universal (subiectum praedicationis or attributionis).

[3a] If, within the reading [3], "property" is interpreted as universal, the principle says that every universal is exemplified in at least one individual. This is known, in logic, as the thesis of existential import of predicates.

[3b] If, always within reading [3], "property" is interpreted as accident, the principle says that every accident has, or is, in a substance, where it is necessary, in order to obtain an interpretation really different from the previous one [3a], to understand "accident" as individual. Otherwise, the principle would repeat that for some universals (namely the accidental ones) there are individuals, that is, it would just reiterate the existential import claim, restricted to accidents. Thus, the appropriate formulation of [3b] is: every individual accident is in a substance. In [3b] the principle states a relation between individuals: given an accidental individual one can infer the existence of a substantial individual. To be sure, it is not necessary to restrict [3b] to individual accidents. Classical ontology boasts also essential individual properties (this humanity, this rationality, this animality, etc., which rather than "being in" the individual human Socrates "constitute" him). Accordingly, version [3b] of the principle could be generalized as follows: for every concrete property (be it accidental or essential) there is a substance in which the concrete property exists (either as an inhering individual accident or as a constitutive substantial form).

[4] In version [3] the principle is not a logical truth — just as, for example, the statement "every donkey has an owner" is not logically true either. However, by pressing the analysis of the term "property" the principle becomes a truth of logic. This can be done in two ways: i) understanding "property" as a dyadic predicate: "x is property of y", or ii) taking "property" as a monadic predicate: "x is a property", which characterizes exactly the referents of the relation in question (relation of universals to individuals, relation of accidents to substances). In both cases we have a logical truth (cf. for example Principia Mathematica 33.13 : x ∈ D'R ≡ ∃y xRy). H. Scholz follows essentially this interpretation.

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3 This familiar distinction is found, for example, in Eustachius a Sto Paulo, Dialectica, Antepraedicamenta.
in his study of Descartes' *Cogito*; he reads *Non entis nulla sunt praedicata* as the logical truth $Pa \iff \forall x \, x=a$ ([Über das cogito, ergo sum, in Mathesis Universalis, p. 85])

[5] and [6]. A totally different analysis is obtained if one takes the standpoint of metalanguage. In this approach, the principle says that the lack of denotation of a singular term "t" (i.e. the fact that "t" has no suppositio, or supposits or stands for "nothing") seriously affects the truth-value (truth, falsehood) of the sentences in which "t" occurs. This can happen in two ways: [5] any atomic sentence in which "t" occurs is false, [6] any sentence in which "t" occurs lacks a truth-value, it is neither true nor false.

3. CORRELATION BETWEEN INTERPRETATIONS AND AUTHORS.

In the case of Descartes, reading [3b] with "property" interpreted as individual accident seems to be the best. For connaisseurs of the scholastics, for example Gilson (pp. 303-4; 295-8) and Cronin (p. 162 ff.), it has appeared as only natural to read the principle as equivalent to the thesis "every attribute is in a substance". However, I want to insist that this formulation in terms of inherence of accidents in substances requires further specifying that the accidents (attributes, properties, qualities, etc.) are to be construed as individual, concrete entities— if an interpretation different from the existential import thesis is intended. This is not against what Descartes appears to mean. In fact, the way he paraphrases the principle strongly suggests that he has in mind individual accidents (properties, attributes, etc.), whose emerging in our experience guarantees— this is what the principle claims— the presence of another type of individual: the corresponding substance., Descartes does not appear to be making any existential import claim, namely that all universals are exemplified. The following passage from Descartes' *Principia*, both in its Latin and French versions, is quite clear in this respect:

1) *Possunt autem substantia corporea et mens, sive substantia cogitans creata, sub hoc communi conceptu intelligi, quod sint res, quae solo Dei concursu egent ad existendum. Verumtamen non potest substantia primum animadverti ex hoc solo, quod sit res existens, quia hoc solum per se nos non afficit; sed facile ipsam agnoscimus ex quolibet ejus attributo, per communem illam notionem, quod nihil nulla sint attributa, nullaeve*

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4 Scholz, p. 84, quotes a passage from Schopenhauer where the principle is mentioned in the same version as used by Scholz: *Non entis nulla sunt praedicata*. Schopenhauer does not appear to propose any special interpretation: he simply quotes the principle as a premiss of the Cartesian "cogito, ergo sum".

2) Et la notion que nous avons ainsi de la substance créée, se raporte en même façon à toutes, c'est à dire à celles qui sont immatérielles comme à celles qui sont matérielles ou corporelles; car il faut seulement, pour entendre que ce sont des substances, que nous appercevions qu'elles peuvent exister sans l'aide d'aucune chose créée. Mais lors qu'il est question de savoir si quelqu'un de ces substances existe veritablement, c'est à dire si elle est à présent dans le monde, ce n'est pas assez qu'elle existe en cette façon pour faire que nous l'apercevions; car cela seul ne nous découvre rien qui excite quelque connaissance particulière en nostre pensée. Il faut, outre cela, qu'elle ait quelques attributs que nous puissions remarquer; et il n'y en a aucun qui ne suffise pour cet effet, à cause que l'une de nos notions communes est que le néant ne peut avoir aucuns attributs, ny proprietez ou qualitez: c'est pourquoi, lorsqu'on en rencontre quelqu'un, on a raison de conclure qu'il est l'attribut de quelque substance, et que cette substance existe. (ibid. vol. ix, 2, p. 47)

In the Latin passage the phrase adesse percipiamus should be highlighted, and in the French its translation: lorsqu'on en rencontre quelqu'un. These phrases do not make much sense if referring to abstract, universal entities which are neither "present" (adesse) nor one "encounters (runs into, bumps into) them", in the way one runs into a friend in the street. It seems that the phrases used by Descartes in his comments on the principle apply more correctly to concrete, individual entities, even sensible entities, that is, to properties or qualities understood as concrete individuals.

Incidentally, while the principle, if interpreted as in [3b], is an ontological thesis, Descartes makes an epistemological use of it: it helps to answer the question: How are substances known? (cf. the last phrase of the Latin passage and the title of the French text).

Interpretation [5] seems to fit Leibniz well (cf. Mates' papers) and [6] Kant (see Brittan). The following passage from Leibniz, however, insofar as it appears to be very close to our principle, and consequently can be taken as a basis for the interpretation of the principle in Leibniz, evidently suggests reading [3b]:

Si l'espace est une propriété ou un attribut, il doit être la propriété de quelque substance. L'espace vide borné [...] de quelle substance serat-il la propriété ou l'affection? [...] Or l'étendue doit être l'affection d'un étendu. Mais si cet espace est vide, il sera un attribut sans sujet, une étendue d'aucun étendu. [Philosophische Schriften, VII, p. 372]
4. THE PROBLEM OF THE PRE-CARTESIAN HISTORY OF THE PRINCIPLE.

The content, or meaning of the principle, in any of the interpretations, should be distinguished from its letter, namely from that peculiar and rather twisted formulation that characterizes it.

From the point of view of the content, the semantic thesis corresponding to interpretation [5] goes back to Aristotle's * Categoriae*, ch. 10, where the atomic sentences similar to "Socrates is ill" are classified as false in case Socrates does not exist, namely in case the singular term "Socrates" does not denote, or denotes nothing. The novelty lies in the curious formulation: if Socrates does not exist the sentence "Socrates is ill" is false because...nothingness has no properties, Leibniz would say, as pointed out by Mates). Needless to say, the ontological thesis corresponding to reading [3b] occurs throughout the history of Aristotelian-scholastic metaphysics. The connection between our principle and the rule from "S is P" to "S is" is highlighted by Casmannus: *Posito adjuncto inhaerente necessario ponitur subjectum, adjuncti enim non est existentia nisi in subjecto:* Aristotelici obscure formant hanc regulam: Ab est tertii adjecti ad est secundi adjecti valet consequentia (towards the end, *observationes practicae*, section on adjunctum).

From the standpoint of the letter, however, philosophical historiography tells us very little on the possible pre-Cartesian circulation of our principle. I know only one pre-Cartesian example, from Goclenius (end of the 16th c.) in the following form: *cogitandi de regula, qua etiam Jurisconsulti, et Theologi: non entis nulla sunt accidentia, nullae qualitates* (Goclenius, I, 46). Further research should shed light on these theologians and jurisconsulti. In this respect, Hübener's work is of particular interest. In *Die Logik* Hübener considers the scholastic axiom *non entis nulla est scientia* (p.111) , proceeding from *Analytica Posteriora* (1,2, 71 b 25) and in *Scientia de Aliquo et Nihilo* he quotes a text from the second scholasticism (published in 1628) where that axiom is linked to our principle: *ut enim non entis nulla est affectio, sic nulla scientia* (p. 43). For the time being, it is not accurate to refer to the principle as "scholastic".

5. A TEXT FROM RUBIO.
An examination of the scholastic sources of Descartes could be useful both for the issue of the letter of the principle and for the understanding of its interpretations. Within this approach, I will quote and analyze a text from Rubio\textsuperscript{5}, that has some interest for our topic\textsuperscript{6}, since it suggests that [3b] is the right interpretation. The quoted passage is from Rubio 1621, \textit{Caput 6. De accidente. Quaestio 1}, pp. 136-7. (For a list of Rubio's logical works cf. Risse's \textit{Bibliographia}.)

An accidens sit universale, et respectu quorum id habeat?

Probatur accidens non esse universale, duobus argum. Primo, quia universale, non habet a parte rei aptitudinem essendi in multis, aut praedicare de illis: nec respicit inferiora relatione reali, sed solum habet talem aptitudinem per intellectum abstrahentem illud, vel comparantem ad inferiora, ad quae solum dicit respectum rationis, sed accidens a parte rei habet aptitudinem essendi in subiecto: ergo etiam habebit aptitudinem praedicandi de illo: et cum distinguatur ab eo realiter, per relationem realem illud respiciet, ut albedo hominem: ergo accidens non est universale respectu subiecti: imo nec potest praedicari de illo: quia quod ab alio distinguitur realiter, non potest de eo praedicari cum distinctio realis falsam efficiat praedicationem.

Secundo. Universale dicitur esse in multis et posse praedicari de multis, etiam si illa multa non sint actu, in rerum natura, sed solum in potentia: ut patet de Sole et Luna: sed accidens non potest praedicari de subjectis, nisi actu existentibus: ergo non est universale, nec praedicabile. Probatur minor: quia nullo homine existente in rerum natura, falsum erit dicere: homo est albus, aut Petrus est albus.

Pro solutione huius quaestionis, notandum est primo: accidens duobus modis considerari. Primo in ordine ad sua inferiora quidditativa: ut color respectu albedinis et nigredinis aut albedo respectu huius et illius albedinis: et hoc modo non constituit quintum praedicabile sed primum, secundum vel tertium: nam vel genus est, vel species, aut differentia. Secundo consideratus in ordine ad subjecta, quibus inhaeret: ut album in ordine ad

\textsuperscript{5} Antonio Rubio (Ruvio, Ruvius...), according to Bäcker and Sommervogel, was born in Rueda, 1548, went to Mexico, where he stayed for twenty five years, returned to Spain, and died in Alcalá in 1615. Aside from general articles in encyclopaedias such as the \textit{Enciclopedia Filosofica} (Italian), \textit{New Catholic Encyclopedia}, etc., there is some specialized bibliography on Rubio: Quiles, Redmond. Rubio is one of the few scholastic authors explicitly mentioned by Descartes; in fact, Descartes even remembers Rubio after many years (letter to Mersenne, \textit{Oeuvres}, III, p. 185).

\textsuperscript{6} Naturally, it is no question of establishing direct relations of influence from Rubio to Descartes in the issue of the principle examined in this paper. My referring to Rubio is history of ideas, not of influences from one author to another. Also, in presenting Rubio's text I do not intend to suggest that it includes anything original relative to the scholastic tradition.
hominem, vel parietem. Et hoc modo constituit quintum praedicabile, quia praedicatur in quale accidentale.

Secundo notandum . Accidens dupliciter considerari: in abstracto et in concreto: et primo modo consideratum, non dicit subiectum, sed solam formam; ut albedo, et color, et cum haec distinguantur realiter a subiecdto, non praedicantur de illo: falsum est enim dicere: homo est albedo: consideratum vero in concreto, dicit subiectum, ut album: et a diversis subjectis abstractum per intellectum, ut ab homine, et parietae, est universale, et praedicabile respectu illorum, a quibus solum distinguitur ratione, nec habet aptitudinem praedicandi de illis a parte rei, sed solum per intellectum, nec denique ad illa refertur relatione reali, sed rationis, sicut caetera praedicabilia, ad sua inferiora: sed quia accidens respicit subiectum, secundum modum inhaerentiae actualis in eo, et hoc modo praedicatur de illo, requirit actualem existentiam subiectorum, de quibus praedicatur: aliquae non erunt verae praedicationes: et in hoc distinguitur a caeteris praedicabilia, quae cum essentialia sint, ut genus, species, et differentia, vel propriae passiones consequentes essentiam, ut quartum praedicabile, abstrahunt ab existentia, et praedicantur de inferioribus, secundum naturalem connexionem extremorum: ideoque non requirit actualem eorum existentiam.

His suppositis, conclusio respondens quaestioni est: accidens in concreto sumptum est quintum praedicabile, non respectu inferiorium quidditative, sed respectu subiectorum, a quibus abstrahitur, et de quibus praedicatur in quale accidentale: et hoc modo sumptum definitur a Porphyrio duplici definitione, inferius explicanda. Probatur haec conclusio: quia accidens hoc modo sumptum est unum in multis accidentaliter et ideo praedicabile de multis in quale accidental, distinctumque a caeteris quatuor praedicabilibus.

Ad primum arg. Neganda est minor; quod accidens habeat aptitudinem realem inhaerendi, aut essendi in multis, a parte rei: nam si sumatur in abstracto, verum est, sed sic non est universale, nec praedicabile: sed dicit formam accidentalem, realiter distinctam a subjectis, et realiter eis inhaerentem: quae non potest realiter praedicari de illis, propter realem distinctionem: si vero sumatur in concreto, respectu subiectorum, a quibus abstrahitur, universale est, et praedicabile, ut expositum est.

Ad secundum: distinguenda est minor: nam ut accidens sit universale, et praedicabile, satis est, quod plura subiecta secundum potentiam existentia respiciat: sed ad exercitium praedicationum requirit actualem existentiam subjectorum: et in primo, convenit cum caeteris praedicabilibus; a quibus distinguitur in hoc secundo, propter modum distinctum praedicandi accidentaliter quem habet: nam accidens respicit subjectum secundum actualem inhaerentiam in eo: actualis vero inhaerentia petit actualem existentiam subjecti: quia nihil potest inhaerere, nisi actu existenti: de aliis vero praedicabilibus diversa est ratio, quantum ad exercitium praedicandi, iam explicata.

This text, as many other things in the history of philosophy, is best understood in the context of a clear distinction between the relation universal - particular on the one hand and the relation accident - substance on the other. The combination of these two relations,
as first done by Aristotle in *Categoriae*, yields four classes of entities: universal substances, individual substances, universal accidents, and individual accidents. Thus, the issue discussed by Rubio is the very possibility of one of these four classes of entities: the universal accidents. Can there be an $x$ such that $x$ is at the same time accident and universal?

Rubio starts from an objection: no accident can be a universal, and supports this claim with two reasons: i) being universal is a mental property, being an accident is a real property; ii) in a sense, being universal does not presuppose existence, whereas being an accident does. Given a predication "$S$ est $P$", if $P$ is accidental (relative to $S$) then the truth of the predication presupposes that there are objects that are $S$, but if $P$ is essential (for $S$) the existence of individuals that are $S$ is not presupposed.

Rubio opens his *solutio* with a *distinguo*. A universal accident points in two directions: on the one hand towards its *inferiora quidditativa* (*color* towards *albedo*, *albedo* towards *haec albedo*), on the other hand towards the *subiecta quibus inhaeret* (*color* towards *homo*, and ultimately towards *hic homo*). These two directions obviously coincide with the above mentioned two relations: universals- particular, accidents- substances.

Rubio insists that the relation from universals to inferiors can obtain without the existence of corresponding individuals: *praedicatur de inferioribus secundum naturalem connexionem extremorum, ideoque non requirunt actualem eorum existentiam* (towards the end of the *secundo notandum*). This clearly prevents reading analysis [3]: "for every property there is a thing which has that property" in the sense of “every universal has a corresponding individual”.

Rubio’s text cannot be used either in support of the reading “every accidental universal (universal accident) has a corresponding substantial individual”, i.e. as a thesis of “existential import” restricted to universal accidents (for each universal accident there is

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7 This can also be seen in another scholastic source of Descartes: Eustachius a Sto.Paulo: *Notandum est autem accidens sicut et proprium dupliciter posse considerari: primo in abstracto respectu inferiorum accidentium, de quibus essentialiter praedicatur, vel ut genus, vel ut species, ut color de candore, nigredine. Secundo in concreto respectu subiectorum quibus inhaeret, et de quibus accidentario praedicatur, ut coloratum respectu parietis, nivis, etc. (Summa, I, de accidente, quaestio I).*
An accidental predicate said of an individual substance or of an universal substance expresses a relation of actual inherence of an accident in a substance: actualis vero inhaerentia petit actualem existentiam subiecti, quia nihil potest inhaerere nisi actu existenti (ad secundum). Every accidental predication "S est P" presupposes the existence of individuals under S because "S est P" expresses the inherence of an accident in a substance, and nothing can inhere in the void, in nothingness.

Evidently, Rubio not only helps ruling out reading [3a] but also tends to make reading [3b] the favorite. Rubio's phrase "nihil potest inhaerere nisi actu existenti" is remarkably close to the letter of our principle (although it must be observed that the phrase is somehow misleading too: its "nihil" does not correspond to the "nihil" of the principle; the "nihil" of the principle corresponds to "nisi actu existenti"; if the two "nihil" were combined, the phrase : nihil potest inhaerere nihil would emerge). As Rubio does not talk of "individual accidents" in the quoted text, it is not strictly possible to say that he confirms reading [3b].

As a final observation it is interesting to point out that the passage includes a statement that favors analysis [5] : nullo homine existente in rerum natura, falsum erit dicere, homo est albus, Petrus est albus (in secundo). The reason is the following.

References

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works of Brittan and of Mates were left out by the publisher: they are provided in the presente paper. Also, some Spanish phrases need improvement: "ocurrencia", as applied to symbols, should be replaced by "figuración" (analogously "ocurrir"), "importe existential" should be replaced by “supuesto existencial”.


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*Logica sive ars cogitandi*, Trajecti ad Rhenum, 1707. This book, published in Utrecht, shows no author's name, but in the preface the following is said: *Nos, in hoc Logicae artis compendio, tractanda quadripartimur, sequiti autorem perillustrem, qui gallice composit Artem Cogitandi.*


