

## Time as a Condition of Possibility: Reply to Michael Futch

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It is an honor for the author of *La métaphysique du temps chez Leibniz et Kant*<sup>1</sup> to be read and reviewed in *The Leibniz Review*<sup>2</sup> by Michael Futch. Futch is a well-known researcher on the topic of space and time in Leibniz, with significant publications in this area. His critical emphasis needs to be considered from a very important frame: my book on time is about the metaphysics of time and the perspective of the reviewer is the philosophy of time. This is not a just terminological difference, but one that is crucial to the nature of the two approaches. According to Futch, time is studied in the context of an approach such as those of B. van Fraassen, R. McRae, A. Grünbaum, J. Cover (to name only some Leibnizian scholars) or more generally in the context of the philosophy of time, as is the case with the famous book edited by R. Le Poidevin and M. MacBeath, *The Philosophy of Time*<sup>3</sup>. These studies rely on the traditions of analytical philosophy, on the methods, procedures, and results of this very important field of the contemporary philosophy. In contrast, the metaphysics of time is an approach to time made from a larger metaphysical view, with strong historical, biographical, cultural elements and a more extensive foundation.

I think that it is this frame of the metaphysics of time (and not the frame of the philosophy of time) that is more proper for analyzing the relationship between Kant and Leibniz. The differences between Kant's ideas and those of any other philosopher are so huge that they can hardly be approached in other frames; further, Kant's criticism of Leibniz is more virulent and thus more difficult to deal with than the criticism of any other philosopher.

Our thesis that time is a condition of possibility for Leibniz (and Kant) must be seen in this context. Of course, the issue of condition of possibility is specific to epistemology. But, the Kantian metaphysics of experience is an inquiry into the conditions of possibility of experience, so we can transpose this idea toward an epistemological dimension. It is not without relevance to recall that Kantian exegesis was epistemological in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century (Cohen et al.) and metaphysical in the XX<sup>th</sup> century (Heidegger et al.). The fact that contemporary exegesis covers almost the whole field of philosophy shows the richness of Kant's thought (logic: G. Tonelli; psychologist interpretation: P. Kitcher, K. Ameriks; cognitivist interpretation: R. Hanna; metatheoretical interpretation: M. Friedman etc.).

Futch asks for a clarification of the divergent characterizations of time in Leibniz's work. Unfortunately, this is an ideal, and like any other ideal, it is almost impossible to be met. Leibniz's work is so large and complex that an attempt to explain how the divergent definitions of the time are consistent will lead to failure from the beginning. Maybe Leibniz's definitions of time are not consistent. Leibniz rewrote some papers four or five times, he wrote thousands of letters, he even wrote from his carriage and, as it is well-known, he published very few of his writings. Besides, any attempt to explain the divergent senses must be put in its historical and biographical context. Many scholars in the last years show the very significant changes in Leibniz's thought. Thus, the classical rigid view of a unitary Leibniz from his first writings to the *Monadology* is almost an extinct idea. The important Leibnizian resources, such as substantial forms, corporeal substances, and monads, require us to construct very complicated metaphysical theories in which there are gaps and discontinuities between the metaphysics of corporeal substances and the metaphysics of monads<sup>4</sup>, or between the metaphysics of substantial forms and the metaphysics of corporeal substance.

Futch's other claim is that it is hard to think of Kant's criticism as really resting on a failure to recognize that there are important differences between how he understands things in themselves and how Leibniz understood the monads<sup>5</sup>. However, this overlooks the fact that our demonstration does not only show this aspect of Kant's failure. There are differences not only between things in themselves and monads, but also in the way in which Kant understands monads. Kant uses a sense of monad that belongs to C. Wolff, a vulgarizator seen by Kant as a Leibniz follower (see "the Leibnizo-Wolffian philosophy"). The problem is that Wolff was not at all a follower.

In the frame of Kantian philosophy it is easy to see that my affirmation that the monad has being and does not have existence is not so problematic. After Kant, existence (*Existenz*, *Dasein*) is in connection with the actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) of the things, so existential judgments are synthetic; they give extra information and the predicate is thought to be independent of the subject. Further, existence as a category of modality adds nothing to the concept of a thing.

The fact that time is a condition of possibility does not exclude but, on the contrary, clarifies the divergence of Leibniz's ideas on the ontological nature of time. Remember the frame of the discussion. Futch shows the existence of divergent definitions of the time, such as: well-founded phenomenon, ideal being of reason, ideal continuum; a set of relations supervenes on or results from changes. The

problem concerns the first two characterizations, because ideal continuity results from the demonstration of ideality and continuity. Thus the last characterization is not an option given that the time is a condition of possibility.

Time as well-founded phenomenon displays Leibniz's belief in the non-fictional character of the time<sup>6</sup>. His favorite example, the rainbow, emphasizes the fact that time is not an illusion, i.e., it is something. Under no circumstances should the phenomenality of time be understood as the phenomenality of physical objects. Time has an idealistic nature even if it is something that depends on anteriority, simultaneity, and posteriority. And our interpretation comes precisely in this context: time is not a simple ordering relation, but it is the condition of possibility of the existence of temporal relations<sup>7</sup>. The fact that time is a condition of possibility emphasizes, in addition to direct demonstration, that Leibniz does not fall into any circularity here. As a condition of possibility, both with Leibniz and with Kant, time is prior and makes things possible: time is prior and makes possible the relations of simultaneity, anteriority, and posteriority.

We now have the elements needed in order to see that the criticism Futch raises with respect to the relation between time and change, respectively time and things, is largely unfounded. He says that it is true that time does not exist without things (concerning time considered as a set of relations among phenomena), but it is false with respect to time as a mathematical being of reason. So, Futch wants to maintain that time as a being of reason can exist without things. But if time is a being of reason, how can it be put into relation with things? If it is said that time as a being of reason can exist without things, in the sense of objects, events, and processes, then the ideality of the time is violated and it would be something phenomenal like physical objects. If it is said that time ensures the frame for the existence of temporal relations, then it is obvious that, in Futch's interpretation, this frame can exist without things. But this view of an empty frame belongs to Newton's philosophy rather than Leibniz's.

It seems that Futch's critical considerations rely largely on a misunderstanding (and on an erroneous translation from the French) of a passage from my book (p. 177). In this passage, I do not say that when it comes to substances, the part is prior to the whole, and "in everything phenomenal, called by Leibniz ideal ... the whole is prior to the parts: in the ideal or continuous 'the whole is prior to the parts, as an arithmetical unity is prior to the fractions which divide it'"<sup>8</sup>, but I say that "in the substantial totality, called real by Leibniz (because, for Leibniz, the monad is real), the simple is prior to the whole, and in the phenomenal totality (*le tout*),

called ideal by Leibniz (because the phenomenon, as we saw, receives its reality from the reality of monads), the whole is prior to the parts”<sup>9</sup>.

Despite these issues, I would like to thank Michael Futch for his review. I think that this is a good opportunity for a dialogue that can lead us to the clarification of some hard to understand and, *voilà*, controversial aspects of Leibniz’s philosophy.

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*Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Adrian Nita, *La métaphysique du temps chez Leibniz et Kant*, L`Harmattan, Paris, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Futch, Review of Adrian Nita, *La métaphysique du temps chez Leibniz et Kant* (L`Harmattan, Paris, 2008), *The Leibniz Review*, vol. 21, 2011, pp. 171-174. I would like to thank Roger Ariew for suggestions and useful comments on a earlier version of the paper. This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0739.

<sup>3</sup> Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>4</sup> See Daniel Garber, *Leibniz. Body, substance, monad*, Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Futch, Review of Adrian Nita, *La métaphysique du temps chez Leibniz et Kant* (L`Harmattan, Paris, 2008), *The Leibniz Review*, vol. 21, 2011, p. 172.

<sup>6</sup> See Adrian Nita, *La métaphysique du temps chez Leibniz et Kant*, p. 128-129.

<sup>7</sup> See the letter to Sophie, 31 October 1705; G VII, 564.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Futch, Review of Adrian Nita, *La métaphysique du temps chez Leibniz et Kant* (L`Harmattan, Paris, 2008), *The Leibniz Review*, vol. 21, 2011, p. 174.

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Nita, *La métaphysique du temps chez Leibniz et Kant*, p. 177. The whole original passage is this: <<dans le tout substantiel, nommé par Leibniz réel (car pour Leibniz la monade est réelle), le simple est antérieur au tout, et dans le tout phénoménal, nommé ici par Leibniz idéal (car le phénomène, comme nous l`avons vu, reçoit sa réalité de la réalité des monades), le tout est antérieur aux parties>>.