

Reply to Massimo Mugnai's Review of *La doctrine Leibnizienne de la vérité*

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I would like warmly to thank Massimo Mugnai. The care that he put into reading my book, his suggestions, his clarifications, and even his criticisms are a great encouragement to me.

1. My most general thesis, the principle of a correspondence interpretation of Leibniz's conception of truth, seems to be accepted by Mugnai. I do not deny that there is in Leibniz, in the theory of science, an extensive pragmatic effort in which the concepts close to coherence play a primary role. But I claim that these concepts are not incompatible with the general aim of a correspondence and that they are not in competition with this aim. A correspondence interpretation of the kind that I propose is not new or revolutionary. Something quite similar was, for example, proposed already in the 1950s by W. Sellars, in his illuminating "Meditations Leibniziennes". This interpretation is also implicit in the work of most commentators (with, it is true, some exceptions). But it seemed to me that such an important point should not be left vague and that by making completely explicit "Leibniz's doctrine of truth" we should be able to resolve certain difficulties concerning his logic and his ontology. It is quite clear that the reconstitution of this doctrine depends largely on the ontological status that the interpreter grants to propositions, concepts, and maybe to facts, statements, possibilities, etc. But we all know that what is designated by "proposition", "concept", "statement", etc. is not the same thing today as it was in the 1680s. In following the usage of medievalists, in particular thanks to the work of Nuchelmans, I have made a certain number of clarifications concerning the behavior of truth-bearers, which are most often those of Leibniz: "*propositio*" and "*enuntiatio*", and sometimes also "*cognitio*". I have also tried to clarify the meaning of "*terminus*", "*ens*", and "*res*" using the definitions in the texts now available in A VI iv. There is a moment, however, when the historian must not only mention and describe the terms recurring in the texts of his author, but also use them. It is somewhat like musicians who decide to play ancient music on ancient instruments: whatever they do, those instruments make a different sound. I do not doubt that Mugnai is entirely in agreement with me on this point. I believe, however, that some of the reservations that he formulates result from this irreducible ambiguity.

Mugnai notes that I should have distinguished more clearly the proposition and

the propositional content, on the one hand, and the concept in and of itself or in God and the concept in the mind, on the other. I can completely understand that he emphasizes these points, especially considering the list of definitions of 1700 that he recently published, in which Leibniz distinguishes clearly between the *forma* of a term, that is its intension, and its *consideratio*, which resembles the “mode of presentation” of today’s Fregeans. All that I can say in my defense is that I found myself faced with the following choice: to formulate Leibniz’s position according to the terms of an identity doctrine or according to the terms of a correspondence doctrine. Given the very strong ontological status that Leibniz himself attributes to propositional content, it was altogether possible to opt for the identity theory of truth, particularly by adopting a line inspired by neo-Russelian versions of this theory. There are two reasons why I did not choose this route: 1) because we find positions among the late Scholastics that are manifestly more identitarist than that of Leibniz and 2) because the correspondentist interpretation alone made it possible to grant a primary role to the relation of expression, considered as a structural resemblance according to the interpretation of Chris Swoyer. Thus, having opted in favor of the correspondence theory of truth and having indicated the kinds of entities to which Leibniz attributes truth, what remained to be done was to show to what that which is declared true corresponds and, perhaps, that in virtue of which this correspondence can be established. I maintain that, for Leibniz, what truth-bearers correspond to are concepts or conceptual complexes (*notiones*) as they exist in themselves.

I readily allow that this is a strange position to which one cannot become entirely accustomed. Why concepts rather than facts or things as they exist in the world? The first thing to come to mind is the status of possible facts. Leibniz believes that there exist possible facts which are entirely determined and are not bundles of strictly qualitative properties. For this reason, truth could not, for him, bear solely upon facts. But that does not in the least contradict another argument that I offer, namely that Leibniz’s ontology is rather factualist: I suppose in that case that factualism is opposed to reism and not to possibilism. Besides the issue of the possible, it seemed important to me to emphasize another point. Leibniz does not make the same distinction that we make between concept and object. He distinguishes between them, but not in the same way we do. The difference for Leibniz is incontestably a much weaker one than that which belongs to our intellectual horizon since Frege. We cannot understand conceptual inherence and its link with the tradition of the *adaequatio rei* within the framework of a Fregean ontology. In particular, saying that true propositions express complex

concepts and that they are true on that condition does not mean that they have no relationship with things. I note, furthermore, that my position is in agreement on these issues with the few pieces of historical information provided by David M. Armstrong (*A World of States of Affairs*, pp. 14 and 125).

2. What I called “conceptual restriction of statements” served to show that the definition of truth through *inesse* requires applying the whole set of *propositiones* to one of its subsets. This conceptual restriction is not a tool aimed at clarifying the notion of inherence. It is rather a means to make apparent the link between inherence and a certain number of frequently debated metaphysical choices such as the rejection of transworld identity, or the (qualitative or non-qualitative) account of identity, or the anti-actualist conception according to which the actual is a subset of the possible.

3. Mugnai claims that any interpretation of a substantial part of Leibniz’s philosophy is only valid as an imperfect generalization and that certain texts do not entirely fit into it. If by that he postulates inconsistency, I cannot agree. If, on the other hand, it is simply the result of experience as a historian and a commentator, I cannot *not* subscribe to this view. I believe, however, that the example chosen to illustrate what is taken as my excessive generalization is not relevant. At issue is the passage “*qui non est a est non-a*” to which W. Lenzen called attention in his classic 1986 article. It is true that the rule given here by Leibniz is only valid if what is designated by the Latin “*qui*” is an individual. I do not contest that the use of the masculine pronoun is an intentional choice that conveys meaning. Nor do I contest that that which is intentionally signified is completeness, the property that Leibniz uses, in this period, to characterize individuality. What I contest does not concern the difference between incomplete and complete but, once again, that between concept and object. It is one thing to say that “*qui*” signifies a complete concept. It is another thing to say that it is therefore an existing individual. It is this second step that I do not grant. Because we implicitly work in a Fregean framework, we have a tendency to use certain variables of Leibniz’s calculus as object variables or as an ersatz of those variables. We do so all the more easily because the sentence in question contains a condition of completeness for the variable’s values. It is possible that this error does not have major consequences for evaluating his calculus. But the error does make Leibniz’s truth doctrine and, more generally, his ontology utterly unintelligible.

4. I must confess that I was surprised to learn that I was “unfair to Angelelli.” My book is probably the most Angelellian of all recently written works on Leibniz.

All of what I have specified above about the concept/object relationship sufficiently indicates how much I owe to the *Studies on Frege and Traditional Philosophy*. When a great historian, like Angelelli, writes that a great thinker (like Leibniz) did not understand one of the *minores* (like Nizolius), he runs the risk of being countered, even by a humbler historian. And I am far from having contested everything. I only put forward the hypothesis that Leibniz probably read Nizolius as well as Angelelli, but that the onto-grammatical positions of the Ciceronian seemed indefensible to him. If that is what it is to be unfair, it is a kind of unfairness that one might like to have to face more often.

Concerning Nizolius, Mugnai assigns a very strong function to *similitudo*, since he makes of this relation the foundation for *multitudines*. Then he notes that Leibniz would have done better to anticipate the difficulties mentioned by David M. Armstrong concerning nominalism. Given the role that he attributes to *similitudo*, I imagine that Mugnai is thinking of the “resemblance nominalism”. We, too, can play that game: by observing, for example, that Leibniz’s conception of *similitudo* as a species of identity falls within a realist framework in the sense of Armstrong. But was it not more in line with historical method to reconstruct the context of the Scholastic debate by working back, as I did, to Abelard’s critiques?

Mugnai claims that there are two separate questions, one concerning the nature of *multitudines* and the meaning of predication, the other concerning the priority of universals. I believe that if Leibniz did not separate these two questions, it is because Nizolius himself linked them. Nizolius inscribes what he has to say within a polemical strategy. For him, the “discrete collective whole” designated by “man” (which ought to be designated by “men”) must replace the kind man. Classes have to take the place of predicables. It is the classes that are the veritable universals. Accordingly, it ought to be shown either that classes fulfill all of a predicables’ functions, or that certain of the predicables’ functions that are not fulfilled by classes are unnecessary for ontology. Leibniz’s response is that priority (1) is an important feature of that kind, (2) cannot be ascribed to the collective whole without generating logical difficulties, but (3) cannot be abandoned if one wants to establish true predications. He finds the situation much better, however, for the distributive whole. And this choice in favor of the distributive whole did not keep him from developing an extensional version of the calculus.

It seems to me that it is not only my analysis that gives Mugnai pause over this point. A further sticking point is that the prestige enjoyed by “nominalism” in his eyes is called into question. Among historians of philosophy, especially among

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those who are well acquainted with medieval metaphysics, fondness for nominalism is like a first love for which we forever remain nostalgic.

5. I have tried to understand the meaning of the analysis of asymmetrical relations through reduplication. According to the results of A. Bäck, a reduplicative proposition is an implicit inference. I wanted to make this inference explicit in my analysis of Leibniz. My aim was not to establish a link between the relational accident of the Scholastics and the “represented relation” in the Monad. I only wanted to go one step further in the analysis of certain texts with which I became acquainted thanks to Mugnai. To speak like Frege, this “further step” in logical analysis turned out to be a “side step” for the ontological status of the terms, since it comprised a descending movement in the ontological square.

It is not impossible that this debate may be important. Indeed, one of the convictions with which I have come away from my work is that there were not two but only one truth doctrine in the development of Leibniz’ philosophy. Does that have metaphysical consequences? Does that mean that the difference between the two theories of substance (the first more turned toward logic, the second more toward dynamics) is not as strong as is usually claimed? It is the relationship between the to-be-in and the to-be-represented that is at stake here. I seem to recall that this relationship also obsessed W. Sellars in several of his articles.

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