

News from Israel: Marcelo Dascal, Institute of Advanced Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The big Leibnizian news from Israel is that from October 1st (1994) up to September 30 (1995) we are running here, at the Institute of Advanced Studies, a research project centered on our beloved hero. The project (described below), involves scholars as well as graduate students from many countries. Some will be fellows of the Institute for practically the whole year [Marcelo Dascal (Tel Aviv), Gideon Freudenthal (Tel Aviv), Massimo Mugnai (Florence), Carl Posy (North Carolina), Quintin Racionero (Madrid), Elhanan Yakira (Jerusalem)]. Other colleagues will be here for shorter periods [(Fernando Gil (Paris), Ezequiel de Olaso (Buenos Aires), Kuno Lorenz (Saarbrücken), Alan Gross (Minnesota), Maria Rosa Antognazza (Aberdeen), Olga Pombo (Lisboa), Marta Spranzi-Zuber (Paris), Mirella Saim (Montreal), etc.]. Several other scholars have been also participating regularly in our seminars and working sessions, which have been so far very lively. We are working in parallel paths: A. trying to learn about other approaches (including in other cultures and traditions) to controversies and to develop our own approach; B. studying Leibniz's own theory or theories of controversies; C. studying Leibniz's practice of controversy, in several particular cases.

The group holds two kinds of meetings: Seminars (where material at an advanced level of elaboration will be presented) and Working Sessions (for the discussion of work in the making). The agenda for the initial period includes:

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| 20.10 | (W) | The semantic field of "controversy", "polemics", "debate", etc. (Gideon Freudenthal) |
| 27.10 | (S) | The Balance of Reason (Marcelo Dascal) |
| 03.11 | (W) | A survey of Leibniz's polemics and of his writings on controversies (Quintin Racionero) |
| 10.11 | (S) | Misinterpreting Leibniz's Theory of Possible Worlds (Massimo Mugnai) |
| 17.11 | (W) | What is at stake in the <i>Théodicée</i> ? (Elhanan Yakira) |
| 01.12 | (S) | Strategies of argumentation in the Talmud (Menachem Fisch) |
| 08.12 | (W) | A survey of Leibnizian themes and problems in Kant (Carl Posy) |
| 15.12 | (S) | The Controversy between Malthus and Ricardo and the Recent Debate on the Rhetoric of Economics (Sergio Cremaschi and Marcelo Dascal) |
| 22.12 | (W) | Leibniz vs. Papin (Gideon Freudenthal and M. Dascal) |
| 29.12 | (S) | A formal model of controversies (Fernando Gil) |

- 05.01 (W) Is there a connection between the Object-Level and the Meta-Level in Controversies? (Open debate)
- 12.01 (S) Leibniz's position on the controversy on enthusiasm (Daniel Cook)
- 19.01 (W) Leibniz vs. Des Bosses (Quintin Racionero and M. Dascal)

Summary of the Project:

Leibniz the Polemicist: A Case-Study in the Pragmatics of Scientific and Philosophical Controversies

The late 17th century's 'République des Lettres' was the arena for an extraordinarily vivid exchange of ideas among scholars. Manuscripts and letters were circulated among scholars prior to their publication, and some prominent figures such as Mersenne and Oldenburg specialized in acting as relays in this process. Scholars often visited each other. Scholarly journals such as *Acta Eruditorum* (Leipzig), *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* (Amsterdam), *Journal des Scavans* (Rotterdam) published critical reviews soon after the publication of important books (sometimes as soon as two weeks after publication), often followed by authors' replies, counter-replies, etc. Learned societies held meetings discussing recent contributions in all fields of knowledge. One may say that the late 17th century was perhaps the golden age of scholarly dispute and controversy, an activity that was considered a *conditio sine qua non* for the advancement of science and philosophy.

One outstanding figure in this context was undoubtedly Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), who was directly or indirectly engaged in the most significant controversies of his time. Leibniz is especially interesting in this respect for several reasons. His work spanned practically all areas of knowledge, from science to metaphysics, from engineering to politics, from theology to jurisprudence. He maintained a huge correspondence with the major intellectual figures of his time. His major works were in fact detailed debates with other authors (the *Nouveaux Essais* is a critique of Locke's theory of knowledge; the *Théodicée* is a detailed rebuttal of Bayle's scepticism; etc.). Furthermore, he explicitly maintained that his own views developed as a result of recognizing and synthesizing the grains of truth found in all other theories. In this way he underscored his firm belief that the progress of knowledge cannot but be the result of a large cooperative endeavor. In addition to all that, Leibniz also developed an explicit theory about the rational

resolution of controversies, which played a key role in the later stages of his conception of philosophical, juridical, and scientific method.

The purpose of this research is to investigate Leibniz's theory and practice of controversies in his various areas of activity — a task that has not been so far systematically undertaken. The research is expected to yield significant results in (a) the interpretation of Leibniz's thought, (b) the understanding of how scientific and philosophical controversies are actually conducted, and (c) the role of controversies in theory formation and evolution:

- (a) the comparative study of the actual strategies of dispute Leibniz employed and how they fare vis-à-vis his own theory of controversies, as well as the investigation of how his own theories in several domains were actually shaped by his having to face this or that opponent, will undoubtedly shed much light on the proper interpretation of Leibniz's innovative but often puzzling and unpalatable theories in several domains.
- (b) It will also provide a rich case-study of the pragmatics of controversy and its influence on theory development.
- (c) more generally and ambitiously, the careful study of Leibniz's case will provide the basis for developing a controversy-based approach to theory formation and evolution, as an alternative to current approaches in the historiography of ideas and in epistemology.

We invite all colleagues that might wish to contribute to this project to contact us. The best idea is to use the following e-mail address: dascal@ias.huji.ac.il. Snail mail: Institute of Advanced Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 91904 Jerusalem, Israel.