

Leibniz around 1700: Three Texts on Metaphysics

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The three short texts – never before published – that follow go back to the very first years of the 18th century. They deal with several metaphysical issues of great relevance to the development of Leibniz's monadological system – issues which also often recur in other works of the period and in the correspondence of those years. Their worth in fact seems essentially that of furnishing further documentary evidence of the development of Leibniz's mature thinking on some philosophical issues that have known conspicuous oscillations in their theoretical formulations. Although some recent criticism, availing itself of the volumes of Leibniz's works published by the Academy, has gone into the origin and early development of Leibniz's metaphysics in great depth and detail, the period from the *Discours de métaphysique* (1686) to the late *Monadologie* (1714) tends nevertheless to be regarded by most scholars as just one stretch. Therefore, one of the next tasks set to the Leibnizian historiography seems to be that of tracing the contour (if there is any) of the development of Leibniz's metaphysics in the philosopher's last thirty years. A history, that is, that means to show whether and how the doctrinal oscillations of the mature monadology let themselves be reconciled into one direction, and whether in such a development any fracture points can be singled out or not (just as they can, for example, as I think, in the doctrine of space in the mid-nineties). In order to carry on such a historical reconstruction possibly more documents will be needed than those now available throughout the 18th-century editions. Thus, going back as they do exactly to the middle of the period in question, the three following fragments represent a small contribution to the larger task.

The first text gives a few considerations on the Principle of Reason and Principle of the Best (here, *Axioma perfectionis*) and, most of all, on the criteria for the selection of the best of possible worlds; therefore, it returns to the themes that Leibniz has dealt with in the ampler *De rerum Originatione radicali* (1697), and that he will return to now and then. Among the most interesting features of our text it is worth signaling that the principle of maximization of variety and form in the world is here understood by Leibniz as a maximization of the *quantity of in-*

telligibility of the world itself, which in turn seems to be evidence of the universally spiritual nature of substances (the fact, in other words, that the essence of any substance is intelligence). Parallel to this, the principle of minimization, which in the '97 paper concerned space and time, here is enriched by the determinations of *subjectum* and *materia*; Leibniz derives from it that the existence of *similar* beings (that is, having the same form) is detrimental to the perfection of the world, because such beings would not provide the world with any variety, thus any perfection, but on the contrary would only use up the others' place. Without insisting on the demonstrational force of such an argument, we will at least note that here Leibniz seems definitely to ground the *principium identitatis indiscernibilium* (i.e. *similium*) in his *axioma perfectionis*, instead of grounding it straightaway in the *principium rationis* as he apparently is more inclined to do elsewhere. In effect, it is the very Principle of the Best that seems to be grounded in turn in the Principle of Reason alone without God's good will expressly intervening. The uniqueness and perhaps in a sense even the selection of the best of possible worlds seems rather to rely on the notion of *determinatio*, which however so far (even in the mathematical and geometrical fields from which it has been drawn) remains more a wish than an achievement. Other issues here briefly mentioned are the classical ones in Leibniz's metaphysics, such as the non-existence of atoms and vacuum, or the conservation of energy (here, in more general terms, *quantitas actionis et potentiae*). Just as in other writings of the period, the *vacuum formarum* is also denied, and yet a few years later, in the *Nouveaux Essais*, it will be partially rehabilitated within a broader perspective. The theme of the growing perfection of the world is also repeated here and in other papers of these years, and nevertheless, as it clearly implies some negation of the ideality of time, it will be questioned in Leibniz's later writings. Note, finally, that the concept according to which the world expresses God, which ends this short essay, seems to make use of the technical notion of expression in a way that excludes from it any intervention of temporality (in the following years, from this argument Leibniz will conclude that all perceptual expression is a spatial expression).

The two other texts are especially concerned with the subtle concept of a being of aggregation. The list of definitions from 1700 sounds quite like many similar catalogues from the preceding decades, and it mirrors the stage of definitional elaborateness that Leibniz attained in metaphysics at the turn of the century. Clearly, such definitions are diverse, involving substance, relations, quality, quantity (here defined as *relatio aggregationis*), and many other concepts of Leibniz's philosophy. It is perhaps worth noting that in this text the aggregation relation is also applied to successive beings, and therefore Leibniz counts among aggregates not only machines and rainbows (the usual examples on most interpretations) but even History. In a passage, he gives the name of *Ens successivum* even to *locus*, and, unless it is a *lapsus calami*, we will have to understand how a

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determination can be called successive that has constantly been defined elsewhere through the concept of coexistence (maybe because a phenomenon in space is apprehended through successive syntheses?). The 1704 text deals again with the concept of a being of aggregation, and explains that the reality of such beings consists of *two* ingredients, that is, mental unity and pre-established harmony. Such a mental unity, which the text carefully distinguishes from a material unity (here Leibniz seems mostly to argue against his younger self's opinions) will later become, in the *Monadologie*, the synthetic principle that defines a monad's perception, and in that theoretical frame the pre-established harmony will be employed to guarantee the intentional (objective) character of a perceptual act. In our text, the only example of a purely mental relation of aggregation Leibniz offers is that of *distantia*. At the time, he was, I believe, about to build a theory of the expression of monads in phenomena through situational relations, and distance must have increasingly appeared to him not only as the paradigm, but perhaps even the only instance, of an ideal but objective relation in a phenomenon.

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The dates for the following texts are those suggested by the *Leibniz-Archiv*. In my transcription, I employ <verbum> for those words Leibniz added at a subsequent time, and *verbum* for the dubious ones. There would be many more of the latter, were it not for the patience and expertise of Massimo Mugnai, to whom I express my deepest gratitude.

LH IV, III, 5e, Bl. 30r

In philosophando assumo aliquid existere, unde cum nihil sit sine ratione, oportet rationem esse cur aliquid potius existat quam nihil. Eamque rationem fundari in re necessaria; nam contingens rationem existendi non habet in natura sua, adeoque fundamentum existendi non est. Porro quae causa facit, ut aliquid potius sit quam nihil, facit etiam ut plus sit potius quam minus, nam ratio est **actus** seu praevalentia existendi in causa seu principio existentiarum. Et hinc jam nascitur magnum illud meum Axioma perfectionis, ut maxima prodeat realitas, quae haberi potest.

Realitas porro aestimanda est et multitudine et varietate et ordine rerum, et ut verbo dicam quantitate intelligibilitatis <quod etiam indicat omnia esse propter intelligentes>. In multitudine sine varietate non satis multa esset realitas, quae non tantum materia sed et formis aestimanda est, et pro pluribus per omnia simi-

De Realitate [1700]

Reasoning on philosophy, I assume something exists. Hence, as nothing is without a reason, there must also be a reason why something exists rather than nothing. Such a reason must be grounded in a necessary thing, because a contingent thing does not have the reason for existing in its own nature and therefore it is not a ground of existence. Furthermore, the very same cause which makes something to be rather than nothing also makes the more to be rather than the less, and indeed the reason is the act or predominance of the existifying in the cause or principle of the existing beings.¹ And from here already comes my great Axiom of Perfection, according to which the greatest amount of reality is given.

In effect, reality should be evaluated according to the multitude and variety and order of things and thus, in a word, according to the quantity of intelligibility (which also shows that everything is for the intelligent beings).² In a multitude without variety there would not be enough reality, for reality needs to be evalu-

¹ This argument already clearly appears in the paper *De Ratione cur haec existant quam alia*, A VI, 4B, n. 314, pp. 1634-35, which its editors date in 1689, although the theme has steadily developed ever since Leibniz's early years (starting, say, with Leibniz's refusal of Descartes' "principle of plenitude"). From the chronological point of view, the passage closest to ours can be found in the *De rerum Originatione radicali* (cf. chiefly GP VII, p. 304). I employ the verb "to existify" to render Leibniz's neologism *existentiare*.

² On the same issue see also § 14 of the untitled writing in GP VII, p. 290, which presumably goes back to the same period as ours does. As for the following developments of the concept, see at least the mentions in the *Principes de la Nature et de la Grâce*, § 10 (GP VI, p. 603) and the *Monadologie*, § 58 (GP VI, p. 616). We can observe that, however the theory of order and formal variety as criteria for bringing the world into existence is not specifically Leibnizian, only in the monadological system is it assumed as the main criterion of perfection. For example, after Malebranche maintains in his *De la Recherche de la vérité*, III, II, 10 (N. MALEBRANCHE, *Oeuvres Complètes*, edited by A. Robinet, Paris 1962-70, vol. 1, p. 482) that generation and corruption show God's wisdom better than a uniform and incorruptible universe ever would, he even says in his *Traité de la Nature et de la Grâce*, I, I, §§ 14-15 (*Oeuvres*, vol. 5, pp. 29-30) that the world was created by God in such a way to be maximally intelligible, but not necessarily the most perfect possible. Almost wiser than good, in fact, Malebranche's God could have created a more perfect but less understandable world than the actual one. Against it, see *De rerum Originatione radicali*, GP VII, p. 306.

libus unum sufficiebat, ne caeteris locus tolleretur. Ordo autem in varietate quoddam dat unum in multis, ut omnia quam plurimum se invicem referantur, et cuncta summa ratione fiunt. Eligenda unica seu determinata, pro geminis seu nullam inter se praerogativam habentibus, quia ita plura sumenda quam esset opus si unicum adhiberetur. Ubique maximi et minimi habetur ratio pro minimo subjecto, spatio, tempore, materia, maximum formae, virtutis, rationis. Nullum vacuum, nullae atomi <nulla prima elementa, mundi in mundis sine fine> ne loca et corpora *similia* relinquuntur: nulla fit mutatio per saltum quod esset genus vacui seu

ated not only from matter but also from forms; and, instead of many things similar in every respect to one another, one would be sufficient in order for the others' place not to be taken away.³ Order in variety also confers some unity on multiplicity, in such a way that all things are correlated between them to the highest degree, and all of them happen with the utmost reason. Unique and determinate things must be preferred to twin things, that is, those things having no prerogative between them, otherwise more of them would be assumed than it would be necessary if only one were employed.⁴ Everywhere there is a ratio between maximum and minimum, and substratum, space, time, and matter are minimized, while form, virtue, and reason are maximized.⁵ There is no vacuum, there are no atoms, no first elements, but worlds within worlds without end, so that there may not be any places and bodies similar to one another. No change occurs through a leap which would be a kind of vacuum or gap in forms, because a great

³ Cf. again the text edited by Gerhardt, § 13, GP VII, p. 290. Here the Principle of Indiscernibles is applied to similar beings, while elsewhere Leibniz, with a typical oscillation, only relates it to the congruent beings. As for the way in which the criterion of justification of such a principle oscillates too, we can see § 25 of the *Fifth Paper* to Clarke, in which Leibniz expounds an argument akin to the one of our text, based on the Principle of the Best; and the subsequent § 26, in which on the contrary he grounds the Principle of Indiscernibles in that of Reason (GP VII, pp. 394-95).

⁴ The principle of determination grounded in architectonic reasons can be found in the same years in the *Tentamen anagogicum* (GP VII, p. 278), and it will pass, along with the same examples, into the *Théodicée*, §§ 195-96 (GP VI, pp. 232-33). Accompanying it, however, there is a principle, no longer an architectonic one, which should demonstrate the existence of a most determinate being in each instance under consideration. In those years Leibniz was, with difficulty, endeavoring a proof of the uniqueness of a straight line as a line determined by two and only two points, and he could not but detect similar difficulties in demonstrating, for example, the uniqueness of the most perfect world, and in general in successfully finding *unica determinata, pro geminis*, in any context whatsoever. Leibniz briefly deals with this problem also in §§ 9-10 of the abovementioned contemporary text, in GP VII, p. 290.

⁵ The principle of determination of the world through the calculus of maxima and minima is also in the *De rerum Originatione radicali*, GP VII, pp. 303-304. On the possibility of solving variational problems, see also *Théodicée*, § 8 (GP VI, p. 107).

hiatus in formis, cum multa et ordinata varietas interponi possit <quod non est negligendum>. Eadem semper est quantitas actionis et potentiae, nempe quam maxima † licet. Sed non idem est semper gradus perfectionis <nam id non licet> quia alioqui nulla posset fieri mutatio, cum non tenderetur ad finem. Semper ergo mundus tendit ad majorem perfectionem, perfectiusque exprimere discit autorem sese evolvendo, neque involutiones evolutionibus aequipollent.

and orderly variety can be put in its place (which is not to be overlooked).⁶ There is always the same quantity of action and power, that is, the greatest possible quantity. However, there is not always the same degree of perfection (in fact, it is not possible), otherwise no change could ever occur since it would not be aimed at an end. Thus the world always tends to a greater and greater perfection, and by evolving it learns to express its own author more and more perfectly; nor are the involutions equivalent to the evolutions.⁷

⁶ An analogous stance on the *vacuum formarum* can be read in the same period (1704) in the *Considerations sur les Principes de Vie, et sur les Natures Plastiques, par l'Auteur du Systeme de l'Harmonie préétablie*, GP VI, p. 543. However, the more nuanced stance expressed in *Nouveaux Essais*, III, IV, § 12 (A VI, 6, n. 2, p. 307; GP V, p. 286) also goes back to the same years.

⁷ On the progress of perfection in the world see again *De rerum Originatione radicali*, GP VII, p. 308. The same opinion may be hinted at in the end of the *Principes de la Nature et de la Grâce*, § 18 (GP VI, p. 606). In his old years, however, Leibniz will also put the question in doubtful terms: see his letter to Bourguet, 5 August 1715 (GP III, pp. 582-83).

LH IV, 1, 14c, Bl. 3r

Multae divisiones utiles ex mea res explicandi ratione oriuntur, adhibendae si scholastico systemate comprehendendi deberet.

Distingui potest inter substantiam quae est concretum completum, et Accidens, quod est abstractum quod substantiae inest. Item inter DEUM, seu Ens primitivum, et creaturam seu Ens derivatum. Item inter Ens absolutum seu constituens; aut respectivum seu **Relativum** seu resultans. Relatio nimirum est quod aliena productione oritur aut desinit nullo accedente influxu proprio in ipsum, seu cujus variatio consequitur alienam. Reale Absolutum est res aut modus. Res est quod perstat, modus est accidens, quod variabile. Variabile est vel terminus variationis, ut figura, qualitas, vel ipsa variatio ut mutatio. Ens etiam aliud est permanens, ut substantia, quantitas, qualitas; & successivum ut tempus, locus, motus. Interim solent qualitates comprehendendi sub rebus. Ens aliud est permanens fixum aliud successivum. Successivum non in momento est, sed ad ipsum constituendum complura sunt conjungenda momenta, ut historia, ut motus. Alia Realia alia apparentia, seu alia φύσει alia νόμῳ. Alia νόμῳ, seu opinionis entia sunt quae fiunt per aggregationem, sic iris; tempus; motus; relationes. Realia sunt: DEUS, materia, formae substantiales. Sunt entia completa formae accidentales, seu passivae et activae. His nos addimus Aggregata et relationes. Quantitas est ipsa relatio aggregationis. Aggregata duplicia sunt, ex coexistentibus, ut machina, et inco-

Divisiones [1700]

Many useful distinctions arise from my way of explaining things, and they will need to be applied in order for it to be understood according to the Scholastic system.

We can make a distinction between a substance, which is a complete concrete, and an accident, which is abstract and is in a substance.⁸ Likewise, between God as a primitive being, and a creature as a derivative being. And also between an absolute or constitutive being, and a respective or relative or resulting being. A relation is indeed that which originates or ceases through the production of something else, without any influx of its own; its variation is the consequence of the variation of something else. An absolute real is a thing or a mode. A thing is that which endures, whereas a mode is an accident and it is variable. Variable is an extreme of the variation, such as a figure or a quality, or is the variation itself, in a change.⁹ Furthermore, a being can be permanent, such as a substance, quantity, quality, or it can be successive, such as time, place, and motion. Sometimes qualities are comprehended among things. A being is either permanent and stable, or it is successive. The successive being is not in one temporal instant, and in order to make it many instants need to be put together, as is the case with history or motion. Some beings are real, other beings are apparent, that is, some of them are φύσει and others νόμῳ.¹⁰ The νόμῳ ones, or beings of opinion, are those that arise through aggregation, such as a rainbow, time, motion, relations. The real ones are God, matter, substantial forms. Accidental forms, both active and passive, are complete beings, to which we can also add aggregates and relations. Quantity is nothing but the relation of aggregation. Aggregates are of two kinds:

⁸ The distinction between abstract and concrete beings is very recursive in the various lists of definitions from the eighties. The most explicit occurrence is A VI, 4A, n. 98₃, p. 400. An extended commentary to it can be read in J.-B. RAUZY, *La doctrine leibnizienne de la vérité*, Paris 2001, pp. 239-69.

⁹ On the distinction between *variatio* and *mutatio* see, for example, *Notationes Generales*, in A VI, 4A, n. 131, p. 557 (formerly in Grua, p. 324).

¹⁰ The distinction between beings of nature (φύσει) and of opinion (νόμῳ) is Democritus', and Leibniz could probably read it in DIOG. LAERT. I 45 (cf. also SEXT. EMP. *Adv. Log.* A 135, where however the term φύσις is not mentioned). Leibniz first cites it in his *Contemplatio de Historia literaria* in 1682 (A VI, 4A, n. 114₂, pp. 477 and 480), and several times after that, and also in his correspondence with Arnauld (GP II, p. 101). The distinction also occurs, at the same time as in our text, in Leibniz's letter to De Volder, 20 June 1703 (GP II, p. 252).

existentibus ut historia, motus.

Sunt et aggregata ex substantiis et ex formis accidentalibus; et alia realia ut grex, alia apparentia ut iris, tametsi certo modo haberi possit pro aggregato reali. Dum incoherencia jungantur per certum situm in eo deceptio est quod videmur nobis videre eandem iridem, plures † nobis esse aut perdurare †, cum semper alia nascatur ut figura in aqua. Et revera eo modo & corpora sunt apparentia, cum non durent, etsi mutatio non sit sensibilis.

some of them are made up of coexistent beings, such as a machine, others of non-coexistent beings, such as history or motion.

There are aggregates of substances and aggregates of accidental forms, and some of them are real, such as a flock, while others are apparent, such as a rainbow, although this one may also be regarded, in some way, as a real aggregate. When a few uncohesive elements join together in some place in it there is a deception, as it seems to us that we see one and the same rainbow, ...¹¹, for another one always rises just as an image in the water does.¹² And in fact in the same way bodies also are apparent, as they do not last, even though the change may not be perceived by the senses.

¹¹ Here the manuscript is corrupted for at least two words.

¹² The example of the rainbow may first appear in the already mentioned chart of definitions from the eighties, in A VI, 4A, n. 98₃, p. 400 (in which a rainbow is a *phenomenon congruum*), and it recurs in Leibniz ever since. At the time in which our text was written, it can also be found for example in the *Nouveaux Essais*, II, XII, § 7 (A VI, 6, n. 2, p. 146; GP V, p. 133). As we can see in our fragment, Leibniz was willing to confer on the rainbow a status midway between appearance and reality, according to the point of view, and he held that «Libro opus fuit non uno ad naturam iridis explicandam» (A VI, 4A, n. 150, p. 640); in effect, elsewhere he mentions two of them, that is, F. MAUROLICO, *Photismi de lumine*, Napoli 1611, and M.A. DE DOMINIS, *De Radiis visus et lucis*, Venezia 1611. Among the other papers in which Leibniz discusses reality and appearance of a rainbow and shows his interest in its physical explanation, we may mention the *Definitiones* in A VI, 4B, n. 267, p. 1397 and again the *Notiones generales* in A VI, 4A, n. 131, p. 555 (Grua, p. 322).

LH IV, III, 5e, Bl. 23r

Entia per aggregationem ut Grex, piscina piscibus abundans, Machina, non sunt nisi semientia quorum realitas consistit in unione, quam facit mens, seu in denominatione extrinseca sive relatione: qualis est distantia, et harmonia praestabilita, quae facit ut unum in aliud influere videatur. Sunt ergo resultantia relativa seu mentalia.

Si duo corpora cohaereant, hoc fit non reali unione, sed velut per accidens singulis, dum ab ambiente ad se invicem pelluntur. Nec contactus unionem facit, cum momentaneus esse queat, imò soleat, rursusque à se resiliant quae concurrere.

Entia per aggregationem [1704]

Beings of aggregation, such as a flock, a fishpond full of fish, a machine, are nothing else but semibeings. Their reality consists of a unity produced by both the mind, that is to say, an extrinsic denomination or relation, such as distance; and the pre-established harmony, because of which such beings seemingly influence one another. Therefore, they are but relative, or mental, resultant beings.

If two bodies join together, this is not due to a real unity, but to an accident of the two single bodies, while the environment pushes them against one another. Nor does their contact produce any unity either, because it may be, and often is, a momentary one and the bodies that have collided spring back again.¹³

¹³ Leibniz's identification of synthesis and mind is exceptionally rigorous. In his youth, Leibniz thought that a bodily contact, as a form of union, should produce a *mens momentanea* devoid of memory (cf. § 17 of the *Fundamenta praedemonstrabilia* in the *Theoria Motus abstracti*, A VI, 2, n. 41, p. 266; GP IV, p. 230; GM VI, pp. 69-70). Along with the systematization of his mature years, he will strongly deny that perception could ever be likened to the unity of bodies (see for example the *Specimen inventorum de admirandis naturae generalis arcanis*, A VI, 4B, n. 312, p. 1625; GP VII, p. 317), and in his later years, finally, he will identify the concepts of unity, substance, and mind (cf. *Monadologie*, § 14, GP VI, p. 608 – or the already mentioned letter to Bourguet, GP III, p. 581). Our fragment seems to me to go markedly towards the latter outcome. It is contemporary with a similar stance expressed in a letter to De Volder, 10 November 1703 (GP II, pp. 256-57).