

# Leibniz and Hermeneutics



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Edited by

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# CONTENTS

Preface .....	vii
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## **Part I: Leibniz and Hermeneutics**

Chapter One.....	3
The Possible Legacy of Leibniz's Metaphysics in Hermeneutics JEAN GRONDIN	

Chapter Two .....	17
Perspective as Mediation between Interpretations JUAN A. NICOLÁS	

## **Part II: Leibniz and Heidegger**

Chapter Three .....	35
On the Shift in How Leibniz was Viewed in Heidegger's Thinking KIYOSHI SAKAI	

Chapter Four .....	67
Intramonadic Temporality in the Monadology FRIEDRICH-WILHELM VON HERRMANN	

Chapter Five .....	87
The Concept of Representation in Heidegger's Interpretation of the Monadology HARDY NEUMANN	

Chapter Six .....	101
Memory, Personal Identity and the Past: Heideggerian Emendations of a Position Held by Leibniz RAZVAN SOFRONI	

Chapter Seven.....	113
Force and Resistance: Heidegger, Leibniz and Reality as the Guiding Thread of General Ontology JOSÉ M. GÓMEZ DELGADO AND MIGUEL ESCRIBANO	

### **Part III: Leibniz—Hermeneutical and Phenomenological Interpretations**

Chapter Eight.....	133
Leibniz from the Perspective of Ratiovitalistic Hermeneutics JESÚS CONILL	
Chapter Nine.....	147
The Conception of Knowledge in Leibniz’s Monadology and its Value within the Framework of Apel’s Anthropology of Knowledge LAURA MOLINA MOLINA	
Chapter Ten .....	159
Vitalism in Leibniz: A Deleuzian Approach FRANCISCO JOSÉ MARTÍNEZ	
Chapter Eleven .....	171
From Leibniz to Deleuze: Three Folds Applied to Art Theory DIEGO GONZÁLEZ OJEDA	
Chapter Twelve .....	183
The Eve of Husserlian Monadology AGUSTÍN SERRANO DE HARO	
Bibliography .....	191
Heidegger’s Reception of Leibniz MIGUEL ESCRIBANO AND JOSÉ M. GÓMEZ DELGADO	
A. Editions of Leibniz’s Works and their Abbreviations.....	191
B. Texts on and References to Leibniz in Heidegger’s <i>Gesamtausgabe</i> .....	192
C. Secondary Bibliography on Leibniz and Heidegger.....	201
Contributors.....	207
Name Index .....	213
Concept Index.....	215

## PREFACE

The work of Leibniz is a wonder of diversity and creativity. Despite his main dedication to diplomacy, his theoretical contribution to establishing the theoretical and practical modern cultural paradigm is of such a magnitude that many of its aspects have yet to be researched and formulated.

Leibniz's contribution to shaping modern European culture is not limited to philosophical reflection, or even to the theoretical sphere. He worked in practice to establish the idea of Europe as a cultural unit, and to do so he campaigned for the unity of the Christian churches, for political cooperation between European powers, and he founded academies and scientific journals. With this aim, he forged relationships with the key politicians, church leaders, scientists, theologians and intellectuals of his time.

In his theoretical work, Leibniz made significant contributions in mathematics as well as in psychology; in physics as well as in engineering; in history as well as in metaphysics; in theory of knowledge and theology. His attitude, always a creative one, allowed him to push the frontiers of knowledge well beyond the point where he encountered them at the outset.

And so Leibniz's imprint on European culture is far removed from what might at first be thought, given his historical recognition. The reconstruction of the "effectual history" of Leibnizianism, as in many other cases, is complicated, intermittent and very multi-faceted. With each historical step, new chapters in the story are discovered. No sooner is Leibniz recognised as one of Kant's key predecessors than he is expressly placed as an essential link in the development of contemporary logic. No sooner are the links that take us from Leibniz to Hegel reconstructed through a certain theory of underlying rationality than a connection is established with Nietzsche via the metaphysics of individuality. No sooner are the origins of the concept of space-time in physical relativity found in Leibniz's ideas than signs of the Freudian theory of the subconscious are found in Leibniz's thinking.

Thus, Leibniz's real influence in many ways offsets the historical fact that a Leibnizian philosophical movement was not established for a certain period of time. A sign of this is the fact that such diverse philosophers as

B. Russell or M. Heidegger, L. Feuerbach or W. Dilthey, E. Cassirer or N. Rescher, G. Deleuze or J. Ortega y Gasset have dedicated monographic studies to Leibnizian thought. This diversity gives an idea of the numerous philosophical ins-and-outs which the Leibnizian philosophical magma has been seeping through.

One of the subtle links that may be in the process of being retraced in historical and critical research is the (possible) relationship between Leibniz's thought and Hermeneutics. All of the studies that make up the volume presented here are dedicated to this task. This is not a completely original attempt, but neither has it received all the attention from researchers that it probably deserves. The specific bibliography on this topic has been compiled in the final Bibliography chapter. The results of this investigation have been rather scant, given the philosophical productiveness that the topic promises.

There is a convergence here, on the one hand, of a philosopher that has decisively influenced the formation of Modernity; and on the other, the strongest philosophical alternative to this Modernity that has ever been formulated, which arose when Modernity was going through a time of crisis and was being called into question. In this sense, Leibniz is both within Modernity (since he contributed to its origins) and outside of it (given that many of his proposals were rejected or simply ignored by the predominant theoretical strands in Modernity, such as the Cartesian-Kantian matrix and its historical derivations until the 20th century). From this point of view, Leibniz is in an exceptionally productive position for explaining Modernity and at the same time, for putting forward proposals for it in its times of crisis. Such proposals arise, then, from the very heart of Modernity, though it is from other Modernities that were at some point possible.

Hermeneutics has been established from the beginning of the last century as the most elaborate and powerful alternative to the paradigm of modern rationality. After a century of philosophical hermeneutics, the assessment of Modernity has been transformed, and in many cases, it has been abandoned by certain fledgling tendencies. The debate with some of the other tendencies to which Modernity has in fact given rise (critical rationalism, logical neopositivism, pragmatism, critical theory) constitutes a large part of the philosophical progress throughout the 20th century.

Leibniz therefore occupies a very important place in the very core of the conception of hermeneutics that Heidegger subscribes to. Heidegger's position is one that is in general very critical of Leibnizian thought, particularly in the second stage of his philosophical development. Heidegger believed that Leibniz represents the purest spirit of Modernity,



reflected in the principle of reason. However, Heidegger concerned himself with Leibniz's work from his first steps in philosophy until the end of his career (a detailed list of exactly where can be found in the final Bibliography of this volume). Throughout Heidegger's first philosophical stage, his position with respect to Leibniz is not so adverse. Heidegger must have thought that Leibniz was more than simply wrong to justify his interest, which lasted for over forty years. Other authors in this area of philosophy, such as Ortega, Deleuze or Gadamer, also occupied themselves with Leibnizian thought. The interaction has diversified and the points of contact are numerous.

The aim of the works listed here is to show this multiplicity, at least partially. At the heart of each of them is the conviction that Leibniz transforms Cartesian rationality, in combination with the Platonism and Aristotelianism around at his time, and through interaction with life sciences, which allowed for a more or less explicit nexus to be established with hermeneutic philosophy. Leibniz moves away from the logic-orientated scientific reasoning spanning all Modernity, starting with Descartes and Kant. He gravitates instead towards life experience, the analysis of which requires a more diverse and flexible logic, and which is more multifaceted and has a wider variety of principles than physics and similar sciences, which for Modernity constitute the model of knowledge *par excellence*. Leibniz accomplishes the great feat of building a model of rationality capable of combining scientific methodology with other ways of expressing reason and life.

If we adopt a broad interpretation with a view of Leibniz as described above, and also with a flexible and pluralistic understanding of the spirit of hermeneutics, then common points start to appear, and the limits of philosophical debate become productive. Some of them are the subject of reflection of the various chapters of this volume. These works were presented at the "2nd Leibniz Ibero-American Congress" which took place in Granada (Spain) in April 2014. It is a selection of articles which all deal with some aspect of the relationship between Leibnizian philosophy and hermeneutics.

Thus, there are some articles of a more general nature which set out the possibilities of establishing and localizing the connections between Leibniz and hermeneutics (J. Grondin, J. A. Nicolás), or re-address the development of Heidegger's position on Leibniz, distinguishing between two well-differentiated phases (K. Sakai). Another set of works has chosen Leibnizian or Heideggerian thought as a core theme and attempted to compare it with the other author. There are chapters dedicated to the notion of intramonadic time (F.-W. von Herrmann), substance and

representation (H. Neumann), personal identity (R. Sofroni), and reality and force (J. M. Gómez Delgado, M. Escribano). A third set of chapters addresses this confrontation from the perspective of a specific author in relation to Leibniz. The chosen authors are Ortega y Gasset (J. Conill), K. O. Apel (L. Molina), G. Deleuze (F. J. Martínez and D. González Ojeda) and finally E. Husserl (A. Serrano de Haro). A Bibliography (J. M. Delgado Gómez and M. Escribano) brings the volume to a close, where the references to all passages in which Heidegger deals with Leibniz are compiled, covering the entire length of each of the volumes of his Complete Works. The last section of this Bibliography is a compilation of secondary literature which deals with some aspect of the work of both authors jointly.

The aim of this volume is to contribute, on the one hand, to the development and use of Leibnizian studies at the present day, and on the other, to contribute to the evaluation, critique and development of hermeneutic thought. The key questions of rationality, interpretation of reality, justification of knowledge, comprehension of experience and the understanding of the subject of all this are at stake. May these contributions serve to further the uniquely human and humanising activity of philosophical dialogue.

# **PART I**

## **LEIBNIZ AND HERMENEUTICS**



## CHAPTER ONE

# THE POSSIBLE LEGACY OF LEIBNIZ'S METAPHYSICS IN HERMENEUTICS

JEAN GRONDIN

There is an infinity of figures and movements, past and present, that go into the efficient cause of my presently writing this. (*Monadology*, § 36<sup>1</sup>)

The aim of this short piece is to suggest how crucial aspects of Leibniz's philosophy can be taken up in a hermeneutics that doesn't shy away from addressing metaphysical questions.<sup>2</sup> Given the limitations of time and space, I will not talk very specifically about the reception of Leibniz by major hermeneutical thinkers such as Heidegger, Gadamer or Ricoeur. Of the three, Heidegger is certainly the one who devoted the most attention to Leibniz, in his lecture courses as well as in his publications, most notably in his lecture course of 1928 on the first metaphysical principles of logic (GA 26) and his famous *Principle of Reason* of 1957. Heidegger was closer to Leibniz in 1928, when he presented his own thinking under the heading of metaphysics<sup>3</sup>, than he was in 1957, when his aim was to show to what extent the principle of reason of Leibniz was emblematic of the metaphysical rage of explaining Being, in which Heidegger detected a forgetfulness of Being. The principle of reason would have formulated, belatedly and after a long period of incubation, the secret and utterly calculating nature of metaphysics which Heidegger seeks to overcome. In spite of certain affinities, Leibniz is here more of an adversary than an ally. As for Ricoeur and Gadamer, they didn't write much about Leibniz, although Ricoeur gladly took up his notion of *appetitus* and *conatus* in his ontology of the subject (his main source remains however Spinoza rather than Leibniz<sup>4</sup>) and Gadamer recognized himself in Leibniz's saying that "he was in agreement with most of what he read".<sup>5</sup>

None of these authors aimed to show however how Leibniz's metaphysics could be appropriated by a hermeneutically oriented thinking.

I would like to suggest, with my modest means, that this is conceivable. Hence the title that speaks of a “possible” legacy of Leibniz in hermeneutics—it is not yet actual. In so doing, I wish to suggest that Leibniz can become not only an inspiration for hermeneutics, but also a corrective and spur that could encourage hermeneutical thinkers to take on issues that are metaphysical in nature, which hermeneutics often sweeps under the rug, but which it cannot utterly avoid.

Since we celebrated in 2014 the 300th anniversary of the *Monadology*<sup>6</sup>, I would first like to stress the gratitude all philosophers should have for this remarkable synthesis of his philosophy which Leibniz wrote at the end of his life. The great thinker offers in this unique piece a short summary of his philosophical outlook or of what Heidegger would call his “thesis on Being”. This is precious in itself and one would wish to have something comparable from the likes of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel or Nietzsche, to say nothing of Gadamer or Ricoeur whose hermeneutical thinking is developed in lengthy books. One finds here and there more synthetic presentations of their philosophies, but nothing as compact as what the *Monadology* has to propose, consisting of 90 aphorisms or “tweets”, as one would say today. It is true that Émile Bréhier warns us that the *Monadology* “cannot serve as an introduction to the study of the philosophy of Leibniz” because it would “presuppose on the contrary a reader already well versed in this philosophy”.<sup>7</sup> No doubt, a specialist will read it differently than a beginner, but *pace* Bréhier it is a work one can recommend without hesitation as a forceful introduction to Leibniz, all the more so as it will prompt its readers to study his other works. In this regard, the *Monadology* is a very protreptic work indeed.

As a matter of fact, one could almost make it an imperative for any philosopher: even if it is a difficult and risky undertaking, try to sum up your philosophy in 90 theses, which you are free to defend and develop more thoroughly in other works, while seeing to it that the last word of your effort, as is the case with the *Monadology*, will be that of happiness!<sup>8</sup> It is to happiness that all philosophy should lead.

To what extent then can the metaphysical thinking of Leibniz inform a hermeneutical philosophy for which it can also function as a corrective of sorts? I would like to suggest how this can be done in a few theses that, to honour the disposition of the *Monadology*, I will number:

1. *We are essentially beings of understanding.* This basic conviction is common to Leibniz and hermeneutics. This shouldn’t surprise us since it is a heritage of the classic understanding of man as a being endowed with reason (*zoon ton logon echon*). It is well-known that Heidegger strove to

overcome and “destroy” this understanding, as early as in *Being and Time* and throughout his entire work. However, he takes issue with it in order to situate the uniqueness of our being in the fact that we are a *Dasein* (or *Da-sein*), that we can experience Being, the truth of Being as he often says, i.e. of the “marvel of marvels that there is something and not nothing”, following *What is metaphysics?* Aside from the fact that he is thus consciously echoing a formula of Leibniz, it is very difficult to speak of an experience of *Being* if the human being doesn't distinguish itself by its reason, which enables him or her to name Being, to understand what this means and to think it through. Heidegger's *Dasein* is perhaps constituted by a vast array of *Stimmungen* and affects, from fear up to boredom and anguish, it cannot experience Being if it does not understand, through its reason, what it means and entails. Even the anguish in front of the sheer fact of Being and my own death presupposes that I understand, “rationally”, how things stand with my Being and its intrinsic limits (which beings not endowed with reason cannot comprehend to the same extent). Willy-nilly, the rational and metaphysical privilege of man is here maintained. It is thus not surprising to see that Heidegger identifies understanding (the act of *Verstehen*, which of course presupposes *Verstand*, the faculty of understanding or *intellectus*) as an “existential” or a fundamental feature of *Dasein*. This distinction is maintained in the work of Gadamer and Ricoeur. It is true that Heidegger's *Verstehen* cannot be reduced to an intellectual affair: drawing on the German expression *sich auf etwas verstehen*, Heidegger gives it the meaning of a practical orientation within existence and insists on the affective *Stimmung* in which it is embedded (and which can remind one, to a certain degree, of what Leibniz called *appetitus*), but this intellectual dimension emerges powerfully when understanding (*Verstehen*) comes to elucidate itself in the exercise of *Auslegung* or self-illumination dormant in every form of understanding. *Auslegung*—one recognizes here the notion of interpretation on which any hermeneutical theory is based—is for Heidegger the understanding that understands itself.<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to fathom how this is possible if *Dasein* is deprived of reason.

Gadamer adopts the outlines of this existential notion of understanding and applies them more resolutely to the understanding of texts, thus to an intellectual activity that is capable of rationality since it is an understanding which must be capable of justifying itself. Gadamer's main thesis is well-known: every understanding is nourished by prejudices. What is however striking in Gadamer's analysis is that he describes understanding as a process in the course of which our prejudices are submitted to a *constant revision* when confronted with the things

themselves.<sup>10</sup> Prejudices are by their nature provisional and constantly replaced by anticipations that are more adequate, i.e. more in accordance with the things themselves. Interpretation (*Auslegung*) thus appears as a rational and self-critical process which learns from its errors and can be rectified.

One of the tools that enable this rectification of the erroneous anticipations of understanding is what Gadamer terms the anticipation of perfection, the *Vorgriff der Vollkommenheit* which presupposes that what I seek to understand forms, at least in principle, a perfect unity of meaning.<sup>11</sup> The *interpretandum* enjoys here the benefit of forming a coherent whole to which my understanding effort must correspond. It is difficult not to suspect a timid Leibnizian heritage in this regulatory idea of “perfection”, but what is even more Leibnizian is the presupposition of an inherent rationality to what one seeks to understand and which is binding on the interpretative process itself. This leads us to underline a second metaphysical convergence:

2. *To be a being of understanding is thus to seek to understand the meaning of the things themselves.* Our understanding is transitive, i.e., object-related, it aims at the meaning of the things themselves and is not a captive of its own projections of meaning. As a precious hermeneutical saying, often quoted by Emilio Betti, puts it, *sensus non est inferendus, sed efferendus*: meaning should not be injected or introduced in things or in texts, it must be inferred from them. For it is the things themselves that are already meaningful and which our hermeneutical effort must seek to understand and unfold (which it cannot do, of course, without putting in something of its own understanding, but this effort remains subjected to the lead of the thing or text to be interpreted). What is presupposed here is that things contain a meaning *that can be understood*. This idea, which is certainly more in evidence in the work of Gadamer than Heidegger, can be gleaned from the last section of *Truth and Method*, when Gadamer writes, in what is perhaps his most famous saying, that “Being that can be understood is language”. One can interpret this *dictum* in many ways. It has been understood in a relativistic sense by the followers of Gadamer such as Rorty and Vattimo.<sup>12</sup> I am not sure this is the only possible or most satisfying reading, since it amounts to saying, according to Rorty’s and Vattimo’s interpretation, that we *cannot* understand Being at all and never go beyond our linguistic understanding of it. It strikes me that the text states, quite on the contrary, that Being *can* be understood! Being is the first and commanding word of this *dictum*, constituting the *telos* of every understanding. One cannot, at any rate, speak of a sheer opacity or



unintelligibility of Being as far as Gadamer is concerned. On the contrary, we are quite capable of understanding Being: it opens itself to our understanding, and it is in our language that this intelligibility is spelled out. Gadamer suggests that this unfolding of the intelligibility of Being knows in principle no limits. To be sure, not everything can be understood, we remain finite beings—Leibniz's principle of reason will also state it, as we will recall—, but the fact remains that it is the meaning of Being, its intelligibility, which can be expressed in our language, whose universality goes as far as reason itself, Gadamer stresses.<sup>13</sup> One can say that what thus emerges in understanding and its linguistic unfolding, is the intelligibility of the world itself. The accents for Gadamer and Leibniz are perhaps not the same: whereas Gadamer would put the emphasis on the fact that *it is in language*, in this marvel of marvels of language, that this intelligibility appears, Leibniz would more readily stress the intelligibility, the rationality, even the perfection of the world itself and which any mind is able to comprehend.<sup>14</sup> On the whole however, both authors appear close to one another. Leibniz is perhaps even more consistent than Gadamer because the author of *Truth and Method* at times appears content with just highlighting the linguistic nature of our understanding, without drawing all the conclusions of the rationality that this implies. This rationality flares up not only when Gadamer stresses that “language is the language of reason itself”<sup>15</sup>, but also when he sees in “the light of the word”<sup>16</sup>, which makes all things intelligible, an echo to the Platonic metaphysics of light: the presentation of things in language corresponds to the presentation, indeed to the emanation of the things themselves. Assuredly, Gadamer *is not* close to Leibniz when he believes that this language of things does not correspond to the *logos ousias*, which would reside in the self-contemplation of an infinite intellect, and that we are only dealing with the language of Being that our finite and historical self can grasp.<sup>17</sup> He nonetheless comes close to Leibniz again when he sees in this self-presentation of Being in our language (or our reason) “a fundamental ontological constitution” (*ontologische Grundverfassung*) and “a universal structure of Being”.<sup>18</sup>

There is no doubt however that it is through this renewal of the metaphysics of light that Gadamer wishes to escape the nominalist understanding of language that he stigmatizes in the last section of *Truth and Method*. This understanding sees in language nothing but (for the most part arbitrary) signs created by thinking to refer in an instrumental manner to Being. Gadamer sees in language rather a manifestation of Being itself, which enables us to grasp its intelligibility.

3. *To understand reality is thus to understand it out of its reasons and the principle of sufficient reason.* For Leibniz we only understand something if we have an idea of its reasons. The hermeneutical notion of understanding, to the extent that it can be corrected by a better grounded understanding and that it strives to penetrate the intelligibility of things, can also adopt this principle of rationality of things (we have already seen that it is part and parcel of the anticipation of perfection). The notion of “reason” can scare a lot of philosophers in this day and age: countless contemporary thinkers, even some of hermeneutic descent, have wanted to bid farewell to reason (let’s just think of Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Vattimo and many others), which has for the most part been reduced to its calculating version. Hermeneutics should however resist this temptation and reduction, which is suicidal for philosophy and hermeneutics itself. If a philosophy ceases to be guided by the idea of rationality, one fails to see what speaks in its favour and why one should endorse it. The celebration of the irrational must also have its reasons. If the notion of reason is so unsavoury to some, it is because one fears that it implies that we should be able to explain and understand everything (which is a bit what Derrida objected to, “the hermeneutical principle” and to the project of metaphysics as a whole). We are certainly not endowed with infinite intellects and we cannot penetrate the infinite reasons of all things, but from the moment we understand something of reality (and to deny that this is possible would be absurd), we grasp something of its reasons. The principle of reason states it very clearly in the *Monadology*: holding that “no fact can be true or existing and no statement truthful without a sufficient reason for its being so and not different”, it adds with honourable hermeneutical modesty: “albeit these reasons most frequently must remain unknown to us”.<sup>19</sup> In other words, it is not because we do not know *all* the reasons of all things that we have to infer that reality itself does not obey the principle of reason, which only holds that every occurrence is *in principle* explicable. To conclude from the limits of our understanding to the limits of the rationality of the world itself would be the pinnacle of intellectual arrogance. It affects those who proclaim the basic irrationality of reality: out of their incapacity to understand the entirety of reality, an incapacity which is obvious enough, they conclude that it is foreign to reason. This amounts to erecting our small reason as the norm of the highest rationality.

4. *This rationalist and hermeneutical affirmation of the rationality in principle of things goes hand in hand with the valorization of the diversity of perspectives and reasons,* of which Leibniz often says that they are

infinite in number. A hermeneutical philosophy which is fully cognizant of our interpretive relation to reality also underscores that there is never only one interpretation of reality. Does Leibniz say anything else? Every monad is distinguished by its perspectival view of reality. Nonetheless, according to Leibniz, all these visions in their infinite variety, remain visions of one and the same universe, an idea he illustrates in the *Monadology* with the beautiful image of a city considered from different angles: "Just as the same city regarded from different sides offers quite different aspects, and thus appears multiplied *perspectivally*, so it also happens that the infinite multitude of simple substances creates the appearance of just as many different universes. Yet they are but perspectives of a single universe, varied according to the *points of view*, which differ in every monad."<sup>20</sup>

Leibniz's well-known idea according to which every monad would be a "mirror" (*speculum*) of the world finds an astonishing echo in what Gadamer celebrates as the "speculative" structure of language. Language too is speculative (understood out of the idea of *speculum*) in the sense that it "mirrors" the world, but also makes it known for the first time. This mirroring is always limited to its finite aspects, yet language can at the same time allude to the infinity of meaning and rationality they point to. As Gadamer states, "the finite possibilities of the word are oriented toward the sense intended as a direction toward the infinite", because language, understood in this speculative tension, can "hold what is said together with an infinity of what is not said in one unified meaning and see to it that it is understood in this way."<sup>21</sup> For Leibniz, as well as for Gadamer, the monad or language expresses a meaning of the world that can be understood in an infinity of different ways and variations.

According to Leibniz, this hermeneutical or perspectival "variety" of our universe is part of its perfection, as the immediately following aphorism of the *Monadology* will underline: "This is the means of obtaining the greatest possible variety, together with the greatest possible order; in other words, it is the means of obtaining as much perfection as possible."<sup>22</sup>

Hermeneutics and Leibnizian metaphysics both welcome diversity of perspectives, since they all help us (at least in principle, because some of them are obviously false and falsifiable) to bring out the meaning of things. None should be discarded a priori because each one allows us to discover a new facet of the universe and, in the case of Leibniz, of its perfection (of which Gadamer only speaks as of an anticipation of understanding).

Pointing to the limits of our modest human reflection, on which Gadamer will also insist when he speaks of the “limits of the philosophy of reflection,”<sup>23</sup> Leibniz writes in a passage of his *Monadology* (§ 36), which I find deeply hermeneutical, that “there is an infinity of figures and movements, past and present, that go into the efficient cause of my presently writing this”, as much as there is “an infinity of minute inclinations and dispositions of my soul which go into the final cause of my writing” and of which I am not aware. The “hermeneutical” thinker to whom Leibniz is nearest in this regard is perhaps Nietzsche. In an aphorism of his *Gay Science* entitled “Our new ‘Infinite’”, he writes: “All existence (*Dasein*) is essentially interpretive (*auslegendes Dasein*) (...). The world has become ‘infinite’ anew for us: to the extent that we cannot reject the possibility that it *contains in itself infinite interpretations*.”<sup>24</sup> After having read Leibniz, one can only ask if this “new” infinite is as new as Nietzsche seems to think.

5. *For hermeneutics as well as for metaphysics, the praise of this infinite variety expresses itself through a formidable openness to dialogue.* Both perfectly recognize that there never is only one perspective on reality and its reasons. There are as many perspectives as there are monads, i.e., an infinity of them. All are susceptible of teaching us something about the order of reality itself. One can think in this regard of Leibniz’s confession, which Gadamer takes up, that “he agrees with almost everything he reads”. In everything one reads, one discovers points of view and reasons that have their justification. For both authors what results from this is an admirable openness to dialogue, especially with those who don’t think like we do. Gadamer makes this point when he insists that one can only understand something, a perspective or an utterance, if one enters into the dialogue from which it stems. It is a virtue Gadamer put in practice in his highly instructive dialogues with contemporaries and tenacious adversaries such as Betti, Habermas or Derrida, to name but a few. This openness to dialogue and the reasons of the other is also a hallmark of Leibniz’s grand treatises, especially his *Nouveaux Essais*, which are an attempt to engage with his adversary John Locke, but also in his *Théodicée* where he continuously engages in discussion with his contemporaries, most notably with Pierre Bayle.

6. *The principle of reason opens by itself onto a metaphysical horizon.* For Leibniz this is beyond any doubt: if there is a reason to the things of this world, it is legitimate and even necessary to hold that there must be an “ultimate reason of things”, a “*dernière raison des choses*” (*Monadology*,

§38). Is there room in hermeneutics for such a *theologia rationalis*? One is hard-pressed to say that this is the case, even if none of the grand thinkers of hermeneutics really closes the door on metaphysics. Heidegger rejects, of course, the God of philosophers, hence also the God of Leibniz, because it would be nothing but a metaphysical idol, yet he himself remains on the look-out for a truly divine God which alone could save us. His life-long quest for such a God had a considerable impact on post-war theology when it sought a “non-metaphysical” God (be it at the price of an oxymoron). Ricoeur himself made his entry into philosophy with a still unpublished Master's thesis on the question of God<sup>25</sup>, and his first hermeneutics, the one of the *Symbolism of Evil* in 1960, strove to render possible again, and precisely through a hermeneutics, the experience of the Sacred.<sup>26</sup> Gadamer did not receive a real religious upbringing, but we saw that in the last part of *Truth and Method* he relied explicitly on the metaphysics of light of Platonism, which affirms the intelligibility of the world which our reason can unfold. The last sentence of a 1983 essay entitled “Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Metaphysics” recalls in this regard that “phenomenology, hermeneutics and metaphysics are not three different points of view, but the expression of what philosophy is itself.”<sup>27</sup> Everybody knows that his insistence on the good will to understand, and to understand the other, is what led Derrida to accuse his hermeneutics of falling back into metaphysics. What if this “relapse” were a (to be sure, little noticed) virtue of hermeneutics?

It is at this juncture that Leibniz's metaphysics can come to the help of hermeneutics, which is perhaps too hesitant to tackle metaphysical issues which it cannot avoid raising. One of the outstanding qualities of Leibniz's philosophy is indeed to present itself as a metaphysics and to take on the question of the ultimate reason of things. It thus has the merit of raising and even answering the question of the meaning of existence. Those are questions that hermeneutics must presuppose, but that it seldom attacks head-on. It shies away from them based on the dubious motive that metaphysics often frightens a lot of people, is viewed as “passé” (but is this a sufficient argument to leave it aside?) or that it doesn't seem fashionable to speak of God in philosophy. To a degree, Leibniz could help hermeneutics to overcome its metaphysical complexes here. If, as Gadamer suggests, hermeneutics and metaphysics are other names of philosophy itself, what do we gain in philosophy by not raising the question of the ultimate reason of things? And if one denies that there is such a thing, which is also a metaphysical thesis, what meaning can we bestow upon human existence?

7. *Open to the rationality of the world, revealed by our reason and our language, both Leibnizian metaphysics and hermeneutics make room for certain optimism towards life.* One knows that in his *Monadology*, as well as in his *Theodicy*, Leibniz defends an “optimism” according to which God would have created the most perfect of all possible worlds. After Voltaire’s *Candide* and a 20th century which has been totally demoralized by its devastating wars, it is difficult to harbour such an optimistic outlook on the world. Nevertheless, one can find in hermeneutics elements of certain “optimism”, at least in the conduct of human life. We have seen that understanding is always capable of correcting and ameliorating itself. The “best”, if not the optimum, can thus be hoped for in the process of human understanding, even if it fails at times. In his idea of a productive work of history, his famous *Wirkungsgeschichte*, Gadamer argues for the Hegelian idea of a certain rationality of history, at least as far as the selection it operates among the works and accomplishments that are worth being transmitted by tradition. In perhaps a more moderate version of this Hegelianism, one could say that we can almost always learn something from history, at least from its errors and failures. On a personal level, Gadamer was himself a natural optimist, who thought and taught that it was always possible to find a solution to our differences through dialogue, even with our toughest foes. In his eyes, the pessimist, the *Miesmacher* or the prophet of doom, lacks self-honesty: she tries to convince herself that everything will turn out badly, but she says this in the clandestine hope that she will be proven wrong.<sup>28</sup> The pessimist lowers the expectations in the secret hope of being surprised by a happy turn of events. Humankind, Gadamer said in his very last interviews, cannot live without hope.<sup>29</sup>

This motive is very much alive in Leibniz’s much decried optimism. It contains, of course, different connotations than what is usually identified with optimism, most notably the idea that the highest wisdom was guided by a view of the “best”, the *optimum*, among all possible worlds (*Théodicée*, §8), a consideration which is rather foreign to the metaphysically shy current of hermeneutics. Nevertheless, Leibniz was fully aware of the oppressing and paralyzing nature of the many philosophies of his time that were characterized by their contempt of the world (following the Augustinian motive of the *contemptus mundi*), their celebration of the misery of the human condition and of the futile course of events in this distressing world of ours. Many “Neo-Augustinians”, “unhappy” (*mécontents*) with human nature, had rekindled this motive at his time. His *Theodicy* courageously opposes this debilitating view of human nature and the world.<sup>30</sup> One of the tasks of metaphysics, and it is certainly true of Leibnizian metaphysics, is to give hope to humankind and

to offer a foundation for this hope. At the time of Leibniz as well as in our time, that of hermeneutics, this optimism remains a useful antidote against the rampant miserabilism which surrounds us.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Il y a une infinité de figures et de mouvements présents et passés qui entrent dans la cause efficiente de mon écriture présente". The *Monadology* is quoted following the edition of: G.W.F. Leibniz, *Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*, trans. Paul Schrecker and Anne Marie Schrecker (New York: Macmillan/Library of the Liberal Arts, 1965). I have at times slightly modified the translation, as is the case with this quote.

<sup>2</sup> I have presented the outlines of the metaphysical hermeneutics in *Du sens des choses. L'idée de la métaphysique*. Paris: PUF, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> It is in his lecture course of 1928 that Heidegger announces his project of a "metontology". "Fundamental ontology and metontology", he says, "constitute in their unity the concept of metaphysics. In this duality Heidegger wants to see a transformation of the "double concept of philosophy in *prôtè philosophia* and *theologia*" (GA 26, 202). The aim of this essay, which is to show how certain elements of Leibniz's metaphysics can be retaken into hermeneutics, doesn't allow me to give to Heidegger's project, and its Leibnizian roots, all the intention it merits.

<sup>4</sup> See for instance P. Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 365-367.

<sup>5</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *Selbstdarstellung*, in his *Gesammelte Werke*, volume 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986), 492: "ich hielt es mit Leibniz, der von sich gesagt hat, er billige fast alles, was er lese" ("I followed Leibniz who said of himself that he agrees with almost everything he reads"). On this solidarity and the Leibniz reference, see my study on "Das Leibnizsche Moment in der Hermeneutik", in M. Beetz / G. Cacciatore (eds.), *Die Hermeneutik im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Köln / Weimar / Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2000), 3-16.

<sup>6</sup> This paper was presented at an international conference in Granada celebrating the 300th anniversary of the *Monadology* in 2014. Hence the many references to this work in this piece.

<sup>7</sup> Émile Bréhier, Introduction to his edition of G.W.F. Leibniz, *La Monadologie* (Paris: Delagrave, 1975), 136.

<sup>8</sup> The *Monadology* ends indeed by speaking of God as "the final cause who ought to provide the sole goal of our will and who alone can give us happiness" ("la cause finale qui doit faire tout le but de notre volonté, et peut seul faire notre Bonheur").

<sup>9</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 2006), §32, 148: "The development (*Ausbildung*) of understanding is what we call *Auslegung* (interpretation, explication). In it, understanding (*Verstehen*) appropriates reflectively what it understands. In this interpretation, understanding doesn't become something else, it is carried through to its end".

<sup>10</sup> H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Second Revised Edition, Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad—modified translation, 2004), 266-267 (H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band I, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986, 271): “What Heidegger is working out here [Gadamer alludes to Heidegger’s description of the circle of understanding in *Being and time*] is not primarily a prescription for the practice of understanding, but a description of the way an understanding interpretation (*verstehendes Auslegen*) unfolds. The point of Heidegger’s hermeneutical reflection is not so much to prove that there is a circle as to show that this circle possesses an ontologically positive significance. The description as such will be obvious to every interpreter who knows what he is doing. All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies, and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thoughts. And it must direct its gaze ‘on the things themselves’ (which, in the case of the philologist, are meaningful texts, which themselves deal with things). For the interpreter to let himself be guided by the things themselves is obviously not a matter of a single, ‘conscientious’ decision, but is ‘the first, last, and constant task’”. (...) “A person who is trying to understand is exposed to distraction from fore-meanings that are not borne out by the things themselves. Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed ‘by the things themselves’, is the constant task of understanding”. This corresponds, by the way, to the understanding of truth as *adaequatio*.

<sup>11</sup> See Gadamer 2004, 294; 1986, 299: the anticipation of perfection states “that only what really constitutes a unity of meaning is intelligible”, because “when we read a text we always assume its completeness”.

<sup>12</sup> See my “Nihilistic or Metaphysical Consequences of Hermeneutics?” in J. Malpas and S. Zabala (dir.), *Consequences of Hermeneutics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 190-201.

<sup>13</sup> Gadamer 2004, 401; 1986, 405: “*Insofern überholt die Sprache alle Einreden gegen ihre Zuständigkeit. Ihre Universalität hält mit der Universalität der Vernunft Schritt. (...) Die Sprache ist die Sprache der Vernunft selbst*”. Quoted translation, p. 401: “Hence language forestalls any objection to its jurisdiction. Its universality keeps pace with the universality of reason. (...) Language is the language of reason itself.”

<sup>14</sup> The spirits, says Leibniz in §83 of his *Monadology* are “capable of knowing the system of the universe” (*capables de connaître le système de l’univers*). The motto taken from Manilius of the *Monadology* stresses the same point: “*Quid mirum noscere mundum si possunt homines?*”

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Gadamer 2004, 483; 1986, 487. On Heidegger’s astonishment upon reading that Gadamer was following in the footsteps of the Platonic “metaphysics of light” (2004, 483), see my *Du sens des choses*, 169.

<sup>17</sup> Gadamer 2004, 476; 1986, 480.

<sup>18</sup> Gadamer 2004, 481 and 487; 1986, 485 and 490.

<sup>19</sup> *Monadology*, §32 (“qu’aucun fait ne saurait se trouver vrai, ou existant, aucune énonciation véritable, sans qu’il y ait une raison suffisante, pourquoi il en soit ainsi



et pas autrement, quoique ces raisons le plus souvent ne puissent point nous être connues”). See also his *Essais de théodicée*, 44: “quoique le plus souvent (!) ces raisons déterminantes ne nous soient pas assez connues, nous ne laissons pas d’entrevoir qu’il y en a”.

<sup>20</sup> Leibniz 1965, §57: “Comme une même ville regardée de différents côtés paraît tout autre, et est comme multipliée perspectivement; il arrive de même, que par la multiplication infinie des substances simples, il y a comme autant de différents univers, qui ne sont pourtant que les perspectives d’un seul selon les différents *points de vue* de chaque Monade”.

<sup>21</sup> Gadamer 2004, 469 (modified translation); 1986, 473.

<sup>22</sup> Leibniz 1965, §58: “Et c’est le moyen d’obtenir *autant de variété qu’il est possible*, mais avec le plus grand ordre, qui se puisse, c’est-à-dire, c’est le moyen d’obtenir autant de perfection qu’il se peut”.

<sup>23</sup> It is the title of a very important chapter of *Truth and Method*, 341-346. On these limits, see also §61 of the *Monadology*: “A soul can read in itself only what is distinctly represented in it; it is unable to unfold all at once of its folds, for these go in infinity” (“Une Âme ne peut lire en elle-même que ce qui y est représenté distinctement, elle ne saurait développer tout d’un coup tous ses replis, car ils vont à l’infini”).

<sup>24</sup> F. Nietzsche, *Gay science*, Book 5, n° 374.

<sup>25</sup> See M.-A. Vallée, “Le premier écrit philosophique de Paul Ricoeur: Méthode réflexive appliquée au problème de Dieu chez Lachelier et Lagneau”, *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies* 3 (2012): 144-155.

<sup>26</sup> On this first foray of Ricoeur into hermeneutics in 1960, the year *Truth and Method* was published, see my essay: *Paul Ricoeur* (Paris: PUF, Collection “Que sais-je?”, 2013), 57-74 and “Ricoeur a-t-il d’abord introduit l’herméneutique comme une variante de la phénoménologie?”, in *Studia phaenomenologica* 13 (2013): 87-106.

<sup>27</sup> H.-G. GADAMER, *Hermeneutik im Rückblick, Gesammelte Werke, Band 10* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 109; *L’herméneutique en rétrospective* (Paris: Vrin, 2005), 141.

<sup>28</sup> See the interview “*Die Kindheit wacht auf. Gespräch mit dem Philosophen Hans-Georg Gadamer*”, *Die Zeit*, n° 13, 26.3.1993, 23: “Indeed, I think that all pessimism is dishonest. Life lives from hope. One can see unsolvable problems in front of oneself and one is tormented. But to fall into pessimism is to lack probity”.

<sup>29</sup> See my short essay on “Gadamer’s Hope”, in *Renascence. Essays on Values in Literature* (56): 2004, 287-292.

<sup>30</sup> G. W. F. Leibniz, *Essais de théodicée*, §15 (Paris: GF, 1969), 111: “Les livres de la misère humaine, tels que celui du pape Innocent III, ne me paraissent pas des plus utiles: on redouble les maux en leur donnant une attention qu’on devrait détourner pour la tourner vers les biens qui l’emportent de beaucoup”.



## CHAPTER TWO

# PERSPECTIVE AS MEDIATION BETWEEN INTERPRETATIONS<sup>1</sup>

JUAN A. NICOLÁS

### **1. Leibniz against Heidegger?**

This reflection does not seek to analyse the historical relationship between Heidegger and Leibniz in the philosophical sphere, otherwise the title of this part would be a straightforward anachronism. The objective is rather to move forward in a systematic comparison of these two philosophers for the resolution of today's common philosophical problems.

Contemplated as such, it is a comparison of two philosophical models to the extent that, save for the distance in time, they may be comparable and the results of that comparison may be of importance. The fact that this road can be travelled is confirmed by the extensive literature which links the two writers in a wide variety of subjects, from the principle of reason to the value of technique and the evaluation of the Enlightenment.<sup>2</sup>

Specifically, Heidegger's thinking could be addressed from Leibniz's perspective, that is, trying to answer the question of what Leibniz would say had he had the opportunity to read Heidegger, and that with reference to a specific aspect of their respective philosophies. Our aim is to obtain some philosophical benefit for Leibnizian thought today.

Heidegger's historical relationship with Leibniz was more than notable, as attested to by the multitude of texts he dedicated to Leibnizian thought throughout almost the whole of his active life. It concerns two philosophers each as inexhaustible as the other, and both of considerable influence on their subsequent generations.

In order to carry out the task, a subject has been chosen that is not very frequent in the literature on the two writers, but which may be of considerable relevance: the notion of "perspective" and its possible parallels with the Heideggerian notion of "interpretation".

Firstly, an analysis is presented of the senses in which Leibniz uses the notion of “perspective” and their scopes and fields of application. Secondly, there is an analysis of the thesis of the interpretative character of all knowledge in the context of the hermeneutic transformation of knowing. Third, the hypothesis is raised of a certain parallelism between the Leibnizian notion of perspective and the hermeneutic concept of interpretation. Thereafter appears an examination of the hypothesis of understanding perspective as interpretation and, conversely, understanding interpretation as a point of view or perspective.

Finally, the hypothesis is raised that the concept of *perspective*, the latter according to Leibniz always being a perspective on the same reality, may be understood as a concept capable of articulating interpretations in a system which is both plural and unified. The concept of perspective could thus become the key notion in reconstructing the relationship between unity and plurality both in Leibniz and current hermeneutics.

## 2. Perspective and Interpretation

**2.1.** Leibniz proposes that there are diverse ways of accessing the knowledge of an object, of a fact, of a problem or, generally, of a totality. Those various means of access can all be simultaneously different and true. Leibniz construes this characteristic as constitutive of human knowledge and uses it to express the concept of “*perspective*”. All human knowledge is of a perspectival nature, an approach to the object from a determined “*point of view*”. There is no exhaustive human knowledge of an object or fact; there is always the possibility of new points of view from which to approach it (that is, new perspectives) that will offer new information. The minimum requirement of the various perspectives is logical-formal coherence between them.

All the above must be placed within the framework of Leibnizian epistemology, in which the distinction between human and divine points of view plays an essential role. Here are two “points of view” inherent to their respective subjects. The first point of view represents the limited human knowledge, while the divine point of view represents absolute knowledge. Absolute knowledge consists of the simultaneous intuitive (atemporal) presence of the totality of the possibilities of the divine mind. It is not a particular perspective which is the true perspective, or which is truer than the others. It is the aggregate of the totality of the partial points of view. Put another way, it is the reason of the series and the series of the reason. This is also contemplated in relation to the subset of the

possibilities that constitute the most potent combination of compossible things, which is reality.

The relationship between both points of view must have certain characteristics. First, they must have something in common, for otherwise the human being could know nothing about the non-human point of view, which is divine. Indeed, there are certain principles of reason that are valid both for God and man. There are principles which “oblige” both God and man, and which cannot be ignored in valid reasoning or in true knowledge. This community between both points of view is what permits the limited human knowledge to partake of the absolute knowledge of what is real and also of what is possible.

The insuperable nature of certain principles poses at least two problems: the problem of liberty, and the perspectivist nature of the absolute point of view.

(a) The question of liberty has been the subject of discussion since the very time when Leibniz formulated his work. Here we aim to present only one aspect related to perspectivism. The place of liberty is made problematic particularly in relation to the principles of reason in the case of the absolute or divine perspective. Thus it is important to clarify that for Leibniz liberty is not (only) the possibility of choosing, but he rather subscribes to an “executive” conception of liberty: liberty occurs when the best option is carried out effectively. In this way liberty is *to be free*, and to be free is *to act freely*, to implement the option which makes us free, which liberates us. In Leibniz’s case, this consists of acting in accordance with the best reason. God is free because He acts in accordance with the best reason (principle of sufficient reason). The action or decision in accordance with knowledge (= reason) is the optimally free one. Here the dimension of the Leibnizian conception of liberty as liberation makes its presence felt. God is the free (= liberated) being. In the case of man, this state requires a process of approaching and, at times, of distancing, of asymptotic nature.

(b) Furthermore, and in relation to the divine point of view, there is the question of its perspectivist nature. If it is considered that the absolute point of view is the aggregate of all the possible ones and each one of them consists of an internally coherent (compossible) combination which comes to make part of the aggregate of all the possible points of view. Each possible world can be understood as a particular point of view concerning the totality of all possible points of view, that is, as a perspective on the aggregate as a whole. If this interpretation is viable in the Leibnizian framework, it could be considered that the internal structure of the absolute point of view is perspectivist (the sum of all the logically

possible perspectives). However, the aggregate of all the perspectives could not be considered a perspective, because this definition must be limited and partial. Consequently, the absolute point of view is in no sense a perspective, but its internal structure is perspectivist.

Secondly, while human knowledge is principally discursive and to a certain degree intuitive, the absolute point of view must be exclusively intuitive. The discursive nature of human knowledge places it in the unfathomable perspective of time in such a manner that, as regards contents or new interpretations, it does not recognise any absolute limit. The formally insuperable limit is that of finitude, which Leibniz links to corporality.<sup>3</sup>

This entails that there is no truth about which there is no possibility of greater advance, new developments, new hypotheses or alternatives. None of this affects the absolute point of view.

**2.2.** On the other hand, Heidegger effects a transformation in the way of understanding knowledge and the way of being in this world, and with this he establishes contemporary hermeneutics. This position awards a fundamental role to the idea that there are always different approaches to facts, to objects, to the truth of knowledge, to the way of understanding the world and ourselves, and so forth. And these various ways of understanding what the real reality is and of being in what is real can all be partially or wholly true. These diverse approaches to the truth are understood as different ways of understanding or interpreting facts, acts, objects and feelings. Hence, the concept of “*interpretation*” becomes central to hermeneutics.

In Heidegger’s case, the concept of “interpretation” must be placed in the context of the thesis that all knowledge takes place in a “hermeneutic situation”. This determines the pre-understanding prior to the interpretation: “every interpretation is founded on understanding.”<sup>4</sup> Man is originally a being which must understand and the first reference of this understanding is the realm of possibility: “As regards understanding, the *Dasein* projects its being toward possibilities. This understanding *looks toward possibilities*, through the repercussion that these possibilities have on the *Dasein* insofar as they are open, it is also a can-be. The active point of view of understanding has its own possibility of development. This development of understanding we call *interpretation*.”<sup>5</sup>

As with Leibniz, the field of what is possible is at the base of interpretation. The difference is that in this case, what is possible is delimited by the aggregate of determinations included in understanding. With respect to these determinations, interpretation is a “development”, an