PRZEMYSŁAW GUT

GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNIZ:
AN INTELLECTUAL PORTRAIT

1.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was born in Leipzig on July 1, 1646, in the days of intellectual ferment and breakthrough in Europe.[1] He gained extensive knowledge of ancient literature and medieval theology at his family home. As a boy he mastered Greek and Latin, which allowed him—as he wrote in the *Letter to Nicolas Remond of January 10, 1714*—to read ancient and medieval writers with the ease with which people used to read novels. His father, Friedrich Leibniz, was a professor of law and ethics at the local university.

After studying at home, at the age of 15 Leibniz began his studies at the Leipzig University under the academic supervision of Jakob Thomasius[2]. Af-

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Dr hab. PRZEMYSŁAW GUT, Prof. KUL – adiunkt Katedry Historii Filozofii Nowożytnej i Współczesnej, Wydział Filozofii, Katolicki Uniwersytetu Lubelski Jana Pawła II; adres do korespondencji: Al. Racławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin; e-mail: dedo@kul.pl

[1] A comprehensive discussion of Leibniz's intellectual biography may be found in the work by Maria Rosa Antognazza *Leibniz: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

The abbreviations I use are: GP = *Die philosophischen Schriften von G.W. Leibniz*, Bd. I-VII, ed. Carl Immanuel Gerhardt (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875–1890); NE = Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, trans. and ed. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); L = Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. and ed. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969); Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, *Theodicy = Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, trans. Eveleen M. Huggard, ed. Austin Farrer (Oxford: Biblio Bazaar, 2007); AG = *G.W. Leibniz Philosophical Essays*, trans. and ed. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1989).

[2] Leibniz highly valued the education he had gained at home, where, as one would expect, a deep appreciation for scientific work prevailed. First of all, he praised the possibility of freely using his father's library. In one of the early writings he summed up the advantages of his early

ter gaining the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1663 on the basis of *De pricipio individui*, he went to Jena, where he studied mathematics under Erhard Weigl. In 1666, he published a dissertation *De arte combinatoria*, on the basis of which he received the title of Doctor of Philosophy. In this work he first sketched the project of the alphabet of human thoughts, on which he would work, with interruptions, almost throughout his entire life.

In the middle of 1666, Leibniz moved to Altdorf and undertook legal studies at the local university. In 1667, he obtained the Doctor of Laws degree. Immediately after completing the dissertation, he rejected the proposal to take up the chair at the University of Altdorf. In the same year, he was appointed a diplomat at the court of the Elector of Mainz, Johann Philipp von Schönborn. He dealt primarily with legal reform and advised on various policy measures. In 1671, he wrote a brief dissertation in which he drew up an outline of the founding of scientific societies, and also prepared two short essays on physics, *Theoria motus abstracti* and *Hypothesis physica nova*, which he sent to the Académie Royale des Sciences and the Royal Society.

In March 1672, Leibniz was sent to Paris with a diplomatic mission. The stay in the French capital, which lasted until October 1676, was a tremendous milestone in Leibniz's intellectual development. It was in Paris that Leibniz deepened his studies in mathematics. Their most important result was the invention of the infinitesimal calculus. Besides, he got acquainted closer with the natural sciences and with the new philosophy, as it was then dubbed, in particular with Descartes, Malebranche, Huygens, Arnauld and Spinoza. We can also assume that while in Paris, he developed a plan—which becomes apparent in his later writings—to reconcile ancient and medieval thought with the thought of the new philosophy based on mathematical natural science.

In 1676, Leibniz returned to Germany. On his way back he visited London and then the Netherlands, where he met the creator of microscope, Antonie van Leeuwenhoeek, and had several conversations with Spinoza in the Hague. In the same year, he accepted a job at the court of the Duke of Hannover, Johann Friedrich, where he took the position of a librarian and the

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education: "Two things marvellously benefited me in this: first, that I was almost self-taught and, second, that I sought out what was new in each and every branch of knowledge, as soon as I came into contact with it, even though I often did not sufficiently grasp things commonly known. But these two things gave me an advantage; the former prevented me from filling my mind with trifles, things that ought to be forgotten, things that are accepted on the authority of teachers rather than because of arguments, and the latter prevented me from resting before I probed all the ways to the depths of each subject and arrived at its very principles, from which everything I extracted could be discovered by my own efforts." AG, 6.

teacher of princess Sophie Charlotte, the later Queen of Prussia. In the following years, he took part in many scientific and political ventures. Among other things, he tried to spread the idea of a reunification of the Catholic Church with the Protestant Churches. In addition, he made major technological innovations in the ducal mines in the Harz mountains.

In 1682, Leibniz founded *Acta eruditorum* in Leipzig, and in 1700—thanks to the support of Sophie Charlotte—the Berlin Society of Sciences, where he became the first president. In the eighties and nineties, Leibniz prepared numerous theses on metaphysics, physics and logic (*Discourse on Metaphysics*; *Generales Inquisitiones de Analysi Notionum et Veritatum*; *New System of Nature*; *A Specimen of Dynamics*), and also corresponded with Antoine Arnauld for two years on remarkable and philosophically important issues. In 1684 two important works by Leibniz appeared in *Acta Eruditorum*: one in mathematics—*Nova methodus pro maximis et minimis*, the other in epistemology—*Meditations on Knowledge, Truth and Ideas*. The latter contains a concise critique of the theory of ideas proposed by Descartes and Malebranche.

The first decade of the 18th century is, in turn, a period of Leibniz's intensive work on epistemology (*New Essays on Human Understanding*) and issues that fall into the scope of *Essays on Theodicy*, the only bigger work Leibniz published in his lifetime (1710). In addition, Leibniz, in this period, corresponded intensely with De Volder (1699–1706), Des Bosses (1709–1715), and Clarke (1715–1716). In 1714, Leibniz edited two small works summarizing his philosophical thought: *Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason* and *Monadology*. The beginning of the 18th century was also the time of Leibniz's more intense study of Chinese culture and philosophy.

The last two years of Leibniz's life are a period of oblivion and disappointment. He fell into disgrace with his former vice-rector, Prince of Hanover, when the latter became English King George I in 1714. The obvious sign of oblivion of this genius was the fact that his death on November 14, 1716 went unnoticed even in the Berlin Society of Sciences, founded by him.

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There is no doubt that Leibniz is one of the most extraordinary and at the same time one of the most outstanding philosophers in the history of European philosophical thought. This opinion does not seem to be exaggerated. It is enough to consider the breadth and diversity of Leibniz's activities and

interests. Almost simultaneously, alongside strict theoretical considerations on the differential calculus, the concept of the universal and formalized language of our thoughts (*ars characteristica*), the idea of truth as an isomorphic representation, the concept of analytical proposition, the idea of substance as a monad, modalities and many other issues Leibniz worked on a settlement plan between Catholics and Protestants, a federation of Christian states, an alliance between the Russian Tsar and the German Emperor, the reform of German law, the organization of mining, the organisation of scientific societies, the history of the Brunswick dynasty and dozens of other issues.

In this situation, it should not come as a surprise that one of the questions that are constantly returning is the question of what constitutes the basis of all the wealth of Leibniz's philosophical thought. More specifically, should we opt for a logical or metaphysical interpretation of Leibniz's thought? The logical interpretation was initiated by Bertrand Russell and Louis Couturat, and later developed by George Henry Radcliffe Parkinson, Nicholas Rescher, and Aron Gurwitsch.[3] According to this view, the cornerstone of Leibnizian system is constitued by his logical priciples. The metaphysical approach was initiated by Bogumił Jasinowski and Willy Kabitz.[4] These authors, using the genetic method, argued that logic, neither historically nor systematically, could be regarded as the starting point for the philosophical system of Leibniz. According to them, the logical principles of thinking in this system derive their original meaning from metaphysical principles.

To this day, many researchers try to resolve this dispute: either (1) by postulating a dualistic interpretation which states that logic and metaphysics present two separate areas of analysis in Leibniz's system and hence should be considered independently of each other,[5] as does Gottfried Martin; or (2) by recognizing that there is something more fundamental in Leibniz's philosophical system—transcendentalism, according to Ernst Cassirer, or the theo-

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[3] Bertrand RUSSELL, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900); Louis COUTURAT, *La logique de Leibniz d'après des documents inédits* (Paris: Alcan, 1901); IDEM, "Sur la métaphysique de Leibniz," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 10 (1902): 1–25; G[eorge] H[enry] R[adcliffe] PARKINSON, *Logic and Reality in Leibniz Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); Nicholas RESCHER, *The Philosophy of Leibniz* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1967); Aron GURWITSCH, *Leibniz Philosophie des Panlogismus* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1974).

[4] Bogumil JASINOWSKI, *Die analytische Urteilslehre Leibnizens in ihrem Verhältnis zu seiner Metaphysik* (Wien: Chr. Reißer's Söhne, 1918); Willy KABITZ, *Die Philosophie des jungen Leibniz* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1909).

[5] Gottfried MARTIN, *Leibniz-Logik und Metaphysik* (Köln: Kölner Universitätsverlag, 1967).

dicy, according to Robert Merrihew Adams and Donald Rutherford[6]; or, finally, (3) by postulating a systematic interpretation in which Leibniz's philosophy does not present a compact system. Hans Burkhardt, Stuart Brown, and Benson Mates advocate the last approach.[7] In their view—as emphasised by Mates—there is no beginning and no end in the philosophy of Leibniz. It is completely irrelevant where the presentation begins. If so, the question whether Leibniz's logic derives from his metaphysics or vice versa becomes pointless.[8]

Defining the position of Leibniz's philosophy within the philosophical thought of the 17th century constitutes another important issue. So far—despite many works on the subject—it has not been possible to work out a consensus on the subject. It is generally accepted that the scientific and philosophical ideas of Descartes considerably influenced Leibniz's philosophy. Indeed, many of Leibniz's important epistemological and metaphysical theses bear a distinct Cartesian trace, and many others seem to be the result of his polemic with various views of Descartes. But even so, it is impossible not to notice that in the philosophy of Leibniz there are elements that clearly distinguish his philosophy from Descartes's philosophy.

One important difference lies in their attitude towards the past. Descartes, as we know, believed that the program of the new philosophy requires a complete break with both the ancient and the scholastic past. The method of doubt among other things was to be used here. Leibniz's philosophy is different. Admittedly, Leibniz agreed with Descartes that due to fundamental changes in the field of the natural sciences, there is a need to give philosophy a new face. He also shared the view that studying the structure of the world requires the use of mathematical methods. To some extent, he also agreed with the opinion that some scholastic principles, being ambiguous and amorphous, are inappropriate in the study of physical reality and therefore require an immediate revision. Unlike Descartes and other modern writers, however, Leibniz showed no hostility towards scholastic philosophy. He

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[6] Ernst CASSIRER, *Leibniz' System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen* (Marburg: Elwert, 1902); Robert Merrihew ADAMS, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Donald RUTHERFORD, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[7] Hans BURKHARDT, *Logik und Semiotik bei Leibniz* (München: Philosophia, 1980); Stuart BROWN, *Leibniz* (Brighton–Sussex: The Harvester, 1984); Benson MATES, *The Philosophy of Leibniz: Metaphysics and Language* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[8] "He regards his doctrine simply as a network of important truths that have many interesting logical interrelationships. […]. Leibniz's attitude is that of a kind of philosophical explorer, who reports what he finds to be the case and who notices that there are important logical interconnections among his discoveries." B. MATES, *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, 4.

thought that a complete break with traditionally comprehended metaphysics would endanger the existence of philosophy. Therefore, the reduction of all causes to mechanical reasons, as the only way of explaining reality, was also alien to him. He pointed to the need to complement mechanics with dynamics. He believed that mechanistic, or 'corpuscularian,' philosophy was much more a promise than a fulfilment: the mechanistic hypothesis, justified in the sphere of phenomena, cannot be validated within it. Metaphysical investigations, which take into account beings other than phenomenal (i.e. extended, complex), are the proper domain for such validation. It was only in this perspective that he judged the project of cognizing the world to be able to find its real and final justification.

Another difference concerns the purpose of philosophy. While in Descartes's system epistemological issues play the key role, Leibniz's philosophy is metaphysical, especially about nature and the nature of the material reality. This can be seen when reading most of Leibniz's major philosophical writings. It is clear from all these writings that Leibniz's main line of reasoning was that reality is a multitude of substances (*substantia singularis*), always individual in their essence. It is this basic conviction that reality, starting from its foundation, entails a multiplicity of individual substances that led Leibniz to a fundamental dispute with the monistic philosophy of Spinoza. The thought of Spinoza that not *many* but *one* is the basis of reality is the main negative reference point of Leibnizian metaphysics. It seems even that Leibniz's typology, character and course of argument, which we find in his main writings, were largely shaped by his polemics with Spinoza.[9]

Yet another difference between Descartes and Leibniz concerns the role of logic. Descartes did not attach much significance to formal logic. He considered it irrelevant to the course and effectiveness of human cognition. If it has some value, it is merely a didactic one. Leibniz's philosophy is different. One of its most characteristic features is the belief that there is a close rela-

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[9] It is worth remembering that Leibniz did not identify Spinozism with the doctrine of Spinoza. He perceived Spinozism as a result of more general tendencies. He believed that certain elements of Spinozism can be found within Descartes's philosophy, especially in his conception of material substance, treated mechanistically, geometrically and passively. Besides, Leibniz saw connection between monism and other metaphysical doctrines. He considered that monism overlaps not only with pantheism but also with necessitarianism, naturalism or an absolutist conception of space and time. In addition, he argued that the consequences of monism cover not only theoretical but also practical issues. He considered monism to be a dangerous idea in practice because it undermined the belief in the existence of individual souls, their immortality, the human freedom; it undermined the belief in Christian doctrines of God as person and *ens perfectissimum*. For this reason, Leibniz accused monism of atheism, heresy and socio-political harm.

tionship between metaphysics and logic. The most vivid examples of this are the Leibnizian conception of truth, theory of individual concept, and analysis of modal concepts. It is clear from all these examples that, for Leibniz, in contrast to Descartes, there is an internal connection between obtaining true knowledge and using logical tools. In this situation, it is no wonder that Leibniz considered one of the main tasks of his philosophy to be the creation of a universal and at the same time formalized language of our thoughts (*ars characteristica*). The essential aim of *ars characteristica* was, according to Leibniz, to translate the content of ideas (thoughts) and the relationships between them into a language of symbols and relationships between them.

<div align="center">3.</div>

It seems possible to identify three basic features which define both the general spirit and the methods of Leibniz's philosophizing. Each of them plays a different role in his thought, each represents a different aspect of his system. Taken jointly, they determine the metaphilosophical identity of that unique phenomenon in the history of the human mind that is Leibniz's philosophy. These features are: (1) rationalism, (2) substance pluralism, (3) theism.

Rationalism

In most books on the history of philosophy Leibniz is identified, alongside Descartes and Spinoza, as a foremost representative of the 17th-century continental rationalism, usually opposed to the empiricist philosophy pursued in that epoch by the British philosophers: John Locke, and later George Berkeley and David Hume. The ground for defining Leibniz's philosophical identity as rationalist in the sense attributed to this word when referring to the great continental systematic philosophers of that time is his acceptation of the following set of theses: (1) there is a cognition of reality that is purely rational and essentially independent of sense perception, (2) it is this purely rational cognition, and not sense perception, that captures and represents to us the essential features of reality, (3) the appropriate method of cognizing reality, ensuring true and certain knowledge thereof, is the kind of deduction used in mathematics, (4) the human mind using its natural resources and especially exercising the correct use of reason can on its own ensure that the human being will achieve happiness.[10]

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[10] See, for example, "On what is independent of sense and matter," in L, 547–553. One ought to remember, however, that an adequate characterization of early modern philosophy in terms of

However, the characterization of Leibniz's rationalism as based on the above enumeration of basic assumptions, true in itself and important as it is, does not suffice to represent fully and adequately the unique spirit of his outlook. There are serious reasons to think that in order to capture the factor that makes Leibniz's account of the Universe perfect in its own inimitable way a different approach is needed, namely an approach which consists in looking upon the whole of his system in the light of the principle of sufficient reason (PSR), which he consistently accepted and was the first to explicitly formulate. According to Leibniz, if there were things in the world completely lacking any reason for their existence, things with respect to which the question why they exist at all could be given no answer, this would mean that reality, or at least large parts of it, is unintelligible in itself. This, however, Leibniz firmly rejects as impossible, as this would mean placing blind chance or inexplicable accident in the position of the ultimate principle of all reality. Reality thus governed by an irrational principle would not only defy all understanding, it would rule out all possibility of objective knowledge; such reality could not be an object of any understanding at all. Leibniz is adamant that this is not the case. It is clear to him that reality in its nature is intelligible and that reason, under certain conditions, is manifestly capable of comprehending what this nature is in itself. Reality itself offers no grounds for a denial of the principle of sufficient reason.

Leibniz's account of the principle presents it in two versions—metaphysical and epistemological (logical). The metaphysical PSR is a thesis concerning reality and affirming that for any state of affairs (fact, event) obtaining in reality there is in reality an adequate reason that accounts for that state of affairs (fact, event); this reason provides the answer as to why a given state of affairs obtains and why it is so and so and not otherwise. The epistemological (logical) counterpart of the metaphysical PSR is the thesis related to knowledge. It states that for any true proposition a reason could be given (whether contained in that proposition itself or in other propositions) for the truth of that proposition. Both versions of the PSR are to be found in many Leibniz's texts. Here is the best known passage:

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the rationalism/empiricism scheme is much more complex and nuanced than the simplified use of that scheme here may suggest. For a more detailed account of the contrast between rationalism and empiricism in the philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see John COTTING-HAM, *The Rationalists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Our reasonings are based upon two great principles: the first the *principle of Contradiction* […] and the second the *principle of sufficient reason,* by virtue of which we observe that there can be found no fact that is true or existent, or any true proposition, without there being a sufficient reason for its being so and not otherwise, although we cannot know these reasons in most cases.[11]

It has been pointed out many times that the view that every fact has its own sufficient reason is not easy to maintain given the nature of our experience. The opposite view, according to which there are facts without reasons, the so called *brute facts*, appears to hold a privileged position in contemporary debates: it is easy to quote most diverse facts and require an immediate answer to the question: how (with what reasons) can you explain this? And we are well aware that very often there can be no ready answer to that question. Arguably, even though the view that reality is just brute facts and it is pointless to try to find reasons for them is more convenient to accept and easier to defend in a debate, this view is less attractive than the assumption that there must be discoverable reasons (explanations) even for hitherto unexplained facts. Accepting such a sceptical attitude would mean surrendering to the view that there are areas of reality with respect to which it is pointless to ask for reasons and explanations why certain facts obtain and why they are so and so rather than otherwise. Yet this would mean giving up our innermost impulse that urges us to cognize the world and our whole practice as cognizing subjects.

Does this imply that the PSR is merely a practical postulate of the human mind and not necessarily the fundamental law of all reality? This is an idea that neither Leibniz nor any other rationalists of the 17th century would have accepted. When one examines his writings from the point of view of possible justification of his rationalism, one finds diverse types of arguments in favour of the thesis that if it is the case that P, then there is a sufficient reason for P. The most prominent among those arguments is the "pure reason argument." Reduced to its very essence, this argument is an attempt to prove that a denial of the PSR would imply obliterating the distinction between being and nothingness and between truth and falsity.[12]

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[11] *Monadology*, § 31 and 32, in L, 646.

[12] "[…] the other principle is that of the *determinant reason*: it states that nothing ever comes to pass without there being a cause or at least a reason determining it, that is, something to give an *a priori* reason why it is existent rather than non-existent, and in this wise rather than in any other. This great principle holds for all events, and a contrary instance will never be supplied: and although more often than not we are insufficiently acquainted with these determinant reasons, we

Substance pluralism

Leibniz was deeply convinced that the theories of substance put forward by Descartes and, to an even greater extent, by Spinoza, give rise to many serious difficulties for an adequate account of individuation and dynamism.[13] These difficulties, to his mind, could not be removed by merely improving some isolated points of these theories; what was in fact required were a far-going changes in the very conception of substance. His reform of the conception of substance consisted in assuming that reality in its very foundation was a plurality of individual, non-extensive, intrinsically active and simple substances (monads). A coherent and uniform theory of reality was only possible, contrary to what Descartes and Spinoza claimed, on the assumption of irreducible plurality of substances, in other words, on the assumption of substance pluralism.[14]

Among Leibniz scholars there are considerably divergent interpretations as to what are the essential characteristics of substance in Leibniz's view. With a certain degree of simplification, one can assume that the essence of Leibniz's theory of substance can be captured in four theses.

The first thesis, which is related to Leibniz's analysis of the concept of force, states that every individual substance is endowed with an inner principle of activity (self-development) which functions as the permanent source of all changes occurring within that substance.[15] In this sense the essence of the world is not extension, *pace* Descartes, but force (*dynamis*).

The second thesis states that every individual substance is the ultimate subject for all of its properties. In his letters to De Volder, Leibniz pointed

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perceive nevertheless that there are such. Were it not for this great principle we could never prove the existence of God, and we should lose an infinitude of very just and very profitable arguments whereof it is the foundation; moreover, it suffers no exception, for otherwise its force would be weakened. Besides, nothing is so weak as those systems where all is unsteady and full of exceptions. That fault cannot be laid to the charge of the system I approve, where everything happens in accordance with general rules that at most are mutually restrictive." *Theodicy*, § 44, p. 151.

[13] See, for example, *Two Notations for Discussion with Spinoza* (1676); *On the Ethics of Benedict de Spinoza* (1678); *On the Correction of Metaphysics and the Concept of Substance* (1694*); Specimen Dynamicum* (1695); *Correspondence with De Volder*; *Reflections on the Doctrine of a Single Universal Spirit* (1702).

[14] See *Leibniz to Arnauld, 30 April 1687*.

[15] "All simple substances or created monads might be given the name of *entelechies*, for they have in them a certain perfection (ἔχουσι τὸ ἐντελές). There is in them a certain sufficiency (αὐτάρχεια) which makes them the sources of their internal actions and so to speak, incorporeal automata." *Monadology*, § 18, in L, 644. See also *On the Correction of Metaphysics and the Concept of Substance* (1694); *Specimen Dynamicum* (1695).

out that although an individual substance is the subject, it is not bare sub-stratum. The subject should be interpreted, according to Leibniz, as the law of the series.[16] It is this law of the series, and not some ontologically isolated subject, that is the inner principle endowing all properties actually belonging to a substance with unity and order. It is the reason why the properties of a substance cannot exist independently of the substance to which they belong and why they never exist as isolated from one another, but are always in-volved in relations with other properties of the same substance.

The third thesis affirms that a substance is a complete being. In his *Discourse on Metaphysics* Leibniz claims that "it is the nature of an individual substance or complete being to have a concept so complete that it is suffi-cient to make us understand and deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which the concept is attributed."[17] This means that all the proper-ties of a substance are potentially contained within that substance. Thus a sub-stance comprises not only absolute (intrinsic) properties, but also relative ones, that is, those properties that result from relationships in which that substance stands to all other substances. In this way every particular sub-stance constitutes a separate species: every individual in Leibniz's theory is a "lowest" species (*species infima*). This further means that no substance allows any other properties in its constitution than the properties constitutive of its essence. Hence the essence of every substance admits of only one actual realization. In other words, no two individual substances, however much alike, are ever instances of one species, as each of them constitutes a separate species for itself. *Quod ibi omne individuum sit species infima.*[18]

The fourth of Leibniz's theses on substance affirms that substance in the strict sense is true unity, that is, a simple, non-complex being. Leibniz be-lieved that if in our ontological analyses we fail to reach true, indivisible unities, we also fail to grasp anything truly real and substantial. In the strict sense of being, only that which constitutes a true unity can be said to be[19].

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[16] See GP, II, 171.

[17] *Discourse on Metaphysics*, § 8, in L, 307

[18] *Discourse on Metaphysics*, § 9, in L, 308

[19] "I regard substance itself, being endowed with primary active and passive power, as an indivisible or perfect monad—like the ego, or something similar to it—but I do not so regard the derivative forces, which are found to be changing continuously. But if there were no *true one,* then every *true being* would be eliminated." *Leibniz to De Volder, June 20, 1703*, in L, 530. "I *believe that where there are only beings by aggregation, there aren't any real beings.* For every being by aggregation presupposes beings endowed with real unity, because every being de-rives its reality only from the reality of those beings of which it is composed, so that it will not

For this reason, as Leibniz argued, that which forms a corporeal nature, without which neither plurality nor aggregation would ever be possible, should correspond to that element which "is called *the self [moy] in* us."[20]

Leibniz was confident that his conception of substance as a monad allows us to solve the essential question concerning the nature, the characteristic features and the way of operation of reality in the best way available. In the words of Leibniz himself:

> To put it briefly, I hold this identical proposition, differentiated only by the emphasis, to be an axiom, namely, *that what is not truly* one *being is not truly one* being *either.* It has always been thought that one and being are mutually supporting. Being is one thing and beings are another; but the plural presupposes the singular, and where there is no being still less will there be several beings. What could be clearer?[21]

Theism

In the wake of other modern authors Leibniz expressed his dissatisfaction with the scholastic form of Christian doctrine endorsed by authors like Thomas Aquinas. He recognized the need to reconsider the problems related to grace, free will, salvation, the sacraments, authority and original sin, and that both Catholic and Protestant positions should be taken into account in that new discussion. However, he differed from many other modern critics in assuming that the postulated modernization of Christian doctrine did not have to imply a total break with the tradition of the scholastic doctrinal synthesis. His conviction was that the properly understood religious spirit must first of all steer clear of extreme and one-sided opinions. People—he thought—most often err not in what they affirm, but in what they reject.

As in other theistic systems of philosophy, arguments for God's existence provide the philosophical foundation for Leibniz's theism. Leibniz recognized many ways of proving God's existence, however the ontological proof

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have any reality at all if each being of which it is composed is itself a being by aggregation, a being for which we must still seek further grounds for its reality, grounds which can never be found in this way, if we must always continue to seek for them. I agree, Sir, that there are only machines (that are often animated) in all of corporeal nature, but I do not agree that *there are only aggregates of substances;* and if there are aggregates of substances, there must also be true substances from which all the aggregates result." *Leibniz to Arnauld*, *30 April 1687*, in AG, 85). "There must be simple substances, since there are compounds, for the compounded is but a collection or an *aggregate* of simples." *Monadology*, § 2, in L, 643.

[20] *New System of Nature*, in AG, 142.

[21] *Leibniz to Arnauld, 30 April 1687*, in AG, 86

was the one he valued most. The ontological argument was for him the simplest and most direct way of demonstrating that God exists. He took the idea of the ontological proof from Descartes, yet he thought that the argument as formulated by Descartes was incomplete.[22] What was lacking in Descartes's argument was a proof of the possibility (that is, non-contradictoriness) of the idea of God: so long as we have not presented a proof of the non-contradictoriness of the idea of God, we do not possess a complete proof of His existence. To make the argument complete one has to show that the very idea of the supremely perfect being is free of contradictions, that is, that the object represented in that idea is possible. The presupposition of the possibility of the object in question is necessary in a reasoning that assumes for a starting point the concept of that object; in particular the assumption of the possibility of the supremely perfect being is necessary in a reasoning which purports to derive the existence of God from the assumed definition of God as the most perfect being. Obviously, a contradiction in the presuppositions of any argument invalidates that argument, as, according to the logical thesis known as Duns Scotus's law, a contradiction allows us to prove any statement regardless of its truth value. Apart from this, as we acquire awareness of the importance of the proof of the very possibility of the Supreme Being that is God, we also come to know the unique ontological privilege of Divine Nature, namely that the very possibility of that nature implies its existence; in other words: if only God is possible, *ipso facto* God exists absolutely.[23]

The best known thesis entailed in Leibniz's theism is his affirmation that the actual world exists because it is the very best of all possible worlds (it is better than any other possible world). Leibniz held the view that our actual world is not the only possible world and that all possible worlds, in a way,

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[22] See Letter to Herman Conring, March 19, 1678, in L, 190. "A necessary being exists (that is, a being whose essence is existence or a being which exists of itself), as is clear from the terms. Now God is such a being, by definition of God. Therefore God exists. These arguments are valid, if only it is granted that a most perfect being or a necessary being is possible and implies no contradiction or, what amounts to the same thing, that an essence is possible from which existence follows. But as long as this possibility is not demonstrated, the existence of God can by no means be considered as perfectly demonstrated by such an argument. In general, we must recognize, as I have long since pointed out, that nothing can safely be inferred about a definite thing out of any given definition, as long as the definition is not known to express something possible. For if it should happen to imply some hidden contradiction, it would be possible for something absurd to be deduced from it." *Critical Thoughts on the General Part of the Principles of Descartes*, (1692), in L, 386.

[23] See, for example, *Critical Thoughts on the General Part of the Principles of Descartes*, in L, 386.

compete in God's mind for actual existence. The winner in this competition is the best of all possible worlds, that is, the world which realizes the highest possible perfection.[24] Perfection, to Leibniz, is not a simple function of maximal values, but a result of optimalization. Perfection presupposes balancing diverse, and to some extent even conflicting, values against one another to achieve the balance that is the best from a given point of view. In particular, to Leibniz, perfection is a combination of two desired effects: maximal plurality and order, or, in other terms, the maximum effect and the minimum expense of effort.[25]

Plurality means, on the one hand, completeness, plenitude, many-sidedness and, on the other, diversity, richness, variety, differentiation.[26] Order in its turn implies structure, form, and conformity of diverse elements. Order is what binds diverse elements together and makes them form one overarching whole. Every possible world is structured by order; the difference between various worlds is not a result of some of the worlds being ordered and other worlds not being ordered. The difference between the worlds lies in the way order helps to produce perfection in each of them. Order is what makes diverse elements form a compact whole; the more compact the world and the greater the number of elements it encompasses, the better the order. Perfection is also related to simplicity, the fewer and simpler the principles organizing a world into a whole, the more perfect the world.

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[24] "Now, since there is an infinity of possible universes in God's ideas, and since only one of them can exist, there must be a sufficient reason for God's choice, a reason which determines him towards one thing rather than another. And this reason can only be found in *fitness,* or in the degree of perfection that these worlds contain, each possible world having the right to claim existence in proportion to the perfection it contains." *Monadology*, § 53–54.

[25] "And this is the way of obtaining as much variety as possible, but with the greatest order possible, that is, it is the way of obtaining as much perfection as possible." *Monadology*, § 58, in L, 648); "Thus one must suppose that, among the general rules which are not absolutely necessary, God chooses those which are the most natural, which it is easiest to explain, and which also are of greatest service for the explanation of other things. That is doubtless the conclusion most excellent and most pleasing; and even though the System of Pre-established Harmony were not necessary otherwise, because it banishes superfluous miracles, God would have chosen it as being the most harmonious. The ways of God are those most simple and uniform: for he chooses rules that least restrict one another. They are also the most *productive* in proportion to the *simplicity of ways and means*. It is as if one said that a certain house was the best that could have been constructed at a certain cost. One may, indeed, reduce these two conditions, simplicity and productivity, to a single advantage, which is to produce as much perfection as is possible […]." *Theodicy*, § 208, 260–1.

[26] See *Monadology*, § 12–13.

According to the principle of perfection as conceived by Leibniz, the world combining maximal plurality with the greatest simplicity of governing principles is the most perfect world possible and as such it has been selected by God for existence. The greatest perfection of our world ensures that of all possible worlds it is the most voluminous, and contains the greatest diversity of mutually compatible items. The unity and simplicity of the overall structure is harmonized with maximum differentiation. This is so because nature calls for unity and simplicity of the whole as well as maximal differentiation, diversity and individualization.

> Hence it is very clearly understood that out of the infinite combinations and series of possible things, one exists through which the greatest amount of essence or possibility is brought into existence. There is always a principle of determination in nature which must be sought by maxima and minima; namely, that a maximum effect should be achieved with a minimum outlay, so to speak.[27]

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

The articles collected in this volume of *Annals of Philosophy* represent a piece of research on Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's philosophy carried out by Polish scholars from different universities in Poland: University of Warsaw, University of Wrocław, University of Białystok, University of Gdańsk, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and Jesuit University Ignatianum in Kraków. The editorial team of *Annals of Philosophy* wishes to express gratitude for interesting articles touching different aspects of Leibnizian heritage to all Authors. We would also like to thank the Ministry of Science and Higher Education for supporting the publication financially (Decision # 00251/NPRH4/H3b/83/2016).

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[27] *On the Radical Origination of Things* (1697), in L, 487.

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GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNIZ – PORTRET INTELEKTUALNY

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie, po pierwsze, najistotniejszych faktów z biografii Leibniza; po drugie, miejsca filozofii Leibniza w ramach myśli filozoficznej wieku XVII; po trzecie, głównych trendów interpretacyjnych jego pism, czynnych do dzisiaj w literaturze historycznofilozoficznej; po czwarte, podstawowych cech, które określą zarówno postawę filozoficzną Leibniza, jak też przyjęty przezeń sposób filozofowania.

GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNIZ: AN INTELLECTUAL PORTRAIT

S u m m a r y

The aim of this paper is to set out the following: firstly, the most important facts from Leibniz's biography; secondly, the position of Leibniz's philosophy within the philosophical thought of the

17th century; thirdly, the diverse ways to explicate Leibniz's philosophical thought that are still in use in literature today; fourthly, basic features which define the general spirit as well as the methods of Leibniz's philosophizing.

Słowa kluczowe: Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz; filozofia nowożytna; racjonalizm; pluralizm, monada; teizm.

Key words: Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz; modern philosophy; rationalism; pluralism; monad; theism.

Information about Author: Dr. hab. PRZEMYSŁAW GUT, Prof. of KUL — Department of the History of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin; address for correspondence: Al. Racławickie 14, PL 20-950 Lublin; e-mail: dedo@kul.pl