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Relation and Individuation in the Philosophy of Leibniz

Angelo Cicatello

1.

In Leibniz, the word “spirit”, as everyone knows, indicates the nature of the rational being.¹ “Spirit” is properly the intelligent being, able to access eternal truths, to perceive itself and to cultivate that memory of itself that makes it a moral subject. However, in Leibniz, “spirit” also takes on a wider meaning referring to the description of substance seen as a place of activity, as a living unity. In a 1698 essay the word “spirit” does not necessarily indicate something intelligent:

modo sumatur *spiritus* non pro re intelligente (ut alias solet) sed pro anima vel forma animae analoga, nec pro simplici modificatione, sed pro constitutivo substantiali perseverante, quod *Monadis* nomine appellare soleo, in quo est velut perceptio et appetitus.²

In this sense monads are primary spiritual entities or entities animated by a *vis primitiva* or *prote entelecheia*,³ which is distinguished from matter seen as passive force or force of resistance.⁴ Indeed, the

1. Works of G. W. Leibniz are cited from two edition: *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, ed. by von C. I. Gerhardt, Berlin 1875-1890, repr. Olms, Hildesheim 1978, (= GP, immediately followed by the number of the volume and the page number); and *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, Darmstadt/Leipzig/Berlin 1923- (=A, immediately followed by the serial number, the volume number and the page number).

2. G. W. Leibniz, *De ipsa natura sive de vi insita actionibus creaturarum pro Dynamicis suis confirmandis illustrandisque* (1698), GP IV, 152.

3. In the *New Essays on Human Understanding* Leibniz explicitly outlines the eventuality that «[...] on explique le mot d'Esprit si generalement qu'il comprenne toutes les ames, ou plustost (pour parler encore plus generalement) toutes les Entelechies ou Unités substantielles, qui ont de l'Analogie avec les Esprits», A VI, 6, 225.

4. «Il y a même encor une espece de *puissance passive* plus particulière et plus chargée de réalité, c'est celle qui est dans la matière, où il n'y a pas seulement la mobilité, qui est la capacité ou receptivité du mouvement, mais encor la *resistance* qui comprend l'*impenetrabilité* et l'*inertie*.» (Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (1703-1705), A VI, 6, 169-170).

active/passive couple delineates the ontological profile of the created monad, of the finite substance, which is substance insofar as it is capable of action,⁵ but, in that it is finite, is capable of passion, that is to say is endowed with a body.⁶ Thus Leibniz can affirm that «realitatem corporeae substantiae in individua quadam natura, hoc est non in mole, sed agenda patiendique potentia consistere»,⁷ or again: «Toute substance créée agit et patit, il n'y a rien de contradictoire en cela, et je suis d'opinion qu'il n'y en a point qui soi séparée de la matiere.»⁸

The spiritual character of the substance is defined in a more precise way by the type of action that characterizes it. For Leibniz, acting essentially means perceiving and passing from one perception to another. And a substance acts all the more insofar as it perceives more clearly or passes from a less clear perception to a clearer one. Likewise, suffering does not correspond, strictly speaking, to a simple condition of receptiveness, does not face something that the substance receives from the outside, but reduced activity, that is to say to a less clear and distinct perception:

La Creature est dite agir au dehors en tant qu'elle a de la perfection, et patir d'une autre en tant qu'elle est imparfaite. Ainsi l'on attribue l'Action à la Monade en tant qu'elle a des perceptions distinctes, et la Passion en tant qu'elle a de confuses.⁹

Action, like every event of the substance, thus has a spiritual nature in the most specific sense, which is worked out in the *ideal* space of representation:

5. «La Substance est un Etre capable d'Action» Leibniz, *Principes de la nature et de la grâce, fondés en raison*, (1714), GP VI, 598.

6. It is only starting from the period between 1669 and 1671 that Leibniz, as C. Mercer notices, starts to define a theory of substance that recognizes the presence of separate incorporeal principles distinct both from the human mind and from the divine mind, operating a radical revision with respect to a previous conception that instead identified in the divine mind the direct cause of the movement of bodies (cf. MERCER 2007).

7. Leibniz, *Specimen inventorum de admirandis naturae Generalis arcanis* (1698?), GP VII, 314.

8. Leibniz an Jaquelot (22 March 1703), GP III, 457. See also *Streitschriften zwischen Leibniz und Clarke* (1715-1716), *Leibniz' drittes Schreiben* (1716), GP VII, 365. On acting and suffering as constitutive principles of substance cf. LAMARRA 2000, 235.

9. Leibniz, *Principes de la philosophie ou Monadologie* (1714), GP 6, 615.

En effect rien ne nous peut arriver que des pensées et [des] perceptions, et toutes nos pensées et perceptions futures ne sont que des suites quoyque contingentes de nos pensées et perceptions precedentes.¹⁰

The very position of the substance in the universe, in space, is only defined by the way in which it represents the universe to itself.¹¹ As we read in a letter to Nicola Remond of 1714: «Il ne faut pas concevoir non plus que les Monades comme des points dans un espace reel, se remuent, se poussent ou se touchent.»¹² Hence the Leibnizian universe is not given primarily as a physical image of a common space populated by substances. It is always given *individually*, as a perspective space that is comprehensible starting from the point of view of every substance.¹³ Hence rather than of a universe containing manifold beings, we will have to speak, in Leibniz, of a universe that multiplies¹⁴ through the beings that represent it to themselves. That is to say, the extension of the universe, in its most intimate metaphysical nucleus, corresponds to this self-multiplication in relation to the multiplicity of substances. Thus its spatial points, like its temporal points, refer to points of view, the points of view of the subjects that perceive it, displaying it in its endless variety. Hence Leibniz, in a letter to Jaquelot of 9 February 1704, writes as follows:

Le miracle ou plustost le merveilleux consiste en ce que chaque substance est une representation de l'univers suivant son point de veue. C'est la plus grand richesse ou perfection que l'on puisse attribuer aux creatures et à l'operation du Createur, et comme un redoublement de mondes dans ces miroirs innombrables de substance, par lesquels l'univers est varié à l'infini.¹⁵

10. Leibniz, *Discours de métaphysique* (1686), ch. XIV, A VI, 4B, 1551. On the subject see COVER and O'LEARY HAWTHORNE 1999, 73-74.

11. Cf. MUGNAI 1976, 170-171.

12. Leibniz, *Leibniz an Remond* (July 1714, [Beilage]), GP III, 623.

13. Cf. SCHEPERS 2000, 172).

14. Cf. Leibniz, *Considérations sur la doctrine d'un Esprit Universel Unique* (1702), GP VI, 538.

15. *Leibniz an Jaquelot* (Wolfenbüttel, 9 February 1704), GP III, 464-465. In the previously mentioned letter of July 1714 to Nicola Remond we also read: «un meme Universe est multiplié d'une infinie de façon par autant de miroirs vivans, chacun se representant à sa mode.» (*Leibniz an Remond* [luglio 1714, Beilage], GP III, 623. On the

2.

The individual substance first, and then the monad, are referred to by Leibniz as living mirrors of the universe,¹⁶ meaning active subjects,¹⁷ whose life consists precisely in representing the universe, and whose history unfolds in the attempt to give the clearest possible representation of it. This *effort* (*conatus*), this finalistic tension towards more and more adequate representations of the universe¹⁸ thus connotes, in an essential way, the life of substances, and defines the relations between them. These are relations that therefore are not to be seen in the physical terms of actions that a substance immediately exerts on the other. They are to be seen in the metaphysical terms of an inter-action between substances that concerns their being originally conceived in connection, in a world whose order is in turn the object of representation by a wise author, whose point of view transcends the partiality of the point of view of each finite entity. If the universe is thus essentially given as an agreement between the different perspectives of the substances that represent it to themselves – an agreement that finds in the divine substance and in its representative activity its own ontological basis – the action of one substance on others lies precisely

theme of perspective multiplication of the universe also see *Discours de métaphysique*, ch. IX, in A VI, 4B, 1542: «Ainsi l'univers est en quelque façon multiplié autant de fois, qu'il y a de substances, et la gloire de Dieu est redoublée de même par autant de représentations toutes différentes de son ouvrage». Also see *Principes de la philosophie ou Monadologie* (1714), GP VI, 616.

16. In *Principes de la nature et de la grâce, fondés en raison*, on the subject of the monad, reference is made to «un miroir vivant, ou doué d'action interne, représentatif de l'univers, suivant son point de vue, et aussi réglé que l'univers luy meme.» (*Principes de la nature et de la grâce, fondés en raison* [1714], § 3, GP VI, 599).

17. Leibniz explicitly affirms that primitive active force can be called life (cf. Leibniz, *Entretien de Philarete et d'Ariste, suite du premier entretien d'Ariste et de Théodore*, GP VI, 588). As a living mirror, the substance does not simply reflect something that comes to it from outside. Rather, in mirroring, as will be seen more clearly afterwards, it expresses the universe from inside itself; this is a spontaneous action that, in every substance, coincides with expressing itself. In expressing the universe according to its own point of view, every substance expresses itself, distinguishing itself in this from all others.

18. On the finalistic orientation of the series of perceptions that characterize the life of the substance and on the teleological nature of appetite as a tendency to pass from one perception to the other cf. McDONOUGH 2008, 688.

in its ability to express in a more or less adequate way the terms of this agreement.

Leibniz in this connection speaks of ideal influence between substances, meaning that the state of each substance and its every possible change are not and cannot be the immediate effect of the action of another substance. They remain an internal event that has its reason for being in internal events that precede it, and that, together with these, finds correspondence on the outside in virtue of the fact that it is already *ab initio* conceived by God – this is the meaning of an ideal influence – as corresponding to, and therefore related to, the actions of other substances:

Par la notion de la substance ou de l'estre accompli en general, qui porte que tousjours son estat present est une suite naturelle de son estat precedent il s'ensuit que la nature de chaque substance singuliere et par consequent de toute ame est d'exprimer l'univers; elle a esté d'abord créée de tel sort qu'en vertu des propres loix de sa nature il luy doit arriver de s'accorder avec ce qui se passe dans les corps, et particulierement dans le sien.¹⁹

Thus the representative states of each substance are expressions of external correspondents that first of all concern what is closest to it on the outside, namely the movements of its own body,²⁰ and secondly bodily phenomena, to which in turn there correspond the

19. *Leibniz an Arnauld* (Hanover, October 1687), GP II, 113-114. «Mais dans les substances simples ce n'est qu'un'influence *ideale* d'une Monade sur l'autre, qui ne peut avoir son effect que par l'intervention de Dieu en tant que dans les Idées de Dieu une Monade demande aver raison, que Dieu en reglante les autres dès le commencement des choses, ait regarde à elle. Car puisqu'une Monade créée ne sauroit avoir une influence physique sur l'interieur de l'autre, ce n'est que par ce moyen, que l'une peut avoir de la dependance de l'autre.» (*Principes de la philosophie ou Monadologie* [1714], § 51, GP VI, 615). In *Primae veritates* Leibniz affirms: «Et quae causas dicimus esse tantum requisita comitantia in Metaphysico rigore» (G. W. Leibniz, *Primae veritates*, [1686?], A VI, 4B, 1647).

20. In a letter to Arnauld datable to between 28 November and 8 December 1686 Leibniz affirms that «[...] la nature de toute substance porte une expression generale de tout l'univers, et [...] la nature de l'ame porte plus particulierement une expression plus distincte de ce qui arrive maintenant a l'égard de son corps.» (*Leibniz an Arnauld* [Hanover, 28 November-8 December, 1686], GP II, 74). In this connection see also *Principes de la philosophie ou Monadologie* (1714), § 62, GP VI, 617.

representative states of other substances.²¹

In short, what happens to a substance is not caused by something else, but is implicit in its own notion, and at once co-implicit in the notion of the others, so that knowing the notion of a substance – knowledge that for Leibniz, in its completeness and total adequacy, can only be the prerogative of a divine mind – would mean being able to foresee with certainty its every event, as well as extending this forecast to the events of the whole universe:

[...] la nature d'une substance individuelle, ou d'un Estre complet, est d'avoir une notion si accomplie, qu'elle soit suffisante, à comprendre et à en faire deduire tous les predicats du sujet à qui cette notion est attribuée.²²

And again:

On pourroit donc dire en quelque façon, et dans un bon sens, quoyque éloigné de l'usage, qu'une substance particuliere n'agit jamais sur une autre substance particuliere, et n'en patit non plus si on considere, que ce qui arrive à chacune n'est qu'une suite de son idée toute seule, puisque cette idée enferme deja tous les predicats ou evenemens, et exprime tout l'univers.²³

That the action of a substance finds correspondence in the passion of another does not mean that the former directly acts on the other, which suffers; otherwise there would be loss of autonomy by the substantial entity,²⁴ which would receive determination not in virtue of its own notion but in virtue of the notion of another. Rather, each

21. We read the following in the correspondence between Leibniz and Clarke: «Elles [les ames] sentent ce qui se passe hors d'elles par ce qui passe en elles, respondent aux choses de dehors, en vertu de l'harmonie que Dieu a preétablie, par la plus belle et la plus admirable de toutes ses productions, qui fait que chaque substance simple en vertu de sa nature est, pour dire ainsi, une concentration et un miroir vivant de tout l'univers suivant son point de veue.» (*Leibniz' fünftes Schreiben*, GP VII, 411).

22. Leibniz, *Discours de métaphysique* (1686), ch. VIII, A VI, 4B, 1540.

23. Leibniz, *Discours de métaphysique* (1686), ch. XIV, A VI, 4B, 1551.

24. «On pourroit donner le nom d'*Entelechies* à toutes les substances simples ou Monades créées, car elles ont en elles une certaine perfection (*echousi to enteles*), il y a une suffisance (*autarkeia*) qui les rend sources de leur actions internes et pour ainsi dire des Automates incorporels» (*Principes de la philosophie ou Monadologie* [1714], § 18, GP VI, 609-610).

substance, freely acting, or in virtue of the notion that constitutes it independently, does so in agreement with the equally free actions of other substances, in virtue of the fact that every substance comes into existence for the reason that its nature, and therefore its actions, its representations, agree with those of the others in the framework of a cosmic design preordained by the divine mind:

C'est qu'il faut donc dire que Dieu a créé d'abord l'ame, ou toute autre unité réelle de telle sorte, que tout luy doit naistre de son propre fonds, par une parfaite *spontanéité* à l'égard d'elle-même, et pourtant avec une parfaite conformité aux choses des dehors.²⁵

The difference between acting and suffering is configured in reality as a harmonic difference of points of view, as a difference in perspective that links the actions of a substance to the actions of some other in accordance with an order of correspondence whose rule concerns the greater or lesser ability that every substance has to express the whole universe:

Et c'est par là, qu'entre les Creatures les Actions et Passions sont mutuelles. Car Dieu, comparant deux substances simples, trouve en chacune des raisons, qui l'obligent à y accommoder l'autre, et par consequent ce qui est actif à certains égards, est passif suivant un autre point de consideration: *actif* en tant, que ce qu'on connoist distinctement en luy, sert à rendre raison de ce qui se passe dans un autre, et *passif* en tant, que la raison de ce qui se passe en luy, se trouve dans ce qui se connoist distinctement dans un autre.²⁶

The difference in point of view expresses precisely the difference between, and therefore the multiplicity of, substances. This multiplicity, however, has always already been conceived under the harmonic sign of acting in concomitance.

3.

Leibniz thus intends to safeguard the autonomy of the individual, its initiative or ability to act beginning from itself, but he intends to do so

25. Leibniz, *Système nouveau de la nature et de la communication des substances, aussi bien que de l'union qu'il y a entre l'âme et le corps* (1695), GP IV, 484.

26. Leibniz, *Principes de la philosophie ou Monadologie* (1714), § 52, GP 6, 615.

in the context of a community conception of the universe in which the actions of each substance do not in principle prove to be indifferent to the life of the others. Autonomy of the individual and community life of the universe are in agreement for Leibniz in virtue of the fact that the very existence of each individual substance is not conceivable (in the sense that it is not possible to exhibit its sufficient reason), except insofar as its notion proves to be in agreement with a cosmic design that God chooses as the best one among those possible.²⁷

In other words, for every substance coming into existence means, from the beginning, being conceived in a context of relations in which the world to which that substance belongs is expressed in the most suitable way. Precisely the more or less adequate way in which the universe is expressed in every substance defines its *quantum* of activity and the correlative *quantum* of passivity; for this reason this passivity never expresses the degree zero of activity but rather represents a degree of it, though reduced.²⁸ Hence one could say that the question of how a substance enters into a relation with another indeed resolves into the question of why it exists rather than not existing. The answer to the *ontological* question on why there is being and not nothingness in this way is also the answer to the *teleological* question on why and how what exists is related to something else.

The fact is that the relation is not a connection that is set up between existing entities that act on one another, but, more radically, is what God necessarily *conceives* in bringing something into existence.

27. «Or, comme il y a une infinité des Univers possibles dans les Idées de Dieu et qu'il n'en peut exister qu'un seul, il faut qu'il y ait une raison suffisante du choix de Dieu, qui le détermine à l'un plutôt qu'à l'autre. Et cette raison ne peut se trouver que dans la *convenance*, ou dans les degrés de perfection, que ces Mondes contiennent, chaque possible ayant droit de prétendre à l'Existence à mesure de la perfection, qu'il enveloppe.» (*Principes de la philosophie ou Monadologie* [1714], §§ 53-54, GP VI, 615-616).

28. «J'ay dit déjà que dans la rigueur metaphysique, prenant l'action pour ce qui arrive à la Substance *spontanément* et de son propre fonds, tout ce qui est proprement une Substance ne fait qu'agir, car tout luy vient d'elle même après Dieu, n'estant point possible qu'une Substance créée ait de l'influence sur l'autre. Mais prenant *Action* pour un exercice de la *perfection* et la *passion* pour le contraire, il n'y a de l'*Action* dans les veritables Substances, que lorsque leur perception (car j'en done à toutes) se developpe et devient plus distincte, comme il n'ya de *passion* que lorsqu'elle devient plus confuse» (*Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* [1703-1705], A VI, 6, 210).

This is because the coming into existence of something is linked, in the judgment of the wise author of the world, to the possibility of its nature agreeing with that of other existing entities and therefore with the whole world that concerns it. What exists has come into existence in virtue of the fact that in its notion God has recognized a nature that does not collide with the existence of all those natures that together contribute to forming the best possible order of the universe.

The ideal nature of the relation, the fact that, strictly speaking, it does not find its reason for being in some real physical influence, is far from reducing the relation to a mere product of the mind that perceives it. This makes it a feature of Leibniz's description of the universe, whose key elements prove to be the wise choice of the best in divine action and the autonomy of the created substance in acting:

Les relations et les ordres ont quelque chose de l'estre de raison, quoyqu'ils ayent leur fondement dans les choses; car on peut dire que leur réalité, comme celle des verités éternelles et des possibilités vient de la supreme raison.²⁹

The reference to the divine intellect, to the supreme reason, is what indissolubly links the ideal order of relations and the real order of things, in that particular way whereby the divine intellect bringing them into being is equivalent to thinking of them in a determined relation, in that relation of co-possibility that decides the access of a thing to existence:

[...] quoyque les relations soyent de l'entendement, elles ne sont pas sans fondement et réalité. Car le premier entendement est l'origine des choses.³⁰

The ideal ontological status of the relations as *entia rationis* therefore finds, through the divine intellect, its real basis in an effective connection between all things. Here the meaning of this "between"

29. *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (1703-1705), A VI, 6, 227. In a preparatory study for a letter from Leibniz to Des Bosses of 4 February 1712 we read: «[...] Deus non tantum singulas monades et ejuscunque Monadis modificationes spectat, sed etiam earum relationes, et in hoc consistit relationum ac veritatum realitas» (*Briefwechsel zwischen Leibniz und Des Bosses, 1706-1716* [Beilage], GP II, 438).

30. Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (1703-1705), A VI, 6, 145.

can no longer be sought in something that would fill an intermediary space between substances, but must be identified in the possibility of interconnection, in the element of co-possibility that every substance bears with itself because it is co-implied in its internal notion. No relation is given *between* substances; if anything, it is every substance, individually taken, that bears in itself the *between* that places it in a relation with the others, without for this reason having to go outside itself to access the world that concerns it.³¹ This does not mean, however, that relations are simplistically reducible to the determinations that connote every individual's nature, as if they were predicates that belong to its essence. It means, instead, that every individual with hits attributes, which are essentially the events that mark its representative life, according to a determined proportion *expresses* a correspondence with the attributes of other substances. The relations between substances are therefore relations of "expression", in the specific sense that the term takes on in Leibniz:

Une chose *exprime* une autre (dans mon langage) lorsqu'il y a un rapport constant et réglé entre ce qui se peut dire de l'une et de l'autre. C'est ainsi qu'une projection de perspective exprime son geometral. L'expression est commune à toutes les formes, et c'est un genre dont la perception naturelle, le sentiment animal, et la connoissance intellectuelle sont des especes.³²

That is to say, the concept of expression implies a relation that does not directly link one thing to another, but concerns the possibility of setting up a proportion between the order and a connection of the determinations of the one and the order and the connection of the

31. On the ideal status of relations cf. K. E. Ballard, «Leibniz's Theory of Space and Time», in *Journal of History of Ideas*, 21, 1960, 49-65, 65, which seems however, in the last analysis, to favour the reductionist thesis that reduces relations to the internal determinations of each monad. As will be seen, precisely because they constitute ideal entities, and especially because of the fact that they are essentially determined as relations of expression in the specific sense that this term takes on in Leibniz, relations, instead, do not so easily allow themselves to be closed in the real space concerning the determinations that identify the nature of every individual.

32. *Leibniz an Arnauld* (Hanover, 9 October 1687), GP II, 112. On the relation seen as reciprocal expressiveness between substances see PIRO 1990, 230, who in this connection speaks of a «purely formal relation that only exists in God, who simultaneously creates all substances.»

determinations of the other. In *Quid sit idea* Leibniz already mentions, among the other examples of expression, that of an algebraic equation in relation to a geometric figure. An equation is certainly not a figure, yet, to use the words of the text, «ex sola contemplatione habitudinum exprimentis, possumus venire in cognitionem proprietatum respondentium rei exprimentae. Unde patet non esse necessarium ut id quod exprimit simile sit rei expressae, modo habitudinum quaedam analogia servetur.»³³

The equation numerically expresses a relation that the figure expresses through a connection of points and lines that delimit a plane. In other words, the type of relation that is set up between the algebraic formula and the geometric figure is not based on some similarity, on a sharing of elements. Instead, it concerns the possibility of identifying in the one a rule rendering comprehensible according to a different point of view the relation between the elements of which the other consists.³⁴ This is not far from the idea that Leibniz expresses when in ch. IX of *Discourse of metaphysics* he affirms that «[...] toute substance est comme un monde entier et comme un miroir de Dieu ou bien de tout l'univers, qu'elle exprime chacune à sa façon», ³⁵ subsequently stressing, in ch. XIV, that «[...] quoyque tous [les substances] expriment les mêmes phenomenes, ce n'est pas pour cela que leur expressions soyent parfaitement semblables, mais il suffit qu'elles soyent proportionnelles».³⁶

Leibniz's example of the algebraic equation well renders the idea of a relation between substances that does not necessarily indicate

33. Leibniz, *Quid sit idea* (1678) A VI, 1370. On the subject see in particular COVER and O'LEARY HAWTHORNE 1999, 74-75. On Leibniz's theory of expression cf. AULETTA 1992, 96-100; DAVIDSON 1998, 403, note 53; SOMAINI 2005, 207-216; MAUNU 2008. On the passages in Leibniz's work where the concept of expression is dealt with cf. PHEMISTER 2005, 135.

34. In the *New Essays* reference is made to «une maniere de ressemblance, non pas entiere et pour ainsi dire *in terminis*, mais expressive, ou de rapport d'ordre, comme une Ellipse et même une Parabole ou Hyperbole ressemblent en quelque façon au cercle dont elles sont la projection sur le plan, puisqu' il y a un certain rapport exact et naturel entre ce qui est *projeté* et la projection, qui s'en fait, chaque point de l'un repondant suivant une certaine relation à chaque point de l'autre» (*Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* [1703-1705], A VI, 6, 131).

35. Leibniz, *Discours de métaphysique*, ch. IX, A VI, 4B, 1542.

36. Leibniz, *Discours de métaphysique*, ch. XIV, A VI, 4B, 1550.

something that they directly have in common. In other words, their *being in common* is not simply to be identified in a *common being*. It is to be more radically sought in the weft of a relation in which each substance *expresses* what happens in the other according to a different point of view, thus articulating the life of a universe that is each time, substance by substance, is explicated as a harmonic connection of the different.³⁷ What each substance expresses it certainly expresses starting from itself, and not in response to an action that it receives from another substance and hence in virtue of a relation that comes from the outside. Nevertheless, the relation that a substance has with others is not for this reason entirely deducible from the determinations that connote its essential nature. At all events, in Leibniz the relation continues to be something that in a certain measure goes through the *real* plane of individual determinations, since what describes the harmonic connection of every substance with others is not an element directly contained in its intrinsic notion, but the possibility that a proportion of relations is set up between the one and the others. Then the ideal plane of the relation, that is to say the fact that, as we have seen, it cannot boast the same reality as the substantial entity, is far from constituting a defective ontological trait. In some way it indicates the demand for something more that, traceable within the individual, at the same time is not reducible to the predicates that constitute its internal notion; instead, it pertains to an order and a formal connection of the arrangements and actions of each substance, in which a rule can be found for accessing understanding of the phenomena that characterize the life of the whole universe. In this sense the monad expresses in itself «suas ad cetera omnia relationes».³⁸ Precisely, it *expresses* them, but does not contain them as if they were notions that belong directly to it.

That is to say, relations are not referable to attributes that connote

37. «The notion of harmony allows one to understand the relation between identity and diversity without subordinating one of the two elements to the other, without swallowing up the “special” in a “universal” that tends to dominate and annihilate it: one is not faced with a kind of *reductio ad unum*, since the aim is to grasp the inseparability of the opposite aspects, the need for their interdependence, based on a balance between unity and plurality.» (L. Basso, «Teodicea e politica: ‘repubblica degli spiriti’ e comunità in Leibniz», in *Giornale di Metafisica*, XXXI (2009), 1, 71-96, 85).

38. *Leibniz an Des Bosses* (Wolfenbüttel, 20 September 1712), GP II, 457.

the nature of individuals taken in isolation, but rather reveal in their very ideal nature how the individual is not, and never can be, *thought of*, as something isolated. Thus if Leibniz affirms in the *New Essays on Human Understanding* that «[...] dans la rigueur metaphysique [...] il n'y a point de denomination entierement exterieure (*denominatio pure extrinseca*) à cause de la connexion reelle de toutes choses»,³⁹ this cannot translate into the cloistered thesis of a reduction of relations to purely intrinsic determinations.⁴⁰ And indeed, we also read in the *New Essays*, immediately afterwards, that «[...] il n'y a point de terme si absolu ou si detaché, qu'il n'enferme des relations et dont la parfaite analyse ne mene à d'autres choses et même à toutes les autres, de sorte qu'on peut dire, que les *termes relatifs* marquent *expresement* le rapport qu'ils contiennent.»⁴¹ Hence there is no relation that can be considered as a merely external relation between two things, just as, however, there is no term that can be considered abstractly from any relation to something else. Hence against every possible form of reductionism of relations in a hyper-monadic key – although this also seems in some respects to find a place in Leibniz's metaphysical discourse – there is the demand for a description of the individual sphere. The autonomy of the latter does not exclude the need for reference to something other than the ideal complement of its reality – a complement that is anything but superfluous, being necessary, indeed, in order to define that order of co-possibility in which, alone, every individual can be thought of as existing, and for this reason brought into existence by God.

4.

In this perspective, that is to say in the perspective of a universe that conspires in every part for the cause of everything, the character of self-sufficiency of the substance on which Leibniz insists so much –

39. Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (1703-1705), A VI, 6, 227.

40. The position that reduces relations between substances and non-relational predicates – an authoritative representative of which, as is well known, is RUSSELL 1900. This work is opposed by ISHIGURO 1967, ISHIGURO 1972, HINTIKKA 1972, KULSTAD 1984, McCULLOUGH 1996, 172-7.

41. Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (1703-1705), A VI, 6, 228.

the fact that its events, as we have seen, find their reason for being in its internal notion and not in anything else – is not simplistically translated into a sort of autarchic state of the individual. Instead, it opens up to a community idea of the individual seen as what bears in itself the imprint of the whole universe. Every individual is autonomous in relation to others, insofar as the relation to them is intrinsic, at least in the *ideal* sense that is already always conceived jointly about its internal notion.

Thus every substance is autonomous in the sense that it reproduces, as a living mirror, the autonomy of the whole universe. It is not, as a merely physical description would imply, the part of a whole in which there are other parts with which it comes or should come into contact. It is not the part of a whole; if anything, it is the part in which, though according to a limited, finite perspective, the reference *is given* to the whole.

This implies that entering into a relation with other substances is not something that comes from the outside, from the outside of a whole conceived as *outside* it, but concerns its very condition as an individual. Precisely and only insofar as it is able to express the life of everything, precisely because it bears in itself the trace of the whole universe, the individual substance does not need to communicate with the outside.

The monad does not have windows, says Leibniz's well-known adage. This means that it is the whole universe that does not have windows insofar as it exhausts inside itself the events that concern it. However, *inside it* here means inside every substance that represents it to itself. The Leibnizian universe extends, so to speak, in depth, giving itself in the perceptive background of every substance. For this reason the latter does not need windows that put it in communication with the outside,⁴² rather constituting itself a window from which the whole

42. Almost paraphrasing the text of a letter from Leibniz to des Bosses of 19 August 1715, Heidegger affirms: «Therefore monads have “no windows,” because they need none [...] There is no influx, not because it would be inexplicable, but because it would be superfluous.» (HEIDEGGER 1984, 99). According to G. Deleuze Heidegger's reading of Leibniz, which insists on the motif of an original opening up of the monad to the world, ends up ignoring «[...] the condition of closure or concealment enunciated by Leibniz; that is, the determination of a being-for-the-world instead of a being-in-the-world. Closure is the condition of being for the world. The condition of closure

universe shows itself according to a determined point of view. That is to say, the outside is expressed in the background of every substance, and the more it is lost and dilated in the most imperceptible and dark perceptions, the more external, the more distant, it is. The external, the distant is thus shaped as what is perceived less or, more precisely, as what is perceived with less clarity and distinction, so that the sum of non-conscious perceptions acts as a background and at once as a context to the perceptive life of every substance, making it, more or less wittingly, participate in the life of the universe:

Ces petites perceptions sont donc de plus grande efficace par leur suites qu'on ne pense. Ce sont elles qui forment ce je ne sçay quoy, ces goûts, ces images des qualités des sens, claires dans l'assemblage, mais confuses dans les parties, ces impressions que des corps environnans font sur nous, qui enveloppent l'infini, cette liaison que chaque estre a avec tout le reste de l'univers. On peut même dire qu'en consequence de ces petites perceptions le present est gros de l'avenir et chargé du passé, que tout est conspirant [...] et que dans la moindre des substances, des yeux aussi perçans que ceux de Dieu pourroient lire toute la suite des choses de l'univers.⁴³

In this perspective, Leibniz's doctrine of small perceptions serves, so to speak, the community cause of the universe, furnishing, indeed, a decisive argument in favour of a conception of the individual as a substance that bears inside itself the *imperceptible* signs of the whole.⁴⁴

holds for the infinite opening of the finite: it "finitely represents infinity". It gives the world the possibility of beginning over and again in each monad. The world must be placed in the subject in order that the subject can be for the world.» (DELEUZE 1993, 26). One can perhaps accept Deleuze's provocation without with this wiping out the nucleus of truth in Heidegger's reading, underlining that the opening up of the monad to the world, and hence the community dimension of the individual, can and must find an echo in Leibniz in the perspective idea of a world that, for its part, is only given individually. In this sense Deleuze's stress on the condition of cloistering of the monad can be recovered in the idea of a contraction of the whole universe in what the expression constitutes of this universe, because of its very essence.

43. Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (1703-1705), A VI, 6, 54-55.

44. Again in the *New Essays* we read the following on the subject of small perceptions: «C'est aussi par les perceptions insensibles que s'explique cette admirable harmonie préestablie de l'ame e du corps, et même des toutes les Monades ou substances simples, qui supplée à l'influence insoutenable des uns sur les autres, et qui au jugement de l'auteur du plus beau des Dictionnaires exalte la grandeur des perfections

The infinitely *small* of non-conscious perceptions thus seems to flow into the infinitely great of which every substance is a mirror in a more or less evident way.

Of every substance one could therefore say what Plato says in *Timaeus* of the whole universe:

And on the outside round about, it was all made smooth with great exactness, and that for many reasons. For of eyes it had no need, since outside of it there was nothing visible left over; nor yet of hearing, since neither was there anything audible; nor was there any air surrounding it which called for respiration; nor, again, did it need any organ whereby it might receive the food that entered and evacuate what remained undigested. For nothing went out from it or came into it from any side, since nothing existed; for it was so designed as to supply its own wastage as food for itself, and to experience by its own agency and within itself all actions and passions, since He that had constructed it deemed that it would be better if it were self-sufficing rather than in need of other things.⁴⁵

Hence it does not seem very difficult to take this passage as a particularly successful description of the windowless monad.

The contour of Leibniz's substance is perfectly smooth and polished like that of the universe imagined by Plato. This is precisely because, according to Leibniz, the universe finds its contours in every substance, whose representative activity is stretched out, finalized, to fill every gap between the individual and the whole – that whole that, for its part, is always and only given as differentiated in the activity of every individual.

In this way, what at first sight appears as an ontological condition of incommunicability between substances is translated in reality into an original and spiritual form of communication that concerns their participating in a design that does not simply unite them: in each of them it finds the place in which to express itself, in a more or less adequate way, in full. Spiritual here means that the *commercium* between entities does not pass through a mutual influence, through some form of physical pressure that the one exerts on the other. It

divines au delà de ce qu'on en jamais conçu.» (*Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* [1703-1705], A VI, 6, 55).

45. Plato, *Timaeus*, 33 b 7-d 3, in LAMB 1925.

concerns a condition that originates from inside each entity, so that it is inside itself that it truly communicates with the outside.

What at a superficial reading seems to be a non-relation proves in this way to be a radical relation that lives in the background of the individual as existing unity, as individual substance. And this is because a universe that is not *in the individual*, a whole that is not given beginning from a perspective point of view, for Leibniz is only an abstraction. Likewise, an individual that is only recognizable as part of a whole, of a whole that, as a set of parts, looms over it, would not prove to be adequately included in its substantial nature as an individual.⁴⁶ The interrogation on the possibility of a relation between substances must therefore be resolved, in Leibniz's perspective, on the plane of a reading in a non-antagonistic key of the relation between individuality and universality. It is a reading that in the individual recognizes striving towards the whole, and in the whole an intrinsically individualized perspective disposition.

Further, the theological reference to a wise author that, among the possible worlds, chooses to bring the best into existence, must not simplistically make one think of a *deus ex machina* that introduces order among things first conceived as isolated thoughts. As we have seen, God does not choose to relate things that would exist regardless of their possible reciprocal relations. Instead, it is bringing them into existence that in God corresponds to thinking of them as related, in a relation that is chosen as the best among the possible ones. Therefore, although the relations certainly describe something ideal, that is to say do not find, and cannot find, an echo in the immediate action of one substance on another, but concern the relation of co-possibility that *ab initio* links one substance with others, this does not mean that precisely the possibility of being thought of in a determined order of relations does not mark the passage of something into existence. Relations are not something real, and yet only something that is set in a relation can be real.⁴⁷ What can be real is only what lends itself to expressing

46. «Thus, in the attempt not to make the individual a prey to the necessity of the universe, Leibniz encompasses the universe in every individual; to escape from the substance of Spinoza he makes every individual similar to it» (MUGNAI 1976, 13).

47. «In reality everything is connected. If I were to find something that has no relations, it would be something that has no reality, an *ens rationis*, which would only

in a more or less adequate way that ideal fabric of connections and relations that makes each substance the trace of a universe in which manifold substances communicate with one another.

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