

Representing Subjects, Mind-dependent Objects

Kant, Leibniz, and the Amphiboly*

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Introduction¹

At the end of the Transcendental Analytic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and after outlining the main traits of his theory of knowledge, Kant contrasts his philosophy with Leibniz's. In the section entitled 'The Amphiboly of the Concepts of Reflection', Kant argues that Leibniz's main error is mistaking objects in space and time for things in themselves, namely, for monads. According to Kant, Leibniz made that mistake because he regarded objects in space and time as objects which can be known with the pure intellect. In Kant's view, Leibniz underestimated the importance of sensibility for knowledge of objects in space and time. Kant holds that several doctrines of Leibniz's philosophy follow from his main error: the

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¹ Abbreviations used for Leibniz: A = Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, edited by the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (Berlin, 1923-); GP = Carl Immanuel Gerhardt (ed.), *Die philosophischen Schriften von G. W. Leibniz* (Berlin, 1875-1890; repr. Hildesheim, 1978); DM = *Discours de métaphysique*; Monad. = *Monadology*. The *Critique of Pure Reason* is cited with the abbreviations "A" (first edition) and "B" (second edition), followed by the page number of those editions. Quotations are from the translation by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York, 1998). The other writings by Kant are cited with the volume and page number of the Academy Edition: Königlich Preußische (Deutsche) Akademie der Wissenschaften (ed.), *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, 1902-).

principle of identity of indiscernibles, the monadology, Leibniz's conception of relationships of opposition between properties, and his conception of space and time. Kant attempts to refute those doctrines in the Amphiboly.

Several studies of the relationship between the philosophies of Kant and Leibniz have focused on the Amphiboly. Detailed analyses of this text are generally critical towards Kant's objections to Leibniz, on the ground that they do not correctly portray Leibniz's positions, and that they are based on premises that the latter would not accept. General assessments of the relationship between Kant's and Leibniz's views are mainly defences Kant's or Leibniz's views as more plausible and advanced.²

In this paper, we will discuss the relationship between Kant's and Leibniz's positions on a question which is rather specific, and yet central to correctly understand the epistemological conceptions of these two philosophers. We will compare Kant's and Leibniz's positions on the relationship between knowing subjects and known objects. We shall begin by looking into the Amphiboly. However, we will not discuss all of Kant's arguments in detail, as such discussions are readily available in the literature. We do not aim to defend the primacy of Leibniz's or Kant's conception of the relationship between knowing subjects and known objects, as some scholars have done. Rather, we will try to individuate

² See, e.g., George H. R. Parkinson, 'Kant as a Critic of Leibniz', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 35 (1981): 302-14, esp. 309-14; Klaus E. Kaehler, 'Systematische Voraussetzungen der Leibniz-Kritik Kants im Amphiboliekapitel', in Gerhard Funke (ed.), *Akten des 5. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses Mainz 4.-8. April 1981* (Bonn, 1981), Vol. 1.1, 417-26; Reinhard Finster, 'Leibniz' Entwurf der phänomenalen Welt im Hinblick auf Kant's "Kritik der reinen Vernunft"', in *Beiträge zur Wirkungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, edited by Albert Heinekamp (Stuttgart, 1986), 188-97 (= *Studia Leibnitiana*, Supplementa, 26); Marcus Willaschek, 'Phaenomena/Noumena und die Amphibolie der Reflexionsbegriffe (A235/B294-A292/B349)', in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, edited by Georg Mohr and Marcus Willaschek (Berlin, 1998), 323-51, esp. 346-7; Martin Schneider, 'Monaden und Dinge an Sich. Überlegungen zu Leibniz und Kant', *Studia Leibnitiana*, 36 (2004): 70-80.

the main reason for Kant's disagreement with Leibniz in the *Amphiboly*. Then, commenting on this disagreement, we shall highlight two important aspects of the relationship between Kant's and Leibniz's philosophies regarding knowing subjects and known objects. We shall highlight the two following points.

Firstly, the fundamental divergence between Leibniz and Kant which the *Amphiboly* highlights is not so radical as it appears to be at first sight. Even if Leibniz did not consider space and time forms of sensibility, as opposed to the pure intellect, he did not regard objects in space and time as mind-independent things in themselves. For Leibniz, objects in space and time, as well as space and time themselves, are not independent from representing subjects.

Secondly, a stark contrast between Kant's and Leibniz's philosophies concerns the status of knowing subjects. Leibniz conceives of knowing subjects as substances, namely, as simple, spiritual, immortal, persistent, and incorruptible substances. Kant rejects this view as an unwarranted metaphysical claim. He denies that we can know whether knowing subjects are substances, and what kind of substances they are. He holds that we can only know their cognitive capacities. Kant's outline of representing subjects – including an anti-Humean defence of their unity through time – not as substances, but as complex systems of cognitive capacities, strongly marks Kant's distance from Leibniz, and is a major novel feature of Kant's philosophy.

Our paper is divided into four parts. We give some information about the *Amphiboly* (§ 1). We outline Kant's main criticism of Leibniz (§ 2). Then, we compare Kant's and Leibniz's views of objects in space and time (§ 3) and of representing subjects (§ 4).

1 Some Expectations from the *Amphiboly*

One can legitimately expect the *Amphiboly* to indicate the doctrines that Kant regarded as distinctive of his philosophy. Highlighting the differences between transcendental idealism

and certain Leibnizian ideas was necessary for Kant to establish his position with respect to a broad philosophical front. Leibnizian themes are present in Christian Wolff's thought. Through his influence, they were widespread in Kant's philosophical environment. Wolff's philosophy had been subjected to heavy criticisms since the 1720s.³ Even though, Wolffianism was still the dominating philosophy in German universities during the 1760s and 1770s. Each new philosophy had to engage in a confrontation with it to effectively support its claims. The *Amphiboly* is one of the main texts where Kant takes a stand towards Wolffianism. In fact, some of Kant's criticisms of Leibniz apply to Wolff and Wolffians as well: for instance, the criticism of regarding space and time as relations among things in themselves, and the criticism of considering only logical oppositions, while overlooking real oppositions. Kant explicitly extends the second criticism to Wolffians, whom he classes together with Leibniz under the heading of 'Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy'.⁴ Some of Kant's contemporaries, including Wolffians like Baumgarten, adopted Leibnizian doctrines rejected by Wolff and criticized in the *Amphiboly*, like the monadology and the pre-established harmony.⁵ In addition, several readers of Kant, like Eberhard, were

³ See, e.g., Adolf Friedrich Hoffmann, *Vernunftlehre, darin die Kennzeichen des Wahren und Falschen aus den Gesetzen des menschlichen Verstandes hergeleitet werden* (Leipzig, 1737); Christian Adolf Crusius, *Dissertatio philosophica de usu et limitibus principii rationis determinantis vulgo sufficientis* (2nd edn. Leipzig, 1750); and Kant's works of the 1760s.

⁴ See *KrV*, B 329. Kant employs this denomination in several other passages (*KrV*, A 44/B 61; Ak.-Ausg. VII, 140n; VIII, 218; XI, 186; XX, 281, 305, 306, 308). This denomination was widespread in Germany since the 1720s. It is not a very fortunate denomination, because it casts shadow on the remarkable differences between Leibniz's and Wolff's philosophy. On these differences, see, e.g., Walther Arnsperger, *Christian Wolffs Verhältnis zu Leibniz* (Weimar, 1897), and Charles A. Corr, 'Christian Wolff and Leibniz', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (1975): 241-62.

⁵ See Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Metaphysica* (7th edn. Halle, 1779, repr. Hildesheim, 1963), §§ 230-45, 448-65. Baumgarten is the author of the handbook Kant used in his lectures on metaphysics and anthropology.

Leibnizians. Kant's criticisms in the *Amphiboly* apply to them as well.⁶ Hence, the discussion of Leibniz's ideas in the *Amphiboly* gives Kant the opportunity to come to terms with the metaphysical tradition in which he was brought up, and to which many of his readers belonged.

In confronting this tradition, Kant does not assume a conciliatory attitude at all. He strikes a radical contrast between his and Leibniz's ideas. He does this by building his arguments on doctrines which Leibniz did not share, and which are typical of transcendental idealism: most notably, the conception of space and time as pure forms of intuition, the qualitative distinction between sensibility and understanding, and the Critical distinction between phenomena and noumena.⁷

As Kant's *Reflexionen* on these subjects show (Ak.-Ausg. XV-XVIII), several of his doctrines were developed from the confrontation with Baumgarten.

⁶ Many authors defended Leibnizian views against Kant in debates which lasted about twenty years after the publication of the first *Critique*. For an overview of the polemics between Leibnizians and Kant, see Raffaele Ciafardone, *La "Critica della ragion pura" nell'aetas kantiana* (L'Aquila, Vol. I, 1987; Vol. II, 1990). Ciafardone's work proves that Leibnizian views received wide consensus in Kant's philosophical environment, as Max Wundt claimed in his book *Die deutsche Schulphilosophie im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Tübingen, 1945; repr. Hildesheim, 1964) 317-9. Kant's most extensive reply to Leibnizians is the work *On a New Discovery According to which Any New Critique of Pure Reason Has Been Made Superfluous by an Earlier One*, against Eberhard (Ak.-Ausg. VIII, 185-251). See Henry E. Allison (ed. and transl.), *The Kant-Eberhard Controversy* (Baltimore, 1973). At the end of this text, Kant sketches an interpretation of Leibniz as a transcendental idealist *ante litteram* (Ak.-Ausg. VIII, 246-51). This portrait of Leibniz is very different from that of the *Amphiboly*. In Kant's work against Eberhard, Leibniz appears as an ally of Kant 'against those of his disciples [like Eberhard] who heap praises upon him that do him no honor' (ibid., 251).

⁷ Various scholars noted this: e.g., Parkinson, 'Kant as a Critic of Leibniz', 309-14; Kaehler, 'Systematische Voraussetzungen der Leibniz-Kritik Kants im Amphiboliekapitel'; Willaschek, 'Phaenomena/Noumena und die Amphibolie der Reflexionsbegriffe (A235/B294-A292/B349)', 346-7.

The importance and radicality of Kant's confrontation with Leibniz make the Amphiboly particularly interesting for the present enquiry. As Kant opposes some of his own most central doctrines to Leibniz's counterparts, one can well expect that the Amphiboly highlights the most original features of transcendental idealism. In order to see if this is really so, we need to explain the main ideas which are at the basis of the Amphiboly.

2 Kant's Criticisms of Leibniz in the Amphiboly

Kant attacks four elements of Leibniz's philosophy in the Amphiboly: the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, the conception of opposition relationships, the monadology, and the conception of space and time.⁸

The first criticism is against the principle of the identity of indiscernibles. For Kant, this principle holds for objects of the pure understanding, that is, for things in themselves and for concepts. It does not hold for appearances, that is, for sensible objects in space and time. Leibniz extended the principle of the identity of indiscernibles to appearances. This error is due to the fact that 'Leibniz took the appearances for things in themselves, thus for *intelligibilia*, i.e., objects of the pure understanding'.⁹

The second criticism regards Leibniz's conception of relationships of opposition between properties. 'If reality is represented only through the pure understanding (*realitas noumenon*), then no opposition between realities [positive properties of beings] can be

⁸ The first criticism is in *KrV*, A 263-4/B 319-20, A 271-2/B 327-8, A 281-2/B 337-8. The second criticism is in *KrV*, A 264-5/B 320-1, A 272-4/B 328-30, A 282-4/B 338-40. The third criticism is in *KrV*, A 265-6/B 321-2, A 274-5/B 330-1. The fourth criticism is in *KrV*, A 266-8/B 322-4, A 275-7/B 331-3. In *KrV*, A 274-5/B 330-1, Kant also criticizes the doctrine of pre-established harmony, which he regards as a consequence of monadology. For the sake of simplicity, we do not consider the criticism of pre-established harmony.

⁹ *KrV*, A 264/B 320.

thought'.¹⁰ '[T]he principle that realities [...] never logically oppose each other is an entirely true proposition about the relation of concepts'.¹¹ 'Realities in appearance (*realitas phaenomenon*), on the contrary, can certainly be in opposition with each other'.¹² Leibniz and his successors failed to see that there can be oppositions between realities. Thus, they made several wrong claims ('all ills are nothing but consequences of the limits of created beings, i.e., negations'; it is possible 'to unite all reality in one being without any worry about opposition'¹³).

The third objection concerns the concept of monad.

As object of the pure understanding, [...] every substance must have inner determinations and forces that pertain to its inner reality. Yet what can I think of as inner accidents except for those which my inner sense offers me? – namely that which is either itself *thinking* or which is analogous to one. Thus because he represented them as *noumena*, taking away in thought everything that might signify outer relation, thus even *composition*, Leibniz made out of all substances, [...] simple subjects gifted with powers of representation, in a word, *monads*. (*KrV*, A 265-6/B 321-2; see also *KrV*, A 282-6/B 338-42)

The only objects which are given to us are objects of sensibility, or phenomena. They do not have 'inner [i.e., intrinsic, non-relational] determinations and forces', but only relational

¹⁰ Ibid. Kant divides properties into realities (e.g., being perfect, being rational, being bright) and negations (e.g., being imperfect, being irrational, being dark). In interpreting Kant, one should not mistake reality [*Realität*] for actuality [*Wirklichkeit*]. Reality is a category of quality. Actuality is a category of modality. See Anneliese Maier, *Kants Qualitätskategorien* (Berlin, 1930).

¹¹ *KrV*, A 272-3/B 328-39.

¹² *KrV*, A 265/B 320-1.

¹³ *KrV*, A 273/B 329.

properties.¹⁴ Hence, Leibniz's argument for the existence of monads rests on a false premise, and it is wrong.

The fourth criticism is against Leibniz's conception of space and time.

[I]n the concept of pure understanding matter [i.e., essential features] precedes form [i.e., 'the way in which they are connected in a thing'], and on this account Leibniz first assumed things (monads) and an internal power of representation in them, in order subsequently to ground on that their outer relation and the community of their states (namely of representations). Hence space and time were possible, the former only through the relation of substances, the latter through the connection of their determinations as grounds and consequences. And so would it in fact have to be if the pure understanding could be related to objects immediately, and if space and time were determinations of things in themselves. But if it is only sensible intuitions in which we determine all objects merely as appearances, then the form of intuition (as a subjective constitution of sensibility) precedes all matter (the sensations), thus space and time precede all appearances and all *data* of appearances, and instead first make the latter possible (*KrV*, A 267/B 323, transl. modified).

Space and time are a priori forms of intuition, and not concepts abstracted from the relations among substances.¹⁵ Space and time are presupposed for the representation of objects, and are prior to objects (rather than vice versa, as Leibniz thought).

The four arguments against Leibniz follow the same argumentative pattern. If objects of knowledge were noumena, or things in themselves, and if we knew them with the pure

¹⁴ See *KrV*, A 265/B 321: '[t]he inner determinations of a *substantia phaenomenon* in space [...] are nothing but relations, and it is itself entirely a sum total of mere relations.' See also *KrV*, A 284-5/B 340-1, B 66-7.

¹⁵ See also *KrV*, A 24-5/B 39, A 33/B 49.

understanding, Leibniz's doctrines would be true. Instead, objects of knowledge are appearances in space and time, and we know them by means of sensibility. Sensible appearances follow different laws from objects of the pure understanding. Hence, Leibniz's conclusions are wrong.

Kant uses two related distinctions against Leibniz: the distinction between sensibility and understanding, and the distinction between appearances and things in themselves. We know objects only by means of sensibility. Space and time are forms of sensibility. Objects of sensibility, or appearances, are in space and time. Things in themselves are neither spatial, nor temporal. Hence, objects in space and time are not things in themselves, but sensible appearances. Kant objects to Leibniz that he mistook objects of knowledge for monads, that is, for things in themselves and objects of pure understanding, whereas they are appearances and objects of sensibility, which do not exist in themselves. Building on this mistake, Leibniz ascribed representational powers to monads, which he considered as things in themselves.¹⁶ He conceived of monads as representing substances. Kant denies that it is possible to know whether representing subjects are substances in the chapter of the first *Critique* on the Paralogisms of rational psychology.¹⁷ Then, Kant's and Leibniz's philosophies diverge both on the status of represented objects and on the status of representing subjects: namely, on the noumenal or phenomenal status of objects in space and time, and on the substantiality of representing subjects.

Even if Leibniz and Kant have differing conceptions of space and time, it is arguable that, for Leibniz, objects in space and time are mind-dependent appearances, as they are for Kant. It is also arguable that the greatest difference between Kant and Leibniz does not

¹⁶ See *KrV*, A 266/B 322.

¹⁷ *KrV*, A 348-51, B 407, B 410-1.

concern the mind-dependence of objects in space and time, but the substantiality of representing subjects. Let us see these two points in detail.

3 Leibniz and Kant on Objects in Space and Time

Despite the impression which may arise from Kant's remarks, Leibniz's conception of space, time, and objects in space and time, is in many respects similar to Kant's own conception.

Let us try to consider things from Leibniz's point of view. For convenience, let us confine ourselves to the case of space.

In the first analysis, we can say that space, for Leibniz, is not a primitive property of substances, but it is a term derived by abstraction from the notion of extension. The latter, in turn, is referred to "corporeal substances" concretely extended (space is an 'ordre des Coexistences' - GP VII, 363).¹⁸ Kant's criticism of Leibniz is related to this view: according

¹⁸ As it is well known, Leibniz's definition of substance involves complex problems. In a letter to De Volder of June 1703 (to which scholars often make reference), Leibniz distinguishes five elements which constitute the substantiality of a being: (1) primitive entelechy or soul; (2) primary matter, or passive primitive power; (3) monad (which is constituted by the first two elements); (4) secondary matter or organic matter (which is composed of infinite interrelated monads); (5) animal, or corporeal substance, which is "one" because of the presence of a dominant monad. Scholars have intensively discussed this outline of Leibniz's, and in particular, at which of the five levels there is an effective degree of substantiality. In the *Monadology*, Leibniz seems to identify substances with *simple* substances, but scholars have given differing readings of Leibniz's concept of simplicity. For the present purposes, it is sufficient to notice that the concept of extension comes into play only at the fourth level. This is the level of the "*materia secunda*" and of corporeal substances (aggregates of monads which *express* themselves by means of an organic body, whose unity is determined by a monad dominant). For Leibniz, extension is a first-degree abstraction from concrete, corporeal substances (which are the level 4 of the above outline). The extension of corporeal substances consists of a series of common conditions, which are related to our perception. See Daniel Garber, 'Leibniz and the Foundations of Physics. The Middle Years', in Kathleen Okruhlik and James R. Brown (eds.), *The Natural Philosophy of Leibniz* (Dordrecht, 1985) 27-129; Daniel Garber, 'Leibniz: Physics and Philosophy', in Nicholas Jolley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to*

to Kant, for Leibniz space is a relationship between things in themselves,¹⁹ and it exists independently of the perceptive activity of subjects.

But things are not so simple, because the notion of extension is not primitive:

I would not consider that the concept of extension is primitive, nor such that from it nothing can be detracted, since it is resolved into *plurality*, which has to do with number, into *continuity*, which has to do with time, and into *co-existence*, which has to do with things also not extended. (GP II, 183)

In other words, in the perception of extended bodies, that which the subject really perceives is a set of common conditions (plurality, continuity, and co-existence). Extension is relative to the point of view of perceiving subjects and to the game of their reciprocal relationships: bodies appear to us as extended because, through sight and touch, we perceive a *plurality* of distinct things as a *unity*. In the perception of a plurality of things we are conscious not of their distinct multiplicity, but of the continual co-existence of a single quality that is expanded. This means, put as briefly as possible, that extension manifests itself and appears purely and solely within a perceptive structure of reference: the perception of

Leibniz (Cambridge, 1995) 270-352; Glenn A. Hartz, 'Leibniz's Phenomenalisms', *Philosophical Review*, 101 (1992): 511-49; Robert M. Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (New York, 1994); Donald Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* (Cambridge, 1995); Richard T. W. Arthur, 'Infinite, Aggregates and Phenomenal Wholes: Leibniz's Theory of Substance as a Solution', *Leibniz Society Review*, 8 (1998): 25-45; Justin E. Smith, 'On the Fate of Composite Substances After 1704', *Studia Leibnitiana*, 30 (1998): 204-10; Pauline Phemister, 'Leibniz and the Elements of Compound Bodies', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 7 (1999): 57-78; Brandon Look, *Leibniz and the 'Vinculum Substantiale'* (Stuttgart, 1999); Massimo Mugnai, *Introduzione alla filosofia di Leibniz* (Turin, 2001); Michel Fichant, 'Leibniz et les machines de la nature', *Studia Leibnitiana*, 35 (2003): 1-28; Pauline Phemister, *Leibniz and the Natural World: Activity, Passivity and Corporeal Substances in Leibniz's Philosophy* (Dordrecht, 2005).

¹⁹ See *KrV*, A 267/B 323.

extension, writes Leibniz, ‘needs a subject’ and ‘is something relative to this subject like duration’.²⁰ From this, Leibniz develops an ontology completely centred on the structure of the substantial subject, according to which external reality is not something that can be deduced in a logical way: things concretely exist only within that perspective that is defined by the structure of the ‘praedicatum inest subjecto’ (DM § 8), or by the structure of the representing subject.

These thoughts of Leibniz are rooted in the idea that perceiving substances have an *essentially* “representative” nature, and this is especially the case of those substances that in the Leibnizian ontology are defined by their capacity to say “I” (DM § 34). The “I” substances, like the other substances, are made up of a collection of representations. The “I” which I really *am* is the complete collection of all the representative states that follow each other between my birth and my death. This is the reason why, at the monadic level, one cannot speak of physical causation (*influxus physicus*) between us and bodies. Strictly speaking, what we experience are our representative states, and we cannot transcend them: they constitute the horizon of our world.

²⁰ ‘J’insiste donc sur ce que je viens de dire, que l’Etendue n’est autre chose qu’un Abstrait, et qu’elle demande quelque chose qui soit étendu. Elle a besoin d’un sujet, elle est quelque chose de relatif à ce sujet, comme la durée. Elle suppose même quelque chose d’antérieur dans ce sujet. Elle suppose quelque qualité, quelque attribut, quelque nature de ce sujet, qui s’étend, se répand avec le sujet, se continue. L’étendue est la diffusion de cette qualité ou nature: par exemple, dans le lait il y a une étendue ou diffusion de la blancheur, dans le diamant une étendue ou diffusion de la dureté; dans le corps en general une étendue ou diffusion de l’antitypie ou de la materialité’ (GP VI, 584). The example of the milk is worthy of attention, because it could lead to misunderstandings. In Leibniz’s ontology, milk is an aggregate and not a substance. Aggregates are not truly beings, but semi-mental beings (whose unity, in the final analysis, is rooted in the perceptive activity of the subject). Let us remember that according to Leibniz “being” properly means “being-one” (‘ce qui n’est pas véritablement *un* estre, n’est pas non plus véritablement un *estre*’, GP II, 97).

The reference to the expressive dimension of representative substances is not accidental, because, if it is true that extension “needs” a subject in order to be represented, on the other hand Leibniz specifies that there must be ‘something *former* in this subject’, or some ‘quality’ or ‘attribute’ that is *diffused*, expressing itself under the form of extension.²¹

Let us develop this point, that could give rise to some difficulty. Leibniz distinguishes what we usually consider objects in space and time into substances and aggregates. In the case of substances, extension or rather space is a “product” of theirs, or it is rooted in their capacity to “project” a scenography *inside* which they represent themselves and their physical properties (which harmonically correspond to their mental states). In the case of aggregates, on the other hand, their extension is the result of the representative activity of the subjects: a table is a colony of monads, and monads do not have extension (a monad does not have parts and within it ‘is not possible extension, figure nor divisibility’ – Monad. § 3). Being extended, and having the shape of a table, are just ways in which a colony of monads appears to representing subjects.

To put it succinctly, between substances and the world, between perceiving subjects and space, there is a necessary relationship of *expression*. And this relationship is *primitive* (in the sense that it was originally imposed by God). The world and space, we could then say, are “contained” in the soul (they do not really exist *outside* it, because this “outside” is an essential part of the content of each soul). Therefore, it is not necessary for space (and time)

²¹ As it is well known, “expression” is a technical term in Leibniz’s vocabulary. It indicates a logical structure which relates two non-homogeneous terms. ‘Une chose *exprime* une autre (dans mon langage) lorsqu’il y a un rapport constante 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’ (GP II, 112). For more details about Leibniz’s concept of expression, see Mark Kulstad, ‘Leibniz’s Conception of Expression’, *Studia Leibnitiana*, 9 (1977), 55-76; Massimo Mugnai, *Leibniz’s Theory of Relations* (Stuttgart, 1992).

to exist outside us, in things, because this is a representation already contained inside us (or in the *simples*). And it is not merely contained, but *necessarily* contained, because space (and time), in its character of *immanent* and *immediate* representation, is a structuring element of the perceptive activity of monadic subjects.²²

Therefore, the main point put forward by Leibniz regards the identification of the substance/subject with its representative power (which is expression of its *vis activa primitiva*). As a consequence, it is possible to assert, especially according to a Kantian perspective, that objects in space and time are not “things in themselves”, but rather representations of knowing subjects (mind-dependent) and that space and time, in their turn, are not things, but belong to the representative modality through which the subject perceives things.

If one sees it from the point of view of the “complete concept”, in which every substance is involved, then it might be possible to weaken Kant’s criticism of Leibniz. Kant states that space and time are a priori forms of intuitions, and not concepts abstracted from the relation among substances. In fact, one might correct this assertion by claiming that, for Leibniz, space and time are a priori forms belonging the complete concept which defines

²² That space and time are “ideal” or “mental” or even “modal” constructs is also highlighted by Martin Schneider, ‘*Monaden und Dinge an Sich. Überlegungen zu Leibniz und Kant*’: 76: ‘Raum und Zeit sind ideale oder mentale oder auch modale Gebilde (die Terminologie schwankt hier bei Leibniz). Das sind sie aber nur deshalb, weil nicht reale Monaden zueinander in Beziehung gesetzt werden, sondern Relata, die selbst gar keinen realen, sondern bloss modalen Entitäten, nämlich mathematische Punkte oder instantane Momente, sind. D.h. Raum und Zeit sind wie die Gegenstände der Mathematik bloss mentale Konstruktionen, die als solche keine Realität besitzen’. According to Schneider, Kant’s arguments about space expressed in the *Amphiboly* do not really fit with Leibniz’s position. Schneider writes: ‘Denn man kann nicht behaupten, dass die Relata vor der Relation, vor dem In-Beziehung-Setzen gegeben sind. Vielmehr sind sie (sozusagen als Materie) gar nicht gegeben (weil sie bloss modal, mental sind), sondern werden erst zusammen mit der Relation als deren Glieder gesetzt’ (ibid., 77). Parkinson had already put forward strong doubts on this point.

every substance. From this point of view, the apriority of space and time is not in question for Leibniz. The apriority of space and time is due to their “formality”: spatiality and temporality do not belong to objects (or to “aggregates”), but to the modes of representation of the subject (or “substance”) which structures the form of objects.

If this outline is right, Leibniz’s conception of space and of objects in space displays several similarities with Kant’s conception:

1) Space does not exist in itself, that is, independently from its being represented by any subject. Space is mind-dependent. It is a represented space, a representation of the space.

In Kant’s terms, space is transcendently ideal.

2) Objects represented in space do not exist outside representing subjects in transcendental sense, that is, mind-independently, in a space which is also mind-independent.²³

3) Objects represented in space are mind-dependent, like the space in which they appear.

Represented objects are representations of subjects.

Apart from admitting these similarities, one should also admit that there are differences between Leibniz’s and Kant’s views. Kant’s characterization of space as an intuition is in direct opposition to Leibniz’s characterization of space as a concept. One could rightly notice that the terms “intuition” and “complete concept” designate different cognitive structures, which should not be confounded. The idea that Kant’s perspective represents a radical departure from Leibniz’s views is generally accepted among scholars and corroborated by years of specialist studies. However, it is interesting to ask what the meaning of this departure is, and to try to identify its distinctive traits. In this respect, highlighting the similarities between Kant’s and Leibniz’s conceptions of space and time can help scholars to reconsider the complex epistemological innovations of Kant’s views with respect to those of his forerunner – and the Amphiboly might well represent only the tip of the iceberg of those

²³ Kant distinguishes an empirical sense and a transcendental sense of “outside” in *KrV*, A 373.

innovations. One can convert this remark into a claim on which scholars might converge. Kant's criticisms of Leibniz in the *Amphiboly* do not stand: those criticisms, considered on their own, prove less than Kant thought them to prove. On the contrary, Kant's criticisms of Leibniz in the *Amphiboly* presuppose the redefinition of knowing substance as a transcendental subject, and the consequent redefinition of its cognitive apparatus, carried out by Kant throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It is to that redefinition that we shall now turn.

4 Leibniz and Kant on Knowing Subjects

If there are strong affinities between Leibniz's and Kant's conceptions of objects in space and time, there is a radical divergence between their conceptions of representing subjects.

Monads are substances. They have the typical features that traditional and Cartesian metaphysics ascribed to spiritual substances. They are immaterial, simple, incorruptible, immortal substances, and they are vital principles of bodies. Leibniz conceives of monads as substances in a stronger sense than traditional and Cartesian metaphysics. Monads do not only exist independently of anything else, they also do not depend on anything else for their properties, relations, and perceptions. All of their properties and relations, both persistent and temporary ones, necessary and contingent ones, are included in their individual essence. The belonging of any property or relation to a monadic substance is part of the unfolding of its own essence through time. It depends on the development of a "story" which is entirely contained in the essence of the monad. Similarly, the essence of a monad includes all of its perceptions. Each monad has at least confused perceptions of everything which exists. Each monad expresses the whole world in its perceptions. Each monad contains in its own essence a representation of the whole world, as seen from a particular point of view. The world is the expression of monads. The world is a whole of mind-dependent entities, which exist only

insofar as their perception is included in the complete concept of monadic substances.²⁴ Not only monads are substances which exist independently of the world, but the whole world is contained in their essence.

Leibniz's admission of the substantiality of monads clashes with his view of the relationship between monads and the world. On the one hand, Leibniz characterizes the world as that which monads express. On the other hand, he characterizes monads as expressions of the world. A monad is a perspective on the world. Leibniz describes the essence of a monad as the sum of all of its perceptions, together with the law which establishes the order in which they follow each other. The perceptions of a monad are literally identical to the world that a monad perceives and represents.²⁵ If this is true, then monads are not independent substances, as Leibniz claims that they are. Their existence and unity depend on the existence and unity of the world they perceive. Monads are not the self-sufficient and substantial ground of the world. The existence of represented objects in space and time, and the existence of monads (i.e., representing subjects), mutually imply one another, and they depend on one another. This line of criticism has been developed by several philosophers, most notably by Hegel.²⁶

²⁴ See A VI, 4, B, 1600; A VI, 4, B, 1618; DM, § 8.

²⁵ 'Totus mundus revera est objectum cujusque mentis, totus mundus quodammodo a quavis mente percipitur. Mundus unus et tamen mentes diversae' (A VI, 4, B, 1713).

²⁶ According to Hegel, the complete self-sufficiency that Leibniz ascribes to monads is in conflict with their multiplicity. On the one side, monads are fully independent individual substances, without reciprocal interactions. On the other side, every monad derives its identity from the complete set of its perceptions of the world, of which every monad is a part. As a consequence, the external world, which is harmonically related to each substance, is necessary to define the individual identity of every single monad. For Hegel, monads and the world are the two terms of an internal tension in Leibniz's system. To remove this tension, Leibniz introduces the concept of a harmony pre-established by God (which, according to Hegel, is a *Deus ex machina* within Leibniz's philosophical system). See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Logik, Metaphysik, Naturphilosophie*

Kant's conception of knowing subjects, even if it has its own problems, avoids the difficulty of Leibniz's conception. It avoids Leibniz's difficulty by not subscribing to the substantiality of representing subjects. Kant does not claim that knowing subjects – the Kantian counterpart of Leibnizian monads – are substantial entities. According to Kant, it is impossible to determine whether knowing subjects are substances.

Kant isolates several features of cognizing subjects throughout the first *Critique*. The fact that we have thoughts (i.e., representations) implies that we exist as thinking or representing subjects. From certain facts about the objects we experience²⁷ and about our cognitive access to the world,²⁸ we can infer that we have certain faculties: sensibility, which receives the deliverances of the senses, and puts them in a spatial and temporal order; understanding, which synthesizes them into persistent and structured objects; transcendental apperception or 'I think', which makes us conscious of ourselves and of our thoughts; and so on. With arguments of this sort, Kant isolates various cognitive functions that each subject endowed with a human-like experience necessarily has. Kant also defends the unity of representing subjects through time, because, in order to have experience of enduring objects,

(1804-05), in Id., *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. VII, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Johann Heinrich Trede (Hamburg, 1971) 139-40; and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), in Id., *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. XX, ed. Wolfgang Bonsiepen and Hans-Christian Lucas (Hamburg, 1992), § 194, Anmerkung. Moving from a very different point of view, G. Tomasi has recently advanced a similar criticism against Leibniz in 'Punti di vista, soggettività dell'esperienza e particolarità delle menti in Leibniz', in *Monadi e monadologie. Il mondo degli individui tra Bruno, Leibniz e Husserl*, edited by Bianca Maria D'Ippolito, Aniello Montano and Francesco Piro (Soveria Mannelli, 2005) 171-98.

²⁷ E.g., that they are unitary objects, extended in an Euclidean space, persistent through time, and endowed with certain quantities, qualities, and causal relations.

²⁸ E.g., 'the combination [...] of a manifold in general can never come to us through the senses' (*KrV*, B 129); time cannot be perceived.

like those which we do experience in ordinary life, we must be able to relate our successive representations to the same cognitive function ('I think').²⁹ In doing this, Kant opposes Hume's denial of the identity of knowing subjects through time.³⁰

However, all we can know about ourselves as representing subjects are just capacities or functions according to Kant. One cannot infer the existence of a *res cogitans* (i.e., a thinking *substance*) from the fact that 'I think'.³¹ Kant distinguishes a thick sense of "substance", expressed by the schematized category of substance, and a thin sense of "substance", expressed by the pure, or non-schematized, category of substance. A substance in the thick sense is a bearer of properties which persists through time. A substance in the thin sense is something that 'could exist as subject but never as a mere predicate' or 'as a mere determination or other things'. In other words, a substance in the thick sense is a bearer of properties which cannot itself be borne by anything.³² For Kant, at least in 1787, it is not possible to know whether representing subjects are substances in any of those two senses.

One cannot know whether representing subjects are substances in the thick sense for the following reason. Only objects which are in time persist through time. One can know that

²⁹ See esp. *KrV*, B 131-40. It is a matter of dispute among scholars whether Kant's claims about the transcendental unity of apperception constitute a defense of personal identity, or whether, for Kant, personal identity requires something more than the transcendental unity of apperception (for instance, a certain degree of physical identity). Kant denies that we can ascribe personhood to representing subjects in the third paralogism of pure reason (see *KrV*, A 361-6, B 408-9). Still, he ascribes to knowing subjects a form of unity through time in the transcendental deduction. For a discussion, see Karl Ameriks, *Kant's Theory of Mind. An Analysis of the Paralogisms of Pure Reason* (Oxford, 1982) esp. 128-76.

³⁰ See *KrV*, B 134.

³¹ See, e.g., *KrV*, B 406-7.

³² On the thick sense of "substance", see *KrV*, A 144/B 183. On the thin sense of "substance", see *KrV*, B 149, B 288.

an object is in time, and that it persists through time, only by way of intuition.³³ Humans can know that they are thinking and cognizing beings (by admitting the truth of the judgement ‘I think’ and the existence of the transcendental unity of apperception). However, this is an a priori knowledge, which is not backed by empirical intuitions. Humans cannot have any empirical intuition of themselves as thinking subjects.³⁴ As a consequence, humans cannot know whether they persist through time, and hence whether they are substances in the thick sense.³⁵

Can humans know whether they are substances in the thin sense? In 1781, Kant was inclined to answer affirmatively. However, he added that one cannot draw from this cognition ‘any of the usual conclusions of the rationalistic doctrine of the soul, such as, e.g., the everlasting duration of the soul through all alterations, even the human being’s death’.³⁶ In 1787, Kant holds that we cannot know whether knowing subjects are substances in the thin sense. He claims that the proposition ‘I am subject’ ‘discloses absolutely nothing about the manner of my existence’.³⁷ In fact, that proposition does not determine ‘whether I *could* exist and be thought of only as subject and not as predicate of another thing’.³⁸ In other words, the fact that the “I” can bear properties does not exclude that those properties could also be borne by some other being. This would happen, for instance, if thinking substances were Spinozian modes of God. In this case, the properties borne by thinking substances would also be borne

³³ See *KrV*, B 408, B 412.

³⁴ See *KrV*, B 412-3, and B 428-9: ‘thinking, taken in itself’, ‘in no way’ presents ‘the subject of consciousness as appearance, merely because it takes no account at all of the kind of intuition, whether it is sensible or intellectual. In this way I represent myself to myself neither as I am nor as I appear to myself, but rather I think myself only as I do every object in general from whose kind of intuition I abstract.’

³⁵ See, e.g., *KrV*, B 421-2.

³⁶ A 350-51.

³⁷ B 412 n.

³⁸ B 419.

by God. According to Kant, we cannot prove that we do not have such a non-substantial mode of being.³⁹ Hence, we do not know whether we are substances in the thin sense.

Besides proving that we cannot know if thinking subjects are substances, Kant refutes the Cartesian proofs that cognizing subjects are immaterial, simple, incorruptible, personal, and spiritual substances, and that they are in relation with objects in space (i.e., bodies).⁴⁰

As a result, Kant's outline of representing subjects – including a defence of their unity through time – exclusively in terms of cognitive functions, without any claim of the substantiality of representing subjects, is in a sharp contrast with Leibniz's conception of representing subjects, which is based on their status of substances.⁴¹

Conclusion

If our suggestion is right, the main difference between Kant's and Leibniz's conceptions of the relationship between knowing subjects and known objects does not concern the status of known objects. Leibniz agrees with Kant that what gives consistence to the world is the fact that the world is ordered and represented by certain subjects. For Leibniz, as for Kant, the world is always "my" world, in the sense that my representational powers play an essential role in the constitution of the world. For Leibniz, as for Kant, space and time are subjective

³⁹ We are following the interpretation of Van Cleve, *Problems from Kant* (New York, 1999) 173-5, closely.

⁴⁰ See *KrV*, A 338-405, B 406-28. Incidentally, Kant does not deny that matter can think. On this point, Kant differs from Leibniz, Locke, and several of Kant's immediate predecessors. See *KrV*, A 349; Mario Casula, 'Die historische Entwicklung der Frage: ob die Materie denken kann? Von F. Suarez bis P. J. G. Cabanis', *Filosofia oggi*, 12 (1989): 407-62; and John W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter. Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 1984).

⁴¹ Whether Kant writes any of the paralogisms with the deliberate aim of attacking Leibniz's theses and arguments, is a different question. According to Margaret Wilson, 'Leibniz on Materialism', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 3 (1974): 495-513, and Patricia Kitcher, *Kant's Transcendental Psychology* (New York, 1990) 198-204, Kant writes the second paralogism to criticize Leibniz's views.

forms of representations, and objects in space and time are mind-dependent. A point where Kant radically differs from Leibniz is Kant's account of representing subjects purely in terms of cognitive capacities, without any commitment to the substantiality of representing subjects. A radically new feature of Kant's Critical philosophy, if compared with Leibniz's metaphysics, is not the mind-dependence of objects, but the de-substantialization of knowing subjects.

We do not claim that this is the only stark contrast between Kant's and Leibniz's philosophies. Other remarkable divergences concern the conceptual or intuitive character of space and time,⁴² the gradual or qualitative distinction between the sensibility and the understanding,⁴³ the possibility of knowing monads vs. the impossibility of knowing things in themselves,⁴⁴ the principle of sufficient reason,⁴⁵ and the classification of judgements.⁴⁶ We have only shown that, if one considers the status of known objects and of knowing subjects in Leibniz and in Kant, a groundbreaking divergence of Kant from Leibniz regards the de-substantialization of knowing subjects, whereas Leibniz's conception of objects in space and time is more similar to Kant's position than what the latter admits in the *Amphiboly of the Concepts of Reflection*.

⁴² See, e.g., Ak.-Auszg II, 400-1, 404-5.

⁴³ See, e.g., *KrV*, A 44/B 61-2, A 270/B 326; Ak.-Auszg. VII, 140-1n; Ak.-Auszg. XXVIII, 229-30.

⁴⁴ Compare the description of the monadology in *KrV*, A 265-6/B 321-2 with *KrV*, A 277/B 333-4.

⁴⁵ Kant criticizes Eberhard, and not Leibniz, for endorsing the principle of sufficient reason (Ak.-Auszg. VIII, 193-8). Despite Kant's remark in Ak.-Auszg. VIII, 247-8, it is possible to extend this criticisms to Leibniz as well.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Lewis W. Beck, 'Analytic and Synthetic Judgments before Kant', in *Reflections on Kant's Philosophy*, edited by William H. Werkmeister (Grainesville, 1975) 7-27. Herbert J. Paton, 'Kant on the Errors of Leibniz', in *Kant Studies Today*, edited by Lewis W. Beck (La Salle, 1969), 72-87, esp. 75, relates Kant's critique to Leibniz in the remark to the *Amphiboly* (*KrV* A 281/B 337) to their differing views of analytic and synthetic judgements.

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