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Francesco Piro

Is it possible to co-operate without interaction?

Leibniz's difficulties with the “production of new perfection” from 1678 to 1694.

1. How are the actions between monads connected?

Leibniz's thesis that there is no transitive action between the individual substances is linked with many different fields of his philosophy (logics, ontology, theology, physics...). But a decisive step for the constitution of this doctrine was the explanation of the correlations between the “action” of an individual and the “passion” of another one in the light of the metaphysical concept of “limitation”, namely by the use of the relations of compossibility and impossibility. Let us see how this step was done.

At the end of the 1670s, Leibniz considered action and passion as, respectively, a “state” (*status*) of an individual A and a “change” (*mutatio*) in an individual B, and conceived the first one as the “cause” or the *ratio* of the second one. If we make exception of the opposition between *status* and *mutatio*, it is just the same definition that Leibniz uses in the *Monadology*, when he discusses the transitive actions subsisting between the “Creatures” and not particularly between the monads.¹ At the same time, his first steps into Dynamics (and his attempts to apply a dynamic model to the mental processes) pushed him to consider every created entity as always “active” and “passive” at the same time, and to measure the approximation of their performances to a “pure action” by the degree of internal consistency of the whole process considered, i.e. with regard to the presence of a law of succession (*lex seriei*) between the various moments.² In this second meaning of the term, passion or

¹ “*Actio* est status rei ex quo mutationis alicujus praesentis ratio reddi potest, qua res dicitur *Causa*. *Passio* est status rei quatenus in ea sequitur mutatio praesens...” (Grua, 513/ VE, 5, 938. See too: VE, 1, 147 and 170). “Et une Creature est plus parfaite qu’une autre, en ce qu’on trouve en elle ce qui sert à rendre raison *a priori* de ce qui se passe dans l’autre et c’est par là qu’on dit, qu’elle agit sur l’autre.” (*Monadology*, § 50: GP, VI, 615).

² “Pars determinationis est *actio*, quatenus ex ea aliquid sequitur, est *passio* quatenus aliquid quod alioqui secuturum est impeditur. *Actio* est status rei quo quid sequitur ex sua natura (...) Si qua sit series determinationum ex se invicem sequentium certa lege et determinatio ad ipsam seriem fuerit actio pura.” (Grua, 527/VE, 5, 952-953). On this opusculum - *De Affectibus*, April 1679 - and its definitions of action, see M. KNEALE, Leibniz and Spinoza on Activity, in H.G. FRANKFURT (ed.), *Leibniz. A Collection of Critical Essays*, New York: Doubleday 1972, 215-237.

passivity could be only a diminution of the degree of proximity to the “pure action”, so that Leibniz began to consider it as the situation of an individual who “is impeded” to explicate fully his own natural possibilities.³ The active external cause was now only the reason of the impediment, and no more the sufficient reason of the successive “states” of the passive individual.

The relations of compossibility and impossibility could now be introduced into this matter, in order to reconsider the concept of “impediment” from a more elevated point of view than the classical model of mechanical collision. Leibniz’s analysis is the following: if a possible act or state of affair (x), derivable from the set of possibilities (“nature”) of the individual A, is impossible with the state of affairs (y), derivable from the nature of the individual B, and (x) is more perfect than (y), then B will not achieve (y), but another possibility (z), which is less perfect than (y) from B’s point of view, but more perfect with regard to the universe.⁴ In the light of this analysis, the mechanical explanation of the activity/passivity correlations can be eliminated, since the necessity of B to do not (y) can be seen as an obligation to harmonize with the rest of the universe, and the following act (z) as the effect of a choice of B between his residual possibilities:

“....every mind....has a power which extends itself to the whole universe, but that is refracted on itself; just as a thought (*consideratio*) elides another one, when someone is deliberating”.⁵

Since Leibniz supposed that a general deliberation had already happened — namely, God’s deliberation and choice — , he could posit on God’s foreknowledge the assumption that the modifications of B have in every case an internal consistence, so that B cannot be destroyed or totally transformed by his passivity (and this is the function of the theory of complete concepts with regard to Leibniz’s conception of action). Furthermore, another fundamental principle of Leibniz’s philosophy, namely the conception of perceptual states as “expressions of the whole universe from a given point of view”, could be

³ “*Passio est status rei quo impeditur aliquid ne ex natura eius sequatur*” (Grua, 527/ VE, 5, 952). With the word “nature”, Leibniz is meaning here not the complete concept of an individual (i.e. the “*nature accomplie*”), but a larger set of possibilities “*per se competentes*”. Leibniz was aware of having two different concepts of “nature of an individual” and sometimes apologizes for the possible confusion: GP, III, 582.

⁴ Grua, 530-531/ VE, 5, 954-956. On the notion of compossibility in 1679, see *Dialogue de Theophile et de Polidore* (VE, 1, 36-38).

⁵ Letter to Erhard Weigel, September 1679 (A, II, 1, 487).

introduced here to explain why the modifications (i.e. the “expressions”) of A and B are two ways to see the same event (*changement*) of the universe, more distinctly in the first case and more confusedly in the second one.⁶

I offer this brief sketch of Leibniz’s theory about the metaphysical grounds of phenomenal interactions in order to pose this question: how much will Leibniz’s solution work? Is it specifically functional to a metaphysical reconstruction of the relations of “impediment” (i.e. of the cases of mechanical collision or opposition between acting individuals), in order to make them compatible with the spontaneity and indestructibility of each non-phenomenal individual? Or does it offer more?

The *Discourse on Metaphysics* seems to be favourable only to the first of these interpretations. Here, the words “limitation” and “impediment” are still used as synonymous ones: “deux substances s’entrempechent ou se limitent”.⁶ Furthermore, it is pointed out that a certain substance “acts on” another if and only if an event of the world (*changement*) functions as the starting-point of two simultaneous processes: an “increase” of A and a “decrease” of B with respect to the “degree of expression”. It is true that Leibniz does not give here an exhaustive analysis of the terms “activity” and “passivity”, but only a criterion to “conciliate the metaphysical language with common sense”, i.e. a phenomenal case in which the common notion of transitive action (*agir sur*) could be accepted. But it is a fact that the criterion adopted by Leibniz reflects his pre-systematic ideas about actions and passions.

What would Leibniz say about the cases where there is, apparently, a correlation between an active (or more active) partner and a passive one, but not such a kind of asymmetric evolution? Leibniz’s answer would probably be that there is no philosophical reason to speak of action and passion in these cases. What really happens is that everyone is active and gives some “contributions” (*conferentia*) to the performances of the other ones. This answer is strictly dependent from another side of Leibniz’s doctrine of compossibility: the compossible concepts who constitute a given world are, to God’s eye, networks of implications between the future modifications of the individual substances. This is the reason why Leibniz sometimes points out that there is a “determination” between individual substances, and not only a “limitation”.

Is this solution able to give an adequate importance to the external “contributions” (for instance, those given by a mother, by a teacher, and so on)?

⁶ GP, VI, 440/ VE, 8, 1708. The title of the whole paragraph is: “L’action d’une substance finie sur l’autre ne consiste que dans l’accroissement de son degré d’expression, jointe à la diminution de celle de l’autre, entant que Dieu les oblige à s’accomoder ensemble.” On the paradoxes arising from this definition, see M. KNEALE, cit., 230-236.

Leibniz admits that there are different degrees of importance. In one case, he asserts that the contributor can also be seen as a *cause* towards the modifications of his partner (and that could seem a kind of *positive* acting-on). But he points out that the contributor can become a causal agent, if and only if his apparently passive partner achieves his own performance and is active too:

“A cause is a contribution that is successful, namely a contribution to a thing which has been really produced. So, when a teacher gives a contribution to the knowledge of his pupil, if his pupil is diligent and learns what is taught, the teacher is the cause of the knowledge of his pupil. I take here the term “cause” in a very wide meaning, of which there are different degrees...”.⁷

Now let us examine this solution. Since, in Leibniz’s universe, *every* external causation is indirect, and each substance spontaneous, there is no particular reason to think that Leibniz’s thesis is true for a teacher and not for a killer. If we wish to find a criterion which can trace a distinction between these two cases, we must appeal to the derivability of the partner’s performance from the best possibilities of his own nature. But this criterion diminishes the importance of the contribution of the other partner, as it happens when Leibniz tells us that the teacher is no more than a contributor, because “we could learn the same things without a teacher” (Ibidem). So, if Leibniz does not explain how an individual can have a decisive role in respect to the development of another one’s *own* possibilities, we meet with a paradoxical situation: the more the pupil is diligent, the more the teacher can become “causal” towards him; but, at the same time, the more the pupil is diligent, the less he needs a teacher.

It could be concluded that Leibniz can hardly trace a distinction between particular co-operative situations and the rest of the general harmony of the universe, it could be suggested that this difficulty is determined by his tendency to identify the causal importance of another one’s action with his power to discontinue the acting of the considered individual. But there are good reasons to believe that Leibniz’s ideas about this argument have had an evolution after the *Discourse*. Contrarily to what we have assumed, Leibniz’s definitive thesis on the cases of correlation between activity of a substance and passivity of another one is that these cases are not only differently structured but also *more universal* than common sense (or mechanical philosophy) can see. To him, the mutual “expression” subsisting between the monads implies that every perception of another substance concerning me is a real modification of my

⁷ *De omnia cogitata nostra continentibus*, VE, 2, 327.

condition.⁸ Without this postulate, we cannot understand how Leibniz could, in his last remarks on action and passion, introduce a kind of principle of “action and reaction” in the monadological context: the monad A is active and expresses his perfection, but the monad B, who is passive, has a certain perfection in this condition and so B is now active and A passive and so on.⁹ Of course this evolution does not change Leibniz’s metaphysical postulates: the assumption concerning the continuous circular flux of information in the universe and the assumption concerning the constant compensation of the asymmetries by other asymmetries are conceived as dynamic consequences of the pre-established harmony and of the perfect spontaneity of the monads. But it is clear too that Leibniz saw only progressively that his critics of mechanical interaction could be interpreted as a scheme by which there are much more changes in the universe and in our own persons than anybody can suspect and the remedy for all this is the change itself. So, we can answer our first question by the suggestion that the principle of non-interaction has two different - even if hardly distinguishable - functions in Leibniz metaphysics, namely (i) to preserve the individual substances from the risks of heteronomy and destruction, and (ii) to show how really “sympathetic” or symbiotic the universe really is.

But this statement is not yet an answer for the other question that has emerged in this paragraph, namely how to resolve the paradoxes concerning the application of Leibniz’s model to the co-operative situations. Was Leibniz in some way aware of these paradoxes and did he try to come to terms with them?

2. Can someone be helped to become more perfect than he was?

In a previous article, I examined how Leibniz had analyzed the relation “A is helped by B” in some of his pre-systematic writings. I hypothesised that Leibniz’s attention to this concept can be explained through Spinoza’s influence (see the frequent use of the opposition *juvare/coercere* in *Ethica*, III), and I concluded that this problem seems to vanish in Leibniz’s systematic phase.¹⁰ That is not

⁸ “Nihil contingit ullibi in mundo, quod non omnia in Mundo reapse afficiat.” (VE, 2, 413); “Ob rerum connexionem universalem, differt intrinsecis qualitatibus Monarcha Sinarum cognitus mihi, a seipso nondum cognito.” (VE, 6, 1096). Same thesis in *Opusculum*, 520; VE, 2, 380-381. On this point, see M. MUGNAI, *Leibniz’s Theory of Relations*, Stuttgart: Steiner, 1994, 54-55, 126-131.

⁹ *Monadology*, § 52: “Et c’est par là, qu’entre les Creatures les Actions et les Passions sont mutuelles. Car Dieu, comparant deux substances simples, trouve en chacune des raisons qui l’obligent à y accommoder l’autre, et par conséquent ce qui est actif à certains égards, est passif suivant un autre point de consideration...” . See too *Essais de Theodicée*, I, § 66 (GP, VI, 139).

¹⁰ F. PIRO, *Liberiorem facere - perfectiorem facere. Que signifie “aider” dans une*

completely true, since there is a hidden continuity of the alternatives that emerged during the pre-systematic phase. Therefore, I shall relate now the whole story, in order to use it as a litmus test with regard to the problems we have already posed in the first part of this article.

Leibniz had already defined the term “to help” (*juvare*) in his juridical writings of 1670-1671. His final choice had been the definition “to make easier someone’s action”, which will appear again in some later opusculum too.¹ But it is only during the phase 1678-1680 that he faced the problem to give a dynamic analysis of the situation in which someone “is helped” by someone else or by the external circumstances. He believed now - like Spinoza - that the acting individual gains more “perfection” or “power” through his action and that he can be “helped” or “impeded” to become more perfect. But he was very doubtful about the causal explication of the first possibility. Has the external aid only the function to carry off the previous obstacles or can it communicate to the helped individual a *quantum* of force? As we already know, the second solution is wholly inconsistent with Leibniz’s metaphysics. But Leibniz seems to discover it only progressively:

“To *make someone more perfect* is nothing but removing the obstacles to another one’s action. If to help were an operation on the other individual, it was the impression of a new impetus and that means violence.”¹²

It seems to me that one *helps*, when he removes an impediment or augments the other one’s force. So, to be helped is the only case in which passivity is pleasurable. But he who increases the force, feels also a resistance in the bodies....”¹³

“We are *helped* when we are made more free or more powerful than before (...) But he who lets us become more powerful, does not really help: he conditions us to do greater things and makes us be passive. But the one who removes an impediment, really helps. The helped one will believe he has become stronger (...) Therefore, he who renders another more perfect, does not give pleasure, but he who renders another more free, does.”¹⁴

Only in 1680, the critique to the hypothesis of the communication of force is

perspective monadologique?, VI Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress, *Leibniz und Europa*, Hannover: Gottfried-Wilhelm-Leibniz- Gesellschaft 1994, 597-604.

¹ 1 *Elementa Juris Naturalis*, 1670, A, VI, 1, 458: “Juvare est actum alterius faciliorem reddere.” Similar definition in *De cogitationum analysi*, 1678-1679: VE, 5, 970.

¹ 2 Notes about Felden, 1678?, Grua, 600.

¹ 3 *De Affectibus*, VE, 5, 953.

¹ 4 *De cogitationum analysi*, VE, 5, 953.

definitive:

“...as we have already said, perfection consists in the growth of the power of a given thing, and that is possible by the remotion of the obstacles; namely, by increasing its freedom (it can be demonstrated that the power contained in a given thing cannot be increased, and that each individual, if the other individuals would not impede it, would have an infinite force) ...”¹⁵

We could expect now that Leibniz inserts this conclusion in his system, and uses it in order to connect his metaphysics and his ethical theory. But, with the unique exception of the last opusculum quoted, Leibniz does not use this possibility and let the whole discussion fall. Probably, he could not give an adequate analysis of the concept “to remove the impediments”. If we mean as “impediment” or “obstacle” some physical external entity, then we have a scheme of co-operation who is limited to the cases of a coalition against a third one (person or thing). And if we try a more metaphorical interpretation of the “impediment” - as Leibniz suggests in *De summa juris regula*, where he tells that we must consider as an obstacle what limits “human power” - this concept becomes extremely vague. Also, the victory of the “remotion of the impediments” seems to have been a Pyrrhic one. But the underlying question was important. Leibniz’s original intuition - though rudely expressed - is that a physical connection between *actions* does not need a connection of *bodies*. On his point, his conception of the way in which individual join together (*convenire*) is deeply different from that expressed by Spinoza.¹⁶

After 1680, the whole question seems to vanish. In the years of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* and of the letters to Arnauld, the examples taken from politics or from social life are usual, but they always have the same precise aim: to specify what a substance is *not*. A State is not a substance and its definition as a person is grounded on mens’ imagination. The Indian Company is not a substance, even if there is a common aim of its officers, because a common aim is nothing other than a *ressemblance* or an “order between actions and passions of different things” as seen by an external mind.¹⁷ But what kind of metaphysical

¹⁵ *De summa juris regula*, 1680, VE, 7, 1413; same thesis in VE, 2, 332.

¹⁶ See B. SPINOZA, *Ethica*, IV, sch. prop. XVIII: “...nihil, inquam, homines praestantius ad suum esse conservandum optare possunt, quam quod omnes in omnibus ita convenient, ut omnium Mentis et Corpora, unam quasi Mentem unumque Corpus componant”.

¹⁷ “...le dessein commun, qu’est il autre chose qu’une ressemblance, ou bien un ordre d’actions et de passions que nostre esprit remarque dans des choses differentes?” (to Arnauld, april 1687: GP, II, 101).

basis has this phenomenal “order”?

It could be suggested that Leibniz sees the “common aim” of the officers of the India Company as a particular case of mutual expression (or *entrerepondance*) between different substances. When he has to make clear what he means by this word, he proposes an interesting example: a group of persons have agreed to meet somewhere, and then, in fact, each of them goes singly to meet the other ones.¹⁸ Leibniz uses this image only as an example, while he is discussing the unity of the truth for all men, but it is rather obvious that he had founded the concept of “common aim” on such a model of convergence.

The difficulty with this model consists in the fact that there is no possibility of an initial agreement in a Leibnizian world, since the unique one was the combination between the compossible possibilities in God’s mind. But we could see the men who co-operate (or try to do so) as players in a coordination game, in which the one way to fix the point of convergence are the expectations of each individual on the behaviour of others and on *their* expectations on *this individual’s* behaviour.¹⁹ If we postulate that Leibniz’s individuals can anticipate the others’ perceptions, we can fix as “common aim” the fulcrum between the different expectations of everyone about the others’ expectations - if they wish to converge.

But there is a hidden difficulty in this solution. The more the convergence is intensified, the less it is possible to determine a concrete “aim”. We have no possibility to connect the convergent perceptions to an *event*, because events are *changements* and the continuous game of expectations on the others’ expectations cannot produce such an asymmetry. It is right that co-operation requires convergent expectations and a symmetry between the respective performances (so to say: you can help me, only if I am helping you to help me). But a pure scheme of convergence produces too much symmetry. In the case of the officers of the Indian Company, there is no problem, since their convergence is correlative to an external divergence: they “act on” together on somebody else (namely, the Indians). But I don’t think that Leibniz had in mind only such a kind of convergence (i.e. a coalition game). He was probably thinking of situations in which the convergence itself becomes in some way similar to a truth to contemplate: I mean of the love or the friendship between the “wise men”, who are “mirrors” to each other. But the continuous mutual mirroring between the lovers is not a dynamic scheme or - more precisely - it becomes

¹⁸ Discours de metaphysique, § 14 (GP, IV, 439/VE, 8, 1706).

¹⁹ See the classical analysis of this game in D. LEWIS, *Convention. A Philosophical Study*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969, ch. 1.

dynamic only if we insert in it the divergences and not only the convergences. The true channel of “universal sympathy” are not our convergent perception, but our *divergent* ones: what “changes” me, are the “extrinsic” visions about me which other individuals have. But it is hard to see how this inclusion of divergences in the scheme of convergence could be made.

Thus, there is always the same problem which re-emerges: can the metaphysical coordination between the individual substances become *causal* enough to explain such phenomena as an eventual “increase of active power”? And what did Leibniz think about this question at the time of his *Discourse on Metaphysics*? It can be suggested that Leibniz had an answer to this question, but a truly drastic one. Paragraph 32 of the *Discourse of Metaphysics* points out that “only God operates on me, only God can do me good or evil, the other substances do not contribute anything but the reasons of these determinations”.²⁰ This is a very usual affirmation, its fundament is in the doctrine of the *creatio continua*, and it does not seem particularly pertinent to our subject. But let us examine the further explication of this same affirmation which is contained in a letter to Spener of January 1693:

“...It seems to me that all perfection contained in things emanates from the divine source with a continuous and immediate influx. Not because I suppose there may not be some active force in creatures - as it pleased Malebranche to believe -, but because creatures, when they act on the other creatures (*agendo in aliis*), cannot generate any perfection, but produce only in the object a certain limitation of the perfection given by God, increasing or decreasing their impediments (*tantum certam perfectionem a Deo datae limitationem in obiecto producant, auctis minutisve impedimentis*)”²¹

Thus, Leibniz had not forgotten his old difficulty about the causes of the possible “increase of perfection” of a certain individual. He had only formulated the most radical possible solution of it: the “remotion of impediments” is a natural possibility, but every increase of perfection comes “immediately” from God. Of course, this “immediate operation” of Leibniz’s God is not completely miraculous, since Leibniz thinks that Grace operates on someone when he becomes more “attentive” than he was and that this transformation is already included in his complete concept.²² But there is no natural disposition to support

²⁰ GP, IV, 457/ VE, 8, 1732.

²¹ A, I, 9, 240-241. See the very similar formulation of this thesis contained in a letter to Veit von Seckendorf of these same days: “numquam creaturam a creatura perfectionem producere, sed tantum efficere aliquid circa limites perfectionis a Deo datae in creaturae positos, auctis vel minutis impedimentis” (A, I, 9, 232-233).

²² Leibniz’s doctrine of the *auxilia Gratiae* is rather complicated: the *auxilia* can be

God's operation neither in the helped individual nor in the other one. We might call this position as a "co-operation occasionalism", as opposed to Malebranche's pure occasionalism.

Also, there is no longer a connection between the moral concept of "aid" or of "help" and the mechanical scheme of the "remotion of the impediments". But what is now the function of the latter? Why does it emerge again? It can be suggested that the reason of this re-emergence is in Leibniz's Dynamics. The transformation of the "dead force" into *vis viva* can be occasioned by the remotion of an impediment. Let us read in the light of this re-emergence a rather famous passage contained in *De primae philosophiae emendatione et notione substantiae* (1694):

"But active force contains a certain actuality or *entelecheian*, so that in some respect it intermediates between the faculty of acting and the action itself, and implicates an effort. Therefore, it is by itself the whole operation and it needs no aid, but only the remotion of the impediment (*nec auxiliis indiget, sed sola sublatione impedimenti*)."²³

This clear distinction between the intentional "aid" and the mere physical and unintentional "remotion of the impediment" would let one think that Leibniz is discussing here exclusively his Dynamics. The release of a bow is the explanatory example he uses and it is clear that it is not an example which has a sense in reference to human co-operation. But Leibniz is *not* concerned exclusively with physical matters. He points out that the new doctrine of "Entelechy" applies to the individual substances in order to give an answer just to "that difficult problem which is the mutual actions between them" (*illud problema difficile, de substantiarum operatione in se invicem*). The new doctrine would show that a substance can receive from other ones only "limits and determinations" (*limites et determinationes tantummodo accipere*), but not the force. It is just the problem which we have discussed till now that Leibniz affirms to have resolved. Let us see why.

Leibniz's solution consists of two elements. The first element is the doctrine of Entelechy. This doctrine allows him to see the remote possibilities, which were contained in the original "nature" of the individual (i.e. the "infinite power" discussed already in 1679-1680) as compressed tendencies which are still at work. This assumption is specifically functional in giving a natural explanation to the cases of *positive* discontinuity (i.e. an apparent increase of

external or internal, but the latter are more important and the fundamental internal aid is "attention". See: GP, III, 29.

²³ GP IV, 469-470.

force) or also to the compensative - we could say: homeostatic - capabilities attributed by Leibniz to the creatures. And these possibilities apply now to the individual substances and to their pursuit of natural perfection too. Therefore, the introduction of this theory in Leibniz's metaphysics means the end of the age of what we called "co-operation occasionalism" and the beginning of the battle in defense of "nature" against Malebranche and the occasionalists. Leibniz's notion of Entelechy has to be seen as a kind of feed-back of his dynamics on his metaphysics.²⁴

The second element is the new dynamic meaning of the scheme of the "remotion of the impediment". As we have already seen, this scheme has now no kind of reference to a specifically moral context. Furthermore, it is no more really distinguishable from its opposite. In a collision between elastic bodies, the impediment itself gives the occasion for the transformation of *vis elastica* into *vis viva*. So, if we want to give a sense to this concept, we must look to processes which have a rather complicated structure and include *both* the alternative possibilities, the position and the remotion of impediments. Let us think to a process of mutual adaptation or of progressive specialization between different individuals. Now, Leibniz's latest writings introduce into his metaphysics the principle of mutuality, which can be seen as the remote foundation of this kind of processes, but they do not mention neither the "impediment" nor its remotion (as the letter to Spener still did). Therefore, it can be suggested that the dynamic interpretation of the scheme of the "remotion of the impediment" in 1694 is only the prelude to a more complex ways to consider the relations between the actions of more individuals, as Leibniz's growing interest for the symbiotic processes as such (i.e. for "organic bodies") let us understand. And it is possible that just this last part of Leibniz's mature system constitutes the natural heir of the problems we have here considered.

3. Some conclusions

It can be concluded that, though the alternative possibilities that emerged in 1678-1680 had a longer life than one could expect. Leibniz did not give a solution to the underlying problem of co-operation. His solutions concern exclusively the enigma of the causal attribution of the increases of "perfection" or "force". He has attributed successively these increases to our original *potentia infinita*, in 1680, then directly to God, finally to the Entelechy after 1694. But,

²⁴ See M. Robinet's careful analysis of Leibniz's changes during these years, in A.. ROBINET, *Architectonique disjonctive automates systémiques et idéalité transcendente dans l'oeuvre de Leibniz*, Paris: Vrin 1986, 66-82.

as we have seen, these solutions are symptomatic with the regard to the evolution or his way of seeing the other side of the problem, namely the dynamical connections between the actions of different individual substances.

It would be interesting to conclude this analysis of a question which concerns Leibniz's metaphysics of action as such (I mean, Leibniz's general doctrines about action and passion), with a more specific analysis of Leibniz's ideas on human co-operation. But it is difficult to discuss in the space allotted such intricate doctrines as Leibniz's ethics and politics. I shall only mention two important suggestions, which emerge from what has already been discussed.

The first suggestion comes from the problem itself discussed above. Leibniz was a radical ontological individualist, but his ideas about social life are inspired by his metaphysics of harmony and he often points out that social co-operation produces new possibilities for everyone.²⁵ Now are these two postulates compatible? This is the deep reason of the rather curious question: "Who is the causal agent when I become more powerful?" As we have seen, Leibniz refuses the solution of seeing the individual as parts of a bigger individual born from their communication of forces. He sees the individuals as "worlds" having such an internal complexity, that can explain *a priori* every apparent discontinuity. This solution could be seen as only an *ad hoc* solution, but it allows him to maintain a fundamental distinction between the individuals and the systems of action they form together: the individuals are not a "part" of these systems as such, and these systems are not properly constituted by individuals. Leibniz's organic bodies are constituted by infinitely numerous *machines*, but the *machines* are not yet monads. This seems to have an analogy with Leibniz's refusal to consider the political community as a body and with his interpretation of it as a pluralistic structure of relations between different powers.²⁶

The second suggestion comes from the singular fate of the scheme "remotion of the impediments". As we have seen, this scheme was functional to Leibniz's answer to Spinoza's ethics. More generally, Leibniz wished to make clear that we really help someone if and only if we are able to coordinate our action with his action and with his own purposes. But Leibniz was not able to transform this intuition into a specific postulate of his ethics. And it is clear the reason why he could not. If the person we are helping is not fully rational, it is

²⁵ "Juvare est multiplicare" (letter to Arnauld, 1671: A, II, 1, 174/ GP, I, 74). When he met the Spinoza's affirmation that "...ex duobus individuis similibus componitur duplo potentius" (E, IV, sch. prop. XVIII), Leibniz wrote on his copy of *Ethica*: "Imo magis" (Grua, 283).

²⁶ Cfr. *In Severinum a Monzambano*, 1669-1670 (A, IV, 1, 500-502); *Caesarinus Fuerstenerius*, X, 1677 (A, IV, 2, 53-57). See on this point A. ROBINET, *Le meilleur des mondes par la balance de l'Europe*, Paris: PUF 1994, 163-264.

doubtful that we can help him following these principles. If he is fully rational - and we are too - we have a convergence scheme, a perfect coordination scheme, but this case is more an ideal than a real one. In the end, if we try to let him be more rational than before - an attempt that Leibniz's pedagogical conception of the political power could legitimate as well -, there is the risk of "playing the role of God", since Leibniz tells us that only God can give more perfection to an individual than he had before. Therefore, there is not a single solution and we cannot resolve the problem of social co-operation through a single scheme. In some cases, an "impediment" can be positive too, but if protracted, it will be surely negative.²⁷ Above all, only a dynamic compensation of the asymmetries can give a certain approximation to the ideal scheme of the rational convergence. This is the sense of Leibniz's conception of civil society as a transition from Hobbes' *mutuus metus* to the *mutuum auxilium*.²⁸ It can be concluded that Leibniz always maintained the thesis that interindividual relations are co-operative if and only if every partner sees them as a way to achieve the fulfilment of his own possibilities, but he was aware how various human situations can be and how complicated are the ways to bring them nearer to the convergence scheme.

²⁷ See as a case of "positive impediment" : "...suivant la raison naturelle le gouvernement appartient aux plus sages. Mais l'imperfection de la nature humaine fait qu'on ne veut point écouter raison, ce qui a forcé les plus sages d'employer la force et l'adresse pour établir quelque ordre tolerable" (to T. Burnett, 1699: GP, III, 264). See D.J. DEN UYL, *The Aristocratic Principle in the Political Philosophy of Leibniz*, "Journal of the History of Philosophy", 15 (1977), 281-292.

²⁸ "Agnosco homines mutuo metu et necessitate ad colendam societatem custodem cogi; sed praeter metu amor, praeter miseriae fugam felicitatis illecebra accessit, qui mutuis imprimis auxiliis constat." (Grua, 653).

Dr. Francesco Piro

Is it possible to co-operate without interaction?

Leibniz's difficulties with the case of the "production of more perfection" from 1678 to 1694

Abstract

In this article, Leibniz's thesis on the absence of properly causal relations between the individual substances will be discussed from the point of view of its possibility to give a foundation to the co-operative situations (in a not-banal sense of this words, i.e. as situations which result distinguishable from the general harmony of the universe). It will be pointed out that Leibniz has discussed this problem in a prevalingly negative form, as his principal aim is to show that it is impossible to communicate "perfection" or force to someone else. But it will be pointed out too, that his mature system absorbs his pre-systematic assumption that an individual's action can "remove the impediments" to the acting of another one. It will be suggested that this assumption is consistent with the mature Leibniz's interest for symbiotic processes and with his tendency to give a more dynamic interpretation to the relations between the monads than his *Discourse on Metaphysics* did.

Curriculum vitae of the author:

Francesco Piro (Naples, 1957) achieved the Ph.D. in 1987 at the University of Urbino with a final dissertation on the mind/body problem in Leibniz's first writings. He teaches now at the University of Salerno (Department of Philosophy - fax: 0039-89-962442). He is author of *Varietas identitate compensata. Studio sulla formazione della metafisica di Leibniz*, (Napoli: Bibliopolis 1990) and of the Italian translation of Leibniz's *Confessio Philosophi* (Napoli: Cronopio 1992) and of many articles on Leibniz and other philosophers of the seventeenth century. His present research concerns chiefly the history of the doctrines on the practical reason and the human action in the modern age.