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# Leibniz's Dissatisfaction with the Cogito

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“What is the *Cogito*? If not, at most, the translation of an untranslatable state?” (Valéry, 1952, 83).<sup>1</sup> In what follows, I will be using ‘Cogito’ mostly as a moniker – or a shorthand – for a *philosophical device* (in the double meaning of an instrument and a trick), notoriously introduced by Descartes in a couple of very similar propositional forms, as well as for a *kind of self-experience* that seems to be embedded in this philosophical device, in both cases without further qualification.<sup>2</sup> We know anyway that in both cases this ‘Cogito’ is expected, on the one hand, to provide the experiencer or the *cogitans* with certainty about and maybe knowledge of their existence; on the other hand, to provide a kind of Truth Prototype, similar in role to the future *mètre étalon* at Sèvres: an example you can look at in order to know a meter or a truth respectively. In our case, the situation in which one was when one first realized the truth of that first proposition can be compared to the situation in which one is when facing any other proposition: if the state one’s soul feels itself in<sup>3</sup> is the same, this proposition is also true.

The formal nature of the Cogito was disputed at the time and is still undecided, while it seems that, as far as the content was concerned, everyone at the time was pretty happy with it. In a way it was perceived, at least, to be obvious – at worst, not a big deal – and, moreover, it was ‘Augustine-ish’. Augustine was a much-played philosophical trump card in the debates of that century, not only to convey ‘what you are saying departs from what you should say’, but also, and maybe much more, to intimate ‘what you are saying has already been said’, precisely by Augustine. Even Leibniz, as we are going to see, used to do it.

Formally, the Cogito could then, like it still can now, be seen as an implication (since the verbal or mental utterance of *cogito* implies existence),<sup>4</sup> as an inference (since in terms of the theory of requirements thinking requires existing, *ergo*), as an act of assent (I cannot but assent to the inference, or pseudo-inference), as a demonstration (of a private but reproducible kind), as a tacitly apagogical argument, that is, one that invokes the impossibility (could you rationally maintain it?) of its opposite. We further know that one of the best interpretations of the philosophical trick sees the Cogito as the performance – not the analysis – of the solution to an existential inconsistency: ‘it may be the case that I do not exist’ is inconsistent with the existence

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1 “Qu’est-ce que le *Cogito*? Sinon, tout au plus, la traduction d’un intraduisible état?” (Valéry, 1926, 11).

2 By this I am mainly trying to dodge the last 70 years of discussion on what the ‘cogito’ is or is not, and does or does not. I’ll mention some contributions in the following, to which may I just add here Abraham, 1974; Markie, 1982; Boos, 1983; Flage, 1985; Trapp, 1988; Stone, 1993; Moyal, 2016. As for Leibniz possibly having a cogito of his own, there are readings so disparate as those of Robinet, 1994; Schäfer, 2009; Paź, 2016.

3 See Paganini, 2008.

4 Even the utterance by an apparently non-existing entity (Hintikka, 1996).

of the very I uttering the sentence, and necessarily such I solves the inconsistency in the same I's favor.<sup>5</sup> Yet this one, although it is in some way important to what we will be discussing in relation to Leibniz, was unavailable to the philosophical discussions at Leibniz's time, its veiled commitment to apagoge notwithstanding.

But then again, there *is* in all these cases some inference to be drawn afterwards, answering to something like: What is the use of this? So that in the end the stress, contrary to what Pope said of Shakespeare, is always on the gain, rather than the glory.

## Not one of a kind

All this said, we can move to Leibniz, who is apparently dissatisfied with both *formal aspects* and *content* of the principle.<sup>6</sup> We may ask: why is this? Is it the notion of existence? We know that Leibniz, from a certain moment, has an understanding of existence that is in strong contrast to that of Descartes,<sup>7</sup> but this never turns up in discussions of the Cogito. Is it the 'fact', the content of the experience? We will see that it is not unimportant, but it is not a real point of contrast. Is it, then, the prototyping role? This is – according to most literature on Leibniz – the main exception he takes *contra Cartesium* on this subject, Leibniz's first and foremost way of taking a stand against the fundamental proposition and first truth of the Cartesians: he definitely does not like the idea that for that proposition there is some sort of an exclusive role as the first model of truth.

Leibniz, concerning first truths and knowledge, is interested rather in axioms, than in prototypes; and if there were such a thing, a better Leibnizian candidate for the role would likely be the identical axiom: "Just as inner experience is the foundation of all factual truths," Leibniz writes against Descartes in a letter of 1691, "so the principle of contradiction is the principle of all truths of reason, and if you take it away you suppress all reasoning, nor can you come to know anything about God or anything else."<sup>8</sup> Now, *cogito ergo sum*, even if we will see that it might be considered a sort of axiom, or a near relative of axioms, plainly is not an identical or logical truth. According to Leibniz's well-known distinction, it is not a truth of reason<sup>9</sup> but a truth of fact. This obviously entails that the Cogito could not be relevant for the domain of the truths of reason; but also its role among the truths of fact is undermined by its being, instead of the one and only prototype, only one among several equally evident and primary propositions. In the *New Essays* Leibniz writes about the fundamental or primary (*primitives*) truths of facts that:

these are inner experiences which are immediate with the immediacy of feeling. This is where the first truth of the Cartesians and St Augustine belongs: *I think, therefore I am*. That is, *I am a thing which thinks*.<sup>10</sup>

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5 Take the existence and run, so to say. See Hintikka 1962, 1963; Kambouchner, 2009.

6 It is not obvious to treat the Cogito as a principle, although Descartes and Leibniz do; but see Schneiders, 1994.

7 See Herrera Ibáñez, 1986; Paolini Paoletti, 2011.

8 "Nam ut experimenta interna sunt fundamentum omnium veritatum facti, ita principium contradictionis est principium omnium veritatum rationis, eoque sublato omnis tollitur ratiocinatio, neque quicquam vel de Deo vel de ulla alia re colligere licet" (*Leibniz to G. Meier*, Jan. 1691; A II, 2, 375).

9 On Descartes and the Cogito as a truth of reason, see Moyal, 2010.

10 "Pour ce qui est des *vérités primitives de fait*, ce sont les expériences immédiates internes d'une *immediation* de sentiment. Et c'est icy où a lieu la première vérité des Cartesiens ou de St. Augustin: *Je pense donc je suis*. C'est à dire, *je suis une chose qui pense*. Mais il faut savoir, que de même que les identiques sont générales ou particulières, et que les unes sont aussi claires que les autres (puisqu'il est aussi clair de dire que *A est A*, que de dire qu'*une chose est ce qu'elle est*) il en est encor ainsi des premières vérités de fait. Car non seulement il m'est clair immédiatement que *je pense*, mais il m'est tout aussi clair, que j'ay des pensées *différentes*, que tantost *je pense à A*, et que tantost *je pense à B* etc." (NE IV, 2, §1; A VI, 6, 367). As for the English texts, I am quoting from

Evidently, the logical jump from thought to thing that made Hobbes cringe does not disturb Leibniz. Instead he turns to the distinction between universal and particular propositions to show that the ‘primary truths of fact’ (a formula to which Leibniz often returns, since ‘first truths’ are an evident major preoccupation of his) come in both kinds, equally valid as to Cartesian criteria, and this deals a major blow to the primacy of the Cogito:

But we must realize that just as identities can be general or particular, and that they are equally evident in either case (since *A is A* is just as evident as *A thing is what it is*), so it is with the first truths of fact. For not only is it immediately evident to me that *I think*, but it is just as evident that *I think various thoughts*: at one time I think about *A* and at another about *B* and so on. (*ib.*)

Leibniz draws this conclusion: “Thus the Cartesian principle is sound, but it is not the only one of its kind” (*ib.*). *Il n’est pas le seul de son espece*: it is fairly clear that the species or kind to which this and other similar principles belong, is defined by the genus ‘truth of fact’ and the difference ‘primary’. This specific character, in turn, is equivalent to its *not* being a demonstration:

One can always say that the proposition *I exist* is evident in the highest degree, since it cannot be proved through any other – indeed, that it is an immediate truth. To say *I think therefore I am* is not really to prove existence from thought, since to think and to be thinking are one and the same, and to say *I am thinking* is already to say *I am*.<sup>11</sup>

Still, this would seem a demonstration, albeit a trivial one; for Leibniz its general form ‘*AB* ⇒ *A*’ is an axiom, a primary truth of reason, and in his view, as it is well known, most axioms could and ought to be proved from definitions and from an extremely restricted nucleus of identical truths. But Leibniz’s chief argument here is that the conclusion cannot be proved – that it does not belong to the domain of demonstration: “it is a proposition of fact, founded on immediate experience.” Like every contingent truth, it “is not a necessary proposition whose necessity is seen in the immediate agreement of ideas. On the contrary, only God can see how these two terms, *I* and *existence*, are connected – that is, why I exist.”<sup>12</sup> There are infinite steps, infinite conditions that connect these two terms, and in Leibniz’s view demonstrations cannot but be finite.

So although the proposition ‘I am’, *Sum*, is true, and not in a demonstrative way, we must exclude it from the axioms *stricto sensu*, Leibniz also says, since it is not a necessary proposition. But it is one of the first propositions we know – ‘first’ not in the order of nature, but in the natural order of our cognition, *quoad nos*. We may say, with some stretch and by analogy to other propositions Leibniz discusses in the *New Essays*, that it is virtually innate to us, in the sense that we can always and indeed are ‘wired’ to find it expressed in our very existence. Moreover, there is a sense in which it can be considered an axiom:

But if you take axioms, in a more general manner, to be immediate or *non-provable* truths, then the proposition *I am* can be called an axiom. In any case we can be

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or paraphrasing the Remnant-Bennett translation of the *New Essays* (Leibniz, 1996), that preserves the pagination of A VI, 6. Otherwise all translations are mine.

11 “On peut toujours dire que cette Proposition, *J’existe*, est de la dernière évidence, étant une proposition, qui ne sauroit être prouvée par aucune autre, ou bien une *vérité immédiate*. Et de dire, *Je pense*, donc *je suis*, ce n’est pas prouver proprement l’existence par la pensée, puisque penser et être pensant, est la même chose; et dire, *Je suis pensant*, est déjà dire, *Je suis*” (NE IV, 7, §7; A VI 6, 411).

12 “c’est une proposition de fait, fondée sur une expérience immédiate, et ce n’est pas une proposition nécessaire, dont on voye la nécessité dans la convenance immédiate des idées. Au contraire, il n’y a que Dieu qui voye, comment ces deux termes, *Moi* et l’*Existence*, sont liés, c’est à dire pourquoi j’existe” (NE IV, 7, §7; A VI 6, 411).

confident that it is a *primary truth*, and indeed *unum ex primis cognitis inter terminos complexos*, i.e. one of the first known statements – in the natural order of our knowledge, that is, since it may never have occurred to a man to form this proposition explicitly, even though it is innate in him.<sup>13</sup>

To summarize, we have found – reading from the *New Essays*, in the Fourth Book on knowledge – that the Cogito is *not* a special proposition according to Leibniz, and this is an obvious manifestation of some discontent. Instead its kind is special, and a segment of it ('I am') is also special. Special, but not an axiom in the strict sense of the term, while it may be an axiom of a secondary kind, since it is a self-evident, immediate truth.

## A Cogito of one's own

Let us now travel back some years and look for the original expressions of Leibniz's dissatisfaction. *Primae veritates*, first truths, were a main occupation already in 1676, when he would, regrettably, lump everything together: "I regard as first truths those which cannot be proved, such as: I have such and such perceptions. Also: A is A, and definitions." But he also entertained the idea of an ordering of first truths, and this offered the opportunity to mention an abridged version of the Cogito:

From the perception of phenomena it follows both that I am, and that there is a cause of these various phenomena, or of the variety of perceptions, different from that whose form I perceive when I perceive [my] thought. I admit, however, that the proposition 'I think' should come first in the order of philosophizing, i.e. that if the first real truths are ordered, it will be first in the order, because it is easier to begin with a single subject of the first experimental proposition than with those various predicates.<sup>14</sup>

The Cogito is indeed, as Descartes correctly remarked, among the first truths. But that Descartes' 'I think' would come first in a philosophical order does not mean that it is the first in the order of reasons, nor in the upcoming 'natural order of our knowledge' of the *New Essays*. The first truths that ensue from the first experiences are, on a par, 'I am' and 'there is a cause of the variety of my perceptions and it is not myself as a thinking substance'. The first one, as we have seen, will stay, while the second one will require some adjustment: from perception to cause there are too many steps to deem it an immediate or indemonstrable truth.

Leibniz will soon be able to solve this difficulty and find better candidates for the uneasy role of Cogito replacements. There are different versions, the best known of which is presented in Leibniz's most engaged anti-Cartesian writing, the *Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum*. Here Leibniz keeps a shortened version of the Cogito, to which he

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13 "Mais si l'Axiome se prend plus generalement pour une verité immediate ou *non-prouvable*, on peut dire que cette proposition, *je suis*, est un axiome; et en tout cas, on peut assurer, que c'est une *verité primitive*, ou bien *unum ex primis cognitis inter terminos complexos*, c'est à dire, que c'est une des Enonciations premieres connues, ce qui s'entend dans l'ordre naturel de nos connoissances, car il se peut qu'un homme n'ait jamais pensé à former expressement cette proposition qui lui est pourtant innée" (NE IV, 7, §7; A VI 6, 411).

14 "Primae apud me veritates quae probari non possunt, ut: Ego habeo apparentias tales vel tales. Item: A est A, et definitiones. Ex apparentiarum perceptione sequitur et esse me, et variarum apparentiarum seu varietatis perceptionum esse causam aliam ab ea cuius for[mam] percipio, cum percipio cogitationem. Fateor tamen propositionem Ego cogito, prius occurrere debere ordine [philosophanti,] seu si primae veritates reales disponantur, ordine primam fore, quia simplicius est ab uno subjecto primae propositionis experimentalis incipere, quam a variis illis praedicatis" (*De veritatibus, de mente, de deo, de universo*. 15. April 1676; A VI, 3, 508).

adds ‘various things are thought by me,’ whence it follows that I am affected in various modes. He first extends his previous concept of ‘primary truths of fact’ to every immediate perception, that he interestingly (as remarked by Barth, 2011) calls *conscientiae*: “the first truths of fact are so many as the immediate perceptions or consciousnesses, so to speak”.<sup>15</sup> One is not only aware of oneself thinking, he adds, but also of one’s thoughts, and it is no more true or more certain that one thinks than that one thinks this or that. So all factual truths can be brought back to these two: “Ego cogito, et: Varia a me cogitantur” (GP IV, 357).<sup>16</sup>

This new proposition does not depend on the former. In a letter of 1691 Leibniz writes: “It is manifest that our first experiences are the same as our internal perceptions, i.e. that there is not only *myself* thinking, but that there is a *variety* in my thoughts (and I judge these two to be independent of each other and equally primal).”<sup>17</sup>

The dissatisfaction, then, has two components: the Cogito is nothing special; the Cogito is indeed the wrong proposition for the task it has been assigned to by the Cartesians, not just because it can be reduced to ‘I am’, but because the proposition that really has a special role is a similar, but different one.

Being independent and primal are typical features of axioms. To be compared to axioms, a proposition does not only need a logical or experiential validity. In the view of axioms as the first propositions of a science – a notion of Aristotelian epistemology that Leibniz shares – not to be insignificant, an axiom also needs an epistemic role, and in such context we find the principle of perceptual variety put on an equal footing with the principle of identity or the principle of contradiction:

Those two first principles (one of reason, that *identical propositions are true while propositions which imply contradiction are false*; one of experience, that *various things are perceived by me*) are such that in regard to them it can be demonstrated, firstly, that their demonstration is impossible.

Not only they are non-demonstrable, but they also have a foundational role, since all other propositions depend on them: “secondly, that *all other propositions depend on them*, i.e. that if those two principles are not true, there is absolutely no truth and no knowledge.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus Leibniz’s ‘second proposition’ is much more important than ‘Sum’, or ‘Cogito’, or any combination of them:<sup>19</sup> even if they are similar propositions, belonging to the same kind, having the same origin, being experienced internally, and so on, one is essential to truth and knowledge, the others are not. The Cogito may be essential to one’s self-representation, it accompanies

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15 “Veritates facti primae tot sunt quot perceptiones immediatae sive conscientiae, ut sic dicam”( *Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum*, 1692; GP IV, 357).

16 I will not discuss here the nuances – sometimes obvious, sometimes elusive – that are related to Leibniz’s use of *cogitare* or *percipere* in this locution. In literature on Leibniz, *varia a me cogitantur* has come to embody Leibniz’s criticism of the Cogito, and it often goes un-analysed; but see Schneider 1998; Fichant 1998.

17 “Prima Experimenta nostra constat esse ipsas internas perceptiones, nempe non tantum *me* esse qui cogitem, sed et *varietatem* esse in meis cogitationibus (quae duo a se invicem independentia, et aequae originaria iudico)” (*Leibniz to G. Meier*, Jan. 1691; A II, 2, 375).

18 “Duo illa prima principia: unum rationis: *identica sunt vera*, et *contradictionem implicantia sunt falsa*, alterum experientiae: *quod varia a me percipiuntur*, talia sunt, ut de iis demonstrari possit, primo demonstrationem eorum impossibilem esse; secundo omnes alias propositiones ab ipsis pendere, sive si haec duo principia non sunt vera, nullam omnino veritatem et cognitionem locum habere” (*De principiis*, 1670s-1680s; A VI 4, 124; my emphasis; the editors of A propose a more restrictive dating on a ground they themselves admit is questionable). Note that we might have to check the truths based on the second principle with those based on the first one, lest we be dreaming.

19 It may be noted that in Leibniz there never is any hint to a paratactic Cogito of the kind ‘I think and I am’.

necessarily one rational being's factual being, but that is it. One does not learn what one is, by applying the *distinctio realis* or real distinction of the second *Meditation*. The self, who is intellectually aware of one's identity, learns to be like the others (other things and other spirits) and through the others learns, according to Leibniz, one's own nature.<sup>20</sup>

Some years before, it may be noted, Leibniz had departed still more from Descartes, even attempting, in the middle of an inventory of the first principles of both ontology and epistemology, a *Cogito* of his own. The inventory began with the "First intellectual principles of the essence of things", and there he placed the principle of contradiction: essences are possibilities, i.e. non-contradictory notions of possible things in God's mind. Then came an "Intellectual principle of the existence of things": that among all incompatible sets of possible things the most perfect does exist. The primary truths of fact that we know came in the third place:

*First sensible principles*, or first perceptions.

1. I am the one who perceives.
2. Many things are perceived by me.<sup>21</sup>

As remarked by Favaretti (2015), in the following Leibniz would openly suggest that this formulation, in which *cogitare* had been expunged from the *Cogito* and 'I am' was in fact 'It's me', was a better formulation than that of Descartes. But he did more, clearly stating the role of both principles and, in particular, the relevance of the second principle for grasping one's relation to the world:

There are some who teach only the first one, which they enunciate as follows: I think therefore I am. But they omit the other, which is much more fruitful. To the person who begins to experience, two [notions] appear before all others: that there are various perceptions, and that it is always oneself who perceives. From this, it not only follows that there is a percipient, but that there must be outside the percipient a reason for such varied perceptions; and therefore this reason is beyond me. From the first [principle] I come to the knowledge of myself, from the second I come to the knowledge of the world.<sup>22</sup>

## The knowledge of the world

Finding the right proposition to be put in place of the *Cogito* is strictly connected with Leibniz's whole vision of the relation between the world and the individual entities that compose it. A diminishing attitude colors Belaval's description of Leibniz's appreciation of the *Cogito*,<sup>23</sup> yet

20 Pelletier, 2020, makes an interesting point apropos how this may bring to an inductive foundation for metaphysics. But see Favaretti, 2015.

21 "Prima principia intellectualia de rerum essentia [...] Principium intellectuale de rerum existentia [...] Prima principia sensuality seu primae perceptiones. I. Ego sum qui percipio. II. Varia sunt quae percipio" (*Definitiones cogitationesque metaphysicae*, 1679-1681; A VI, 4, 1394-1395).

22 "Sunt nonnulli qui prius tantum inculcant, quod sic enuntiant, *cogito ergo sum*. Sed omittunt alterum quod longe est foecundius. Duo enim ante omnia experiendi occurrunt, varias esse perceptiones, et unum eundemque esse se qui percipit. Unde non tantum infertur esse percipientem, sed etiam rationem tam variae perceptionis esse debere extra percipientem; ac proinde alia esse praeter me. Ex priori pervenio in cognitionem mei, ex posteriori in cognitionem mundi" (*Definitiones cogitationesque metaphysicae*, 1679-1681; A VI, 4, 1395).

23 "Leibniz est de son siècle. Il cite peu les *Méditations* et n'interprète guère le *Cogito* autrement que ses contemporains" (Belaval, 1960, 17). Belaval also maintains both that, while Descartes introduced variety only after demonstrating the existence of the external world, Leibniz has variety come to the fore to demonstrate this existence (80); and that it is on the unity of the cosmos (which implies an order) that Leibniz bases the

he saw clearly what is at stake here: Leibniz's refusal of Cartesian *isolation*. On the one hand, "Leibniz does not dissociate *cogito* and *cogitatum*," nor is there, according to him, "any thought that can be isolated," that is, that does not involve the representation of the totality of the universe. On the other hand, the solitary Cogito is felt by him as a mark of "isolation from the republic of spirits" and from the progress of history.<sup>24</sup>

The propositions Leibniz substitutes for Descartes' Cogito have a role in what I will call here, *faute de mieux*, the monad's three-stage upward path. In Leibniz there is not only a *Frage nach dem Sein des Seienden*, but also a *Frage nach dem wahren Selbst*,<sup>25</sup> and certain monads follow an itinerary to the fullness of selfhood. The monad first coexists with the universe (as a simple monad); it may stay there, but in some, or most, or maybe all cases it eventually moves, in Leibniz's own words, to a 'greater stage' (as a complex organized living being with a true soul); then this true soul might have it in its law of development that it will get a spiritual life, not being limited to feeling and memory, but having the ability to transform its experiences into (universal) knowledge through reason. All rational beings have passed or will pass through these three stages, one single time during their existence (that is not co-eternal with the world, but indeed equally lasting). Those two propositions end up with being the fundamental principles of the rational life of spirits, the only monads that are entitled to reflection and, thus, to selfhood. It seems to me that there are two axes along which we may represent and characterize this role from the point of view of our inquiry.

The first is the 'never-alone' axis. One becomes a rational beings at a certain and unique time but, as a created indestructible monad, one is coexistent with the universe for its entire duration, and thus with innumerable other things. This is a horizontal dimension – the monad, the soul, the spirit is always in a horizontal way of co-presence, summarized by the Leibnizian expression *non tantum me esse qui cogitem*.<sup>26</sup> This horizontal dimension, in turn, works two-ways, from the world to the I and back, building confidence:

For I perceive within myself that there is not only I who think, but that there are many differences in my thoughts, from which I understand that there are other things besides myself and this gives me a little more confidence in my senses.<sup>27</sup>

This is Leibniz's true 'cogito',<sup>28</sup> that enables one to accept the fact that there are other things around, and validates one's subsequent conscious experiences of both one's life and the world. When in a bad mood, Leibniz says of the Cogito: "inter phaleras ad populum numero" (GP IV 357), that he numbers it among the nonsense that is peddled to the common people. In a nutshell, as

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multiplicity of *cogitata* (203). But the point he makes and I report in the text is more fundamental.

24 "Leibniz ne dissocie point *Cogito et Cogitatum*, aussi étroitement corrélatifs l'un de l'autre que forme et matière. Il n'y a point de pensée qui n'implique à la fois représentation et tendance, perceptio et appetitio. Il n'y a point non plus de pensée isolable, c'est-à-dire qui n'implique la représentation de la totalité de l'univers" (Belaval, 1960, 482); "Le Cogito isole de la République des esprits et se prétend en vain commencement absolu: au sectarisme de ce Cogito solitaire, on doit préférer l'électisme défini comme la pensée du progrès historique" (532).

25 The 'question of the true self' – an expression I am borrowing from Sakai, 2008.

26 I recently discussed this at the yearly Descartes seminar in Lecce and I am thankful for their permission to present here a further elaboration of that lecture.

27 "Percipio autem intra me, non tantum me ipsum qui cogito, sed et multas in cogitationibus meis differentias, ex quibus alia praeter me esse colligo, et sensibus paulatim fidem concilio" (*De Synthesi et Analysisi universali...*, 1683-1685; A VI, 4, 543).

28 Compare the first, deleted version: "Talia sunt non tantum, *Ego cogito*, sed et *ego haec vel illa cogito, percipio, intelligo*" (*ib.*). In this *I think, I perceive, I understand*, one may even, *pace* Belaval, hear the echo of a famous passage in the second *Meditation*.



always, *non mi bisogna e non mi basta*, I do not need it and it would not be enough for me. Instead with Leibniz's *multa-cogito* principle of perceptual variety, one is in the world and at home in it.<sup>29</sup>

The other axis, the 'always-there' axis, is vertical. Not only, from the very beginning of one's cognitive life as a spiritual entity, one is there, horizontally, together with other things; but one has always been there, since there is a temporal continuity in consciousness: "Consciousness is the memory of our actions." This is the reason why atheist mathematicians, in Descartes' view, can carry out demonstrations but can never be sure of what they have just done. But there is more to it:

Descartes wants that for this reason no demonstration can be trusted, since every demonstration requires the memory of previous propositions, concerning which the power of some malignant genius might mislead us. But if we push the reasons for doubt to this extent, then we will not even be allowed to trust our conscious states about present things, since nothing is present in an absolute sense except in the moment.<sup>30</sup>

This has specific metaphysical reasons: as Leibniz always remarks, *le présent est gros de l'avenir*, the present time is pregnant with the future. But in Leibniz's metaphysics, on the one hand the person lives a temporal life, a life *in* time; on the other hand, the subject is intemporal, because time is just a representation of the succession of the states of the universe and its components; the subject indeed exists in the instant and is fulgurated by God in another and another instant; but each of these instants contains the representation of all the other instants, quite intemporally. All this raises a couple of interesting questions, that I would like to put forward as a conclusion.

## Conclusion

The first of my concluding remarks concerns identity. Implicit in the *cogito* – it is even banal to say – is the identity of the *cogitans*. An instantaneous identity is implicit inside a repeatable but momentaneous act of self-recognition and instauration. One either recognizes that one is, or that one is thinking, or that one is thinking of many things, but it's always a connection of the 'I' one identifies with, to the conditions of one's own existence at that moment. It is implicit in the experience and at the conceptual level, both in Descartes's own version and in Leibniz's various substitutes. It is also implicit on a slightly (or quite) larger temporal scale, in that the 'I' who in principle utters all those principles, also remembers it.

On the one hand, it is a matter of identity over time in the self-affirmation of a *Dasein*, so to speak. On the other hand, this opens the question of the relationship between the succession of the perceptive or representative states of the substance and the self's temporal self-representation, between perception by the self of the substance and perception by the substance as substance. It is a conundrum that, in my understanding, crops up for Leibniz when introducing the *petites perceptions*, which are liminary between those two aspects, and only in late writings (Pasini, 2020). It has to do with the accessibility, in first-person mode, to a portion of one's

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29 Not too seriously, we may say that the principle adds to the well known epistemic and existential functions of the Cogito an existentialist function.

30 "Conscientia est nostrarum actionum memoria. Cartesius vult ideo nulli demonstrationi posse fidi, quia omnis demonstratio memoria praecedentium propositionum indiget; in qua nos potentia alicujus mali genii fortasse falli posset. Sed si hucusque producimus dubitandi titulos, etiam conscientiae nostrae de praesentibus fidere non licet, semper enim involvitur memoria, cum nihil sit absolute loquendo praesens praeter momentum" (*De conscientia memoriaque*, 1683-1685?; A VI 4, 1473).

representations in substance-mode, and with the permeability between these two domains. One's substance has representations of the life on remote stars and of people dying in continents far away while their loved ones become widowed in England, but as a conscious rational being one knows nothing of that. Sometimes those things move to a nearer portion of one's representations, the portion one is aware of: this can happen because one goes to England, or makes a zoom call with the widow(er) of the India guy. But this has been represented by one's substance, even before it became conscious, as something that would become conscious.

This raises, in addition, an intriguing question concerning the *cogito ergo sum*, the *sum*, the *sum cogitans* and the 'there are many things that I am thinking of'. Who is ultimately entitled to saying this 'I'? Since 'sum', according to Leibniz, does not need a 'cogito', would a dog, let us say the dog Leibniz and Bayle battle about, feel its 'I'-ness? Would Leibniz's own principles be in some way findable even in the much less or not at all rational soul of that dog? The dog has some perception of its past as connected to it(self), and of a connection between a menacing face, a stick, and itself, although this perception does not bring about proper selfhood, since there is no reflexion.<sup>31</sup> Is there some shadow of identity, an *analogon identitatis*,<sup>32</sup> by which the same principles, albeit in a shadowy way, may inhabit even that dog's psyche?

This connection of *multa-cogito* principle and temporal identity could be developed in a phenomenological direction – this has been pointed out to me by Oscar Esquisabel – but it will not be my choice. The final point concerns instead plurality. *Varia a me cogitantur, non tantum me esse qui cogitem*: as we have seen, there is from the very beginning a multiplicity beyond the self, the knowledge of which is grounded in one or more principles that are on a par with the principle of identity or contradiction. Teresa's image of being alone with God is moving, even inspiring, but somewhat untrue.<sup>33</sup>

Worldly plurality has its roots in an idea of abundance, of 'more perfection', amply discussed in Leibniz studies. But in reading that Leibniz would have united Plato and Democritus, one wonders whether there is more beyond the obvious reference to natural philosophy, more than Democritus for physics (at least tolerable and workable physics) and Plato for truth – metaphysically more. My answer would lie in a reassessment of his Democritism in the direction of a subtler philosophical role, because Democritus is the philosopher of the innumerable multiplicity of atoms and not only of real material existence. It seems to me that the space given by Leibniz to multiplicity does not come from reading Plato's *Parmenides*. I would suggest that Leibniz's passion for Democritus, over and above his acceptance of corpuscularism, has to do with Democritus providing originary plurality, while Platonism, obviously, provides the idea of unity (and Aristotelianism provides the technical means and tools to keep all this together, for better or for worse).

There is in Leibniz a refusal of the solipsist elements of certain strands of scepticism, even in the case of Cartesian instrumental scepticism. He does not sympathize either with any idea of being in or belonging to some separate world – akin in this, more than under any other aspects, to Spinoza. A certain *fil rouge* of solipsism in what we call Classical German Philosophy – which, we are often told, is initiated and inspired by Leibniz – might be due not to Leibniz and monadology, but to an excess of Cartesianism.

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31 "Illae solae animae sunt Mentis in quas cadit cognitio sui ipsius seu conscientia [...] sed non agnosco in [brutis] conscientiam, ut scilicet oblata quadam cogitatione percipiant eam vel aliam similem, jam sibi affuisse" (A VI, 4, 1490).

32 As in Leibniz's "shadow of reasoning" (*ombre du raisonnement*, NE, Préf.; A VI, 6, 51) and the *analogon rationis* of later writers (see Roling, 2011; Buchenau, 2017; Bouchat, 2007).

33 See McRae, 1994 and Westphal, 2001 on Leibniz's wavering anti-solipsim.

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