

**Klaus D. Dutz, Stefano Gensini (eds.)**  
*Im Spiegel des Verstandes, Studien zu Leibniz*  
 Nodus Publikationen, Münster 1996.

THE volume contains a collection of nine papers, each of which deals with some aspect of Leibniz's ideas on language. Four of these papers are in German, four in English, and one in Italian. The editors intended to contribute to a survey of current research on Leibniz, and relate that they were surprised by the coherence of the ensuing volume. However, they do not explicate this any further, and they refrain from thematically arranging the various contributions, which are instead alphabetically ordered by author's name. The variety of issues addressed by the authors testifies to the impressive range of subjects related to language on which Leibniz had interesting things to say.

1. Allison P. Coudert, *Leibniz, Knorr von Rosenroth, and the Kabbalah Denudata*. Coudert discusses the interests shared by Leibniz and Knorr von Rosenroth (1636-1689), a polyglot who translated a number of kabbalistic texts into Latin, and published them under the title 'Kabbalah Denudata'. Leibniz was greatly interested in these texts, and in 1689 he visited von Rosenroth. They read over the 'Kabbalah Denudata' together and Leibniz made notes of what he found the most memorable kabbalistic ideas. According to Coudert, these ideas were later modified and included by Leibniz in his own writings. In particular, the Leibnizian concept of monads was directly influenced by the Kabbalah. Moreover, kabbalistic ideas helped to shape Leibniz's argument for free will, and his theory of causation as volition.

Coudert states that modern historians unjustifiedly categorize seventeenth-century intellectuals as either progressive mechanists or reactionary occultists. In fact, the situation was more complex and interesting. Areas of knowledge considered scientific in the seventeenth century, such as alchemy, magic and the Kabbalah should not be eliminated. The optimism characteristic of the period developed in part from precisely these areas. It is time, Coudert concludes, "to acknowledge the Kabbalah as a factor in the emergence of our modern secular and scientifically oriented world."

Although a thorough assessment of Coudert's claims should take his 1995 book into account, the argument as presented in the present paper is unconvincing. It requires some strain of the imagination to view the kabbalistic ideas allegedly lying at the basis of Leibniz's concept of monads as even remotely resembling the latter. Further, it is ironic that Coudert provides quotes from Leibniz which confirm that kabbalistic writings were not well known to his contemporaries, and that if they were, they were habitually ridiculed. In my opinion, Coudert underestimates the extent to which the opposition between science and occultism, rather than being a distinction imposed by later historians, was a reality in seventeenth century intellectual life. That Leibniz tried to reconcile every conflict he met with, distilling, whenever possible, useful elements from each of the impressive number of doctrines he was familiar with, should not mislead us into thinking that he believed all these doctrines to be true nor that the conflicts did not exist.

## 2. Klaus D. Dutz, *Leibniz und die Linguisten*.

Dutz's paper is the longest, the most puzzling and the least convincing of the volume. His central claim seems to be that since the history of linguistics stands desperately in need of a 'meta-historiographical concept', we are unable to exclude the possibility that Johann Jakob Feinhals (1702-1769) was in fact the person who wrote or edited some or most of Leibniz's writings. Not that we don't know this was not the case, but we have no methodology ascertaining this. I find this claim little short of absurd, and I assume I am probably unable to grasp the full complexity of Dutz's argument. A somewhat unfortunate circumstance is that Dutz's paper contains a section in which he criticizes a paper by myself. Since this section is fairly self-contained, I shall use all the available space for a brief discussion of this section only.

In my paper, I examined Leibniz's position with respect to Dalgarno and Wilkins. I argued that Leibniz studied their work thoroughly, and that he used both Dalgarno's and Wilkins's lexicons as a starting point for his own lists of definitions. Further, I pointed out that Leibniz's aims differed widely from those of both Dalgarno and Wilkins. Nonetheless, if we focus on the actual work done to achieve these different objectives, we see that Leibniz continued the work of his English predecessors. The latter conclusion has apparently evoked Dutz's indignation. He goes into detail to argue that Leibniz's definitions represent a completely different philosophical view from that underlying those of Wilkins and he even takes pains to show that some of Wilkins's definitions are nonsensical. All that Wilkins and Leibniz have in common, he concludes, is that both thinkers were interested in the search for an ideal language, and that Leibniz used Wilkins's list of definitions. The rest is 'Rekonstruktion und Rezeption'. In a footnote, he adds that it may have become clear that "'mein' Leibniz nicht 'Maats' Leibniz ist". The funny thing is that this has not become clear to me at all, for I perfectly agree with Dutz's observation that Leibniz's philosophical position is far removed from Wilkins's, if a consistent position can be associated with the latter's definitions at all. Indeed, I assumed that these differences would be so apparent from the short comparative table I provided that this point did not deserve separate mention. Dutz's polemic, then, is quite pointless. Yet what has become clear is that 'Dutz's Maat' is not 'my Maat', and this must probably be ascribed to 'Rekonstruktion und Rezeption', though unfortunately, as I will explain on another occasion, not of an admirable sort.

## 3. Stefano Gensini, *The Leibnitian Concept of 'Significatio'*.

The main point made in the paper is the following: Leibniz did not, in a traditional manner, regard the meaning of linguistic expressions as residing in a material or mental extra-linguistic referent. Rather, like Frege and De Saussure, he distinguished an autonomous level of linguistic meaning. Gensini substantiates this claim by examining, first, two early essays by Leibniz, in the latter of which Leibniz introduced the notion of 'significatio' as 'a pure linguistic entity'. Next, Gensini examines fragments that are related to Leibniz's project of a *characteristica universalis*. It appears that 'blind thought', which is characterized by a vague 'sense' that is present in the mind, as opposed to the fully explicated 'significatio', is just as essential for ordinary language use as it is for the *characteristica universalis*. Thirdly, Gensini discusses the *Nouveaux Essais*, in which Leibniz clearly confirms 'the autonomy of

the semantic side of languages'. In a final section, Gensini argues against recent attempts to depict Leibniz as an Adamicist and as a precursor of modern theories of a 'language of thought'.

Bringing together a wealth of relevant material, Gensini makes some interesting further points. For instance, he persuasively argues that Leibniz's views cannot be understood without taking into account the distinction between the historical order, to which our thoughts and our language use belong on the one hand, and the metaphysical order, the 'realm of ideas', fully grasped only by God on the other hand. Further, Gensini rightly points out that it would be a mistake to associate Leibniz's ideas on natural languages with a mystical view on language.

4. Ludger Kaczmarek, *Organisation, Kommunikation, Formentstehung. Resonanzen eines begrifflichen Feldes bei Leibniz und in der Gegenwart.*

Kaczmarek draws attention to aspects of Leibniz's solution to the mind-body problem which he says are of interest for linguistics and communication theory. Leibniz's metaphysical concept of psycho-physical relations is modelled on mutual interaction and communication. The world is a sensible structure, organised with respect to a goal. The laws of nature underlying matter are not questioned but subsumed under a metaphysical perspective. Kaczmarek observes that questions occupying Leibniz, such as whether life can be sufficiently explained by mechanical laws or whether it is necessary to assume goal-directed principles of organisation, still have not received a definitive answer. Further, there are non-trivial parallels between Leibniz's theory of pre-established harmony and recent theorizing on 'morphic fields' by Sheldrake. Leibniz's concept of harmony, which is central to his philosophy, is a precondition of, or even coincides with 'communication'. Kaczmarek also explores the relations between Bisterfeld's concept of 'immetatio', the theological concept of 'perichoresis', and Leibniz's central concept of relational, communicative harmony between everything that exists.

5. Maurizio Matteuzzi, *Leibniz e i sincategoremi.*

From the *De Arte Combinatoria* (1666) on, Leibniz was concerned to derive a truth condition for all propositions from an arrangement of terms. This posed the problem of what role is to be assigned to the syncategorematic part of language. Matteuzzi discusses various solutions Leibniz considered to cope with this problem. In the 1666 tract, Leibniz used the Greek article to represent relational terms, thus indicating that these terms belong to a metalinguistic level. In the *Generales Inquisitiones* (1686), Leibniz attempts reductions of partial terms, such as 'similar', to integral terms, that is terms which can be the subject or the predicate of a proposition. Thus, 'similar to A' is an integral term. As Matteuzzi shows, Leibniz then realizes that he cannot not do without certain particles, and that particles are to be divided into primitive ones and composed ones. At this point, a new problem arises. Whereas integral terms are combined in a single way following the single rule of juxtaposition, particles combine in diverse ways. Leibniz declares this problem unsolvable as long as a list of primitive terms and primitive particles has not been established. After providing a provisional list, Leibniz is diverted by more pressing thoughts. In later writings, he did not come back to the problem, which thus remained unsolved. By way of afterthought,

Matteuzzi argues that Leibniz was correct in trying to make the structure of his language isomorphic with that of the world.

6. Francesco Piro, *Are the 'Canals of Tropes' Navigable? Rhetoric Concepts in Leibniz' Philosophy of Language.*

The rhetorical tradition recognised the function of figurative language not only to adorn speech but also to supplement the poverty of literal language. Leibniz transformed this insight into an explanation for semantic change: the semantic potential of a language evolves through the 'canales troporum'. In an illuminating article, Piro examines the various, sometimes implicit expressions of Leibniz's views on tropes through his early and mature writings. Tropes are important in the first place within the context of investigations into natural languages, but Leibniz also explores the etymology of prepositions within the context of his search for a philosophical language. Although the present meaning of a word ('usus') can sometimes be traced back to an earlier or the earliest meaning ('origo') through the channels of tropes, this often fails because there are no rules determining these meaning changes. Thus the opaqueness of ordinary language results from arbitrary transformations on originally 'natural' signs. These transformations are no instances of degeneration; on the contrary, they are means to enlarge the expressive power of languages and to allow a more rational use of signs. Leibniz's views on tropes, Piro concludes, are not only concerned with explaining meaning change in natural languages, but are directed to a deeper problem: "to connect language and time, language and contingency".

7. Olga Pombo, *Leibnizian Strategies for the Semantic Foundation of Universal Language.*

Central to Leibniz's project of a universal language, Pombo points out, is his cognitive conception of language, that is, the view that language is not merely instrumental in communicating, but also in constituting thought and further, that language has heuristic potentialities. In order to create a universal language having great heuristic power, Leibniz followed two strategies. The first one is to establish an exhaustive list of primitive ideas into which all our concepts can be resolved. Since this approach faces insurmountable difficulties, Leibniz tried a second strategy, which is connected with his views on the 'representativity of the sign'. Three seemingly contradictory projects are in fact part of a single effort, unified by Leibniz's concern with this representativity of the sign: the study of natural languages, the search for a rational grammar and the construction of a universal language. The second strategy consists in applying the discoveries concerning the motivated origin of natural languages and the deep structure underlying these languages to the new philosophical language. This result concerning the internal structure of Leibniz's views, Pombo claims, has interesting external implications in that it may help us to reconsider our ideological belief in the arbitrariness of language.

Pombo justifiably distinguishes two Leibnizian approaches towards the construction of a philosophical language, which distinction was already made by Couturat (1901). However, both Pombo and Couturat fail to see that in terms of strategies, the first approach using primitive ideas was never really an option for Leibniz. Although the theoretical framework starts from primitive ideas and their

combination, in practice the primitives function as the end towards which progressive steps in analysis are directed. From his earliest writings on, Leibniz makes clear that this analysis takes existing languages as a starting point. A more serious objection concerns Pombo's principal claim that Leibniz tried to construct, in a sophisticated manner, a language which was 'natural' in the seventeenth century sense of the term. This claim is based, among other things, upon the premiss that Leibniz tried "to avoid the complete formalism of a well made but empty language". This is to misrepresent Leibniz's primary concern, which was precisely to construct a completely formal language. In his view however, such a language is not 'empty', i.e., disconnected from reality, but structured in such a way that syntactic and semantic correctness coincide.

8. H. Walter Schmitz, *Ungeheuer über Leibniz und die cognitio symbolica-Tradition*. Schmitz is not directly concerned with Leibniz, but with the views of Gerold Ungeheuer (1930-1982), as expounded in a series of studies edited by Schmitz (1990). Ungeheuer's studies deal with the *Cognitio Symbolica* tradition, which originated with Plato and extends into the present. Leibniz occupies a central position in this tradition. 'Cognitio Symbolica' involves knowledge with the help of symbols, but comprises in addition that of the 'entia rationis', 'things of thought', which is the ontological correlate of the human capacity of phantasy and imagination. In the tradition of Western thought, entia rationis are to a large degree dependent on language. According to Ungeheuer, Leibniz integrates both Suarez's and Ockham's ideas into his conception of 'cognitio symbolica', i.e. knowledge by means of signs. Since this type of knowledge, which forms the lion's share of what we know, is blind, the certainty of knowledge is constantly in danger. Hence Leibniz's effort to make knowledge more reliable by analyzing it into first elements. Ungeheuer traces the tradition further in later writers such as Nietzsche, Bühler and Wundt. Rather than viewing the history of ideas as a sequence of periods, Ungeheuer was convinced that behind these periods a more fundamental process takes place, in which the same basic stances keep reappearing.

9. Giovanna Varani, *Leibniz' Rezeption der Aristotelischen Dialektik*. Aristotle's 'art of disputation', also known as dialectic or topics, constituted a special kind of rationality, distinct from deductive thinking: to be successful in a debate requires the use of artifices besides methodical processes. Varani examines Leibniz's reception of Aristotelian dialectic, a subject that, she claims, has hitherto been scantily studied. Presenting a broad sketch of Aristotelianism and Ramism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Varani argues that Leibniz's general attitude towards Aristotle was both approving and critical. As for dialectic, he identified this with the art of invention in his early writings. In the Parisian years the art of invention gained prominence and was developed in a mathematical sense. In the *Nouveaux Essais* Leibniz repeated his criticism of the abuse of dialectical artifices, but he maintained that the use of some types of dialectical argument is sometimes justified. In the *Theodicee*, finally, he judged positively of Aristotelian dialectic, and did not hesitate to use dialectical artifices for his discussion of theological matters.

Jaap Maat, *Amsterdam*