MAN AS A SPIRIT – UNDERSTANDING, REASON, AND SPIRITUAL MEMBRANE IN LEIBNIZ'S METAPHYSICS

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Abstract. I will focus in this paper on three aspects: understanding, good, and spiritual membrane. Although for reason we are referred to the term "understanding", Leibniz did not make any explicit difference between intellect and reason, just as, for example, we can clearly see in Kant and in the era that followed him. In this way an extremely interesting game arose with the two fundamental aspects of the human being, let's call them intellectual capacities and reason capacities. In order to approach the principal interrogation of our research – what is the nature of man as spirit? – we need to start with a comprehensive meaning of understanding, moving on to understanding as a means of behaving and finishing with understanding as means of harmony – the perfect, empathic understanding. On the base of this act, in the final part of the paper, I will propose an image relating to hermeneutic of man as a monad; in my view on Leibniz, man is a spirit means that the monad is a set of spiritual membranes.

Keywords: early modern philosophy; reason; understanding; good; membrane; monad; Leibniz; Kant; Heidegger; Marion.

One of the first occurrences, if not the first, of the term *reason* in the title of a written work is given by Leibniz: *The principles of natures and grace founded in reason* (1714). In this work we can see that Leibniz owes a lot to the era of reason[1] and, simultaneously, with some elements, the extent to which he goes beyond his era with his remarks. Not at all by coincidence, Leibniz tried in the first part of his philosophical

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[1] In the sens of Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason* (1795). Abreviations: A: Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Darmstadt und Berlin, 1923 ff; GP: *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Leibniz*, hrsg. C.I. Gerhardt, 7 vol., Berlin, 1875–1890 (Hildesheim, Olms, 1960–1961); GM: *Leibnizens mathematische Schriften*, hrsg. C.J. Gerhardt, 7 vol., Berlin, A. Asher et co., 1849–1863 (reimpr. Hildesheim, Olms, 1962); L: GW Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, tr. Leroy E. Loemker, second edition, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1969.

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career to make peace between Aristotle and the moderns, and in the final part (precisely after 1695–1696) he followed with making peace among the moderns with something that went far beyond the standard modern world.[2] In this perspective, the relevance of Leibniz is always a theme that needs to be underlined by the research of the 21ˢᵗ century.

I will focus in this paper on three aspects: understanding, good, and spiritual membrane. Although for reason we are referred to the term understanding, the relation with the intellect must be made clear: Leibniz did not make any explicit difference between intellect and reason, just as, for example, we can clearly see in Kant and in the era that followed him. In this way an extremely interesting game arose with the two fundamental aspects of the human being, let's call them intellectual capacities and reason capacities.

So that we can approach the principal interrogation of our research – what is the nature of man as monad? – we need to start with a comprehensive meaning of understanding, moving on to understanding as a means of behaving and finish with understating as means of harmony – the perfect, empathic understanding. On the base of this act, in the final part of the paper, I will propose an image relating to hermeneutic of man as a monad; in my view on Leibniz, man is a spirit means that the monad is a set of spiritual membranes.

1. REASON AND SUFFICIENT REASON

In his *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686), Leibniz shows that God is a being that possesses supreme and infinite understanding, meaning that he has a supreme knowledge, if we refer to the theoretic part, and an accomplished action, if we refer to the practical part. We see that both of the aspects are strongly linked to the intellect and reason, because these are the most important characteristics of man as reasonable being.[3]

According to the moderns (Descartes, Newton etc.), Leibniz seeks to underline that the divine freedom does not mean arbitrarily introducing the divine knowledge or action. God is free does not mean he does whatever he wants (in opposition, the human cannot do whatever he wants), but instead means that he does the greatest good, everything he does is the most perfect. The argument brought by Leibniz is theoretic (abstract) the choice between A and B. If God would choose A without having any doubts that would be an action not worth of a praise. That would not mean freedom; God is free in the mean that he would choose the best choice, the one completely bound by reason. "Besides these moderns insist on certain untenable subtleties, for they imagine that nothing is so perfect that there is not something more perfect, which is an error. They believe also that thus they are safeguarding God's freedom, as though it were not the highest freedom to

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[2] I will name the age after modernity with the expression "age of spirit" – for more details, see Adrian Nita, *Epoca spiritului* (Age of spirit), Iasi, Institutul European, 2020.

[3] Leibniz, *Discours on Metaphysics* I, L 303.

act in perfection according to sovereign reason. For to think that God acts in any matter without having any reason for his will, even overlooking the fact that this seems impossible, is an opinion which is hardy in accord with God's glory."[4]

A clearer image is offered in *Essays of theodicy*, in which, in his last paragraphs, Leibniz shows very clearly what the choice of the best of all possible worlds means. The fact that our world, one of the possible worlds that exists in the divine intellect, is chosen to be made in existence purely by supported by a basis, by a reason; the world in which we live is the best one, or, in another perspective, the world that we live in is the least evil one of all.[5]

We see in *Essays of theodicy* that Leibniz makes a distinct difference between intellect and reason, however he does not name it, he does not underline this difference. Let's think about a possible world just like an assembly of phrases "the book of destinies", the term used by Leibniz, on this base we can gather all the true phrases in the world inside the world L, in book C; in world L1 we have all the phrases in the L world, except one, in the C1 book; in the world L2 we have all the true phrases from L1 except one, in book C2, and so on to infinity. We can imagine of course, infinite values, because it is hard for the human mind to understand what a book with an infinite phrase looks like. Having infinite understanding, the creator can read the infinity of books and compare the good in all of them. After the "weighing" of the good, he will choose the world that has the largest amount of good. Only now does the reason intervene with an outstanding capacity of intellect.

In *Essays of theodicy*, 413–417, we see how Sextus Tarquinius comes to Jupiter to complain about his fate and asks for one that is better and happier. Jupiter response is that if he gives up on Rome, in his will of claiming the crown of Rome, he would have a better fate. Unable to make such a sacrifice, Sextus goes to Rome, causing havoc, making many bad things, and so doing he was banished by his parents, beaten and unhappy.

Theodor, The Great Sacrificator, who assisted at the discussion between Sextus and Jupiter, is convinced that the evil of Sextus comes from his free will and not from Jupiter. To understand how this is possible he is carried by the goddess Pallas Athena through the Destiny Palace in which there are represented not only what was happening, but also all the possibilities. Every world is a room in which the events are different from the one next to it. Every one of them has something of the true Sextus, but not all that was already known about the true Sextus. So the world in which Sextus is happy is found, another one in which Sextus is satisfied with a mediocre fate, a multitude of infinite Sextus and infinite types of Sextus. For example, in a world Sextus listened to Jupiter, goes in a city, in which when he bought a small garden he found a treasure, living a rich life, respected and loved until his elder age. In another world Sextus goes to Traces, he marries with the king's daughter and succeeds him on the throne.

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[4] L 305.

[5] Paul Rateau, *Leibniz et le meilleur des mondes possibles*, Paris, Garnier, 2015, ch. 1.

Each world has all the events described to the point in the book of destinies, which is present in each room, all the history of all the member being readable and described to that point. The palace rooms are organized in the form of a pyramid, becoming more beautiful as you reach the top of the pyramid, where the most beautiful room is found, that is, the perfect one. The palace, says Leibniz, has a top, but no base, it has a beginning, but the end cannot be seen, since the possible worlds descends regarding to their perfect grade, to infinity. In the room at the top of the pyramid, Theodor sees Sextus just as he is in reality, his actual image, coming out of the temple mad, not considering Jupiter's advice, going to Rome, where he causes disorder, and doing many evil things, and so being banished by his parents, beaten and unhappy.[6]

The unsettling questions "why does something exist rather than nothing?" sends us directly to the great principle of which nothing is done without sufficient reason. The question is persistent, because the "nothing" is much simple and easy to obtain. You don't have to do a thing to get nothing. So, if nothing is much simpler, why is it that something exists? To see the reason of the world we need to step out of the contingent line of things, because a contingent thing gives birth to the same contingent thing. Or, in the perspective of movement; to explain the movement of things, we need a prime moving thing that is not necessarily bound to the other moving things. To the matter, the movement and the repose are indifferent, given the fact that they are simple properties – o modern conquest; after Aristotle and the millennia that followed him, things were different.[7] If we go back to the series of contingent things (or the things that are moving/in repose) we cannot find a final element. However far we can proceed, we can always find a contingent element (moving/in repose).

The sufficient reason of the contingent things must be found then outside of that series, in a substance that is the cause of the series itself. Being the cause of the series, this necessary substance has its cause in itself[8] and this exactly is God.[9]

The important category of sufficient reason it is seen put to work in *Monadology* 32: "and the second [is] the principle of sufficient reason, by virtue of which we observe that there can be found no fact that is true or existent, or any true proposition, without there being a sufficient reason so and not otherwise, although we cannot know these reasons in most cases."[10]

The principle gives sense to both the phrases and also to the actions, or, by Leibniz terms, both to the essence and the existence. Moreover, the principal functions for both the series of things and actions in the world, and also to the possible things and actions in the possible worlds we covered above. To say that without reason, nothing is existent (the

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[6] Leibniz, *Essay on theodicy*, par. 413–417.

[7] For details on the repose as a natural state of a body, see Aristotle, *Physics* I, 7; on the motion as realization of a potentiality, see Physics, III, 2.

[8] See also Spinoza, *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata et in quinque partes distincta* I.

[9] Leibniz, *The principles of nature and of grace, based on reason*, 7–8; L 638–639.

[10] *Monadology* 32; L 646.

world we live in), but also that nothing would be possible (the possible worlds) shows the strong engagement of the author of *Monadology* to the modern reason.[11]

2. UNDERSTANDING AND COMPREHENSION

As a major versant of reason, the understanding has as a prime meaning the comprehensive aspect, just like we see in whole Leibnizian work, from the first writings to the last. For example, in the famous letter to Johann Friedrich von Hannover, in the fall of 1679 (when Leibniz was 33 years old), after he returned from France, Leibniz presents the project to an ample catholic demonstration. A true program of research, just as it was built in science by Newton and his research from *The mathematical principles of natural philosophy* (1687), the catholic demonstrations are previewed in three parts: the demonstration of God's existence and of the soul, the proof of the Christian religion on the topic of mysteries, reincarnation, Eucharist and finally the proofs of the Church and its authority.[12] The work needed the proper philosophical fundaments, named by Leibniz "the true philosophy" or "the reform of philosophy", in which the logic the physics and the moral are treated in order.[13] After the sketch of building and the basis, he follows the sketch of the cupola: Leibniz needs the project of an universal language that means to make all the reason to be some sort of mathematical calculation used for both invention and for demonstration.[14]

The reason put to work can contribute decisively, Leibniz thinks, to the progress of understanding, and the universal harmony of humans, states, religions, confessions etc. This ideal of universal peace, which comes on the line of the Enlightenment, can be seen in the context of an era that is extremely shaken by conflicts, that doubts the fundamental values of the European civilization, such as true, good, justice etc.

Although the understating will lead in time to the rising of the scope of knowledge, by the general science and especially by the art of inventing, the humanity will be able to minimize the books in which they deposit the information. This paradox is possible not only by the discovery of corollary, axioms, laws etc., but also by the facts that we can find everything with the help of general science of the art of inventing.[15]

Composed by a vocabulary and grammar, the universal language sketched by Leibniz, wishes to be formed by simple elements and, simultaneously, easy to use. These special characters (that gives the name of the universal characteristic to the instrument that Leibniz worked on all his career) were in fact real: he was going to relate the correspondence that existed between things and ideas.[16] If we talk about the time before

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[11] *Monadologie 43*; L 647.
[12] Letter to John Frederick, 1679, A II, 1, 756–757; L 260.
[13] The three parts are the same as those of stoic philosophy, or at Gassendi.
[14] Letter to John Frederick, 1679, A II, 1, 756–757; L 261–262.
[15] Leibniz, *Discourse on the method of certainty and the art of invention*, GP VII, 179–180.
[16] *Dialogue [on the conection between things and words and to the reality of truth]* (1677), L 182–185.

1679, Leibniz took care to give numbers, at the same time with the rehabilitation of the substantial forms he has the possibility of creating the universal characteristic on this metaphysic fundament.[17] In *On the caracteristic numbers* it is showing the need to leave the logic to the principles[18] – an Aristotelian idea, it is true, it is put in modern context by Leibniz. The way that leads the reason is discovered by the construction of the characteristic: to have characteristically numbers for all the useful ideas.[19]

At the same time in *Verbal Characteristic* (1679), after he shows that the universal language can leave out the declination, conjugations, even the difference between the noun and the adjective, it is made clear the ideal character (abstract) of the concept: the concepts are some kinds of essence: we obtain them just like the alchemists obtain their substances. If we refer to humans, we must propose that some kind of seed exists in each human in the virtue that all the human is the same as any other member of the species. Without being identical, considering the famous law of indiscernibility for the identic people, the humans have a common core, namely a substantial form.[20]

3. UNDERSTANDING AND INTELLECT

Somehow consonant with the understanding based on the substantial forms it is found in Leibniz the sense of understanding centered on the corporal substance, namely the one from the maturity time of the philosopher from Hanover (1680–1695).

Beyond the capacity of understanding the meanings and the links of the phenomenon, named above comprehension, the understanding can be seen as another versant of the intellect like the capacity of thinking. We already saw that Leibniz does not identify, in one way, the intellect and the reason, but neither the intellect nor the judgment. From this perspective, we need to say a few words about the understanding as a mean of intellect.

Probably, the clearest aspect regarding the role of the intellect as a fundamental human capacity is seen in the dispute between empiricism and rationalism – as we can see in the famous work *New essays about the human understanding*.[21] At the same time, in *On the things that are beyond senses and matter*, a lesser known paper, Leibniz does not negate the fact that we receive information by senses about the sensible qualities of the objects of experience. But the senses cannot teach us about the nature of this qualities. And so, the notions of the sensible qualities, although clear, are not distinct. The notion of "blue" can be used to recognize a blue object, and in this

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[17] *De numeris characteristicis ad linguam universalem constituendam* (On the caracteristic numbers uses for the creation of a universal language (1679), A VI, 4, 263–270.

[18] *Ibidem.*

[19] *Ibidem.*

[20] *Characteristica verbalis*, A VI, 4, 333–337.

[21] Leibniz, *New essays about the human understanding*, IV.

sense, we have a clear notion, but we cannot support all the characteristics of the color blue that we use to differ the blue objects from other objects, and in this sense the notion is not distinct.[22]

This lack of understanding of the sensible qualities appears even clearer if we comparatively consider what the intellect does. The author of the work *About the things that are independent from the senses and matter* shows that the object is known with the help of the intellect are demonstrative, dodged by doubts and subjectivity. As a paradigmatic example of this it is given the objects of my thoughts when I am thinking about myself. With the help of this notion, I can simultaneously know the sensible objects and my thoughts about it. We arrive to the formation of some notions such as: the substance, the truth, the being etc.[23]

We see how the intellect, as an eminent capacity of understanding, is the one that singularizes through all the living things – an idea that is well underlined in the latter works. For example, in *Monadology*, quite rashly is the shifting from the intellect (intellection, understating) to reason (causes, morality, spirituality) made. Ranking the monadology, Leibniz makes the difference between the simple monades (which have appetition and perception),[24] the souls (which are filled with appetition, distinct perception, memory)[25] and the reasonable souls (filled with appetition, distinct perception, memory and reason).[26]

We see how beyond the understanding as a means of intellect, Leibniz introduces a stronger capacity that differentiates us not only on the materiality line, but also through the spiritual beings. The human has reason for both knowing, namely for inventing science, and also for being in relationship with God; if the understanding intellect is a king of mirror-knowledge of the physical world, the reason understanding makes us the mirror of divinity. We see how the 29–30 paragraphs from *Monadology* makes a direct link with the writing from two decades ago, *About the things that are independent from senses and matter*. Continuing the image proposed within the metaphysical corporal substance, the monadological metaphysics adds two extremely important ideas for our research: the shifting from the intellect to reason, respectively the shifting from the universe to the world.

The first idea marks the rashly shifting operated by Leibniz from the intellect to reason; in my opinion this means the shifting from the intellect understanding to the rational understanding. To greatly underline the difference operated by Leibniz, let's imagine a thinking experiment about the human ages. In the first years (the first two), the children have a mind, they can make operations related to the intellectual understanding; however, they don't have the capacity of rational understanding. Only at four-five years of age, some satisfactory answered can be produced for the demands of

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[22] *L* 548 sq.
[23] *Ibidem.*
[24] *Monadology*, par. 14–15.
[25] *Monadology*, par. 19
[26] *Monadology*, par. 29.

rational understanding. For example, we can ask a two years old kid to choose between cubes that have different numbering operations, adding or subtracting, on them. For a four-five years old kid we can use cubes that have illustration on them on which we can request an explanation about the cause of a phenomenon. The task will be executed with satisfaction by the four-five years old kid. However, for a two years old kid it would be hard, near to impossible to give causal explanations, or, even better, reasons regarding the good, the right, the just etc.

The second aspect we want to underline is that in *Monadology*, and generally in the writings from the monadological period (1696–1716), another rashly shift is made, without any precautions, from the universe to the world. For example, In *Monadology*, from the beginning and until paragraph 54 the term "universe" is used, and then after that the category of "world" is used in five contexts, even if the use of the "universe" category is still used. If Leibniz talks about the infinity of "possible universes" in the 53th paragraph, in the next one, 54th, he supports that the reason of which the universe in which we live in exists is linked by the "convenience", namely the grades of perfection contained by this world, each having the right to pretend to the existence in the measure of the perfection they have.[27]

Or, exactly here we need to observe that it is about *the ultimate reason of the existence of the world* in which we live in: intellect (wisdom) is presented to God, kindness makes him chose it, and power allows him to bring it into existence – God being simultaneously gifted with infinite intellect, immeasurable kindness and infinite power.

If inside the 65th paragraph it is supported the infinite division of the matter, in the 66th are presented the consequences of this idea; even in the smallest portion of matter a world of creatures, beings, animals, entities, souls can be found. Just as the universe is infinite, it must be that a monad to have the capacity to reflect this infinity. In this sense, the monad is a unit of multiples.[28]

In *Monadology*, 82nd paragraph, it is stated that the souls must be considered reasonable souls, namely that they are placed on the highest step of the hierarchy of simple substances. Being of immaterial nature, the soul can have eternal duration, it begins at the same time with the world and will last just as much as the world will. As spirits, the souls are the ones that assure the unity, the being and the reality of this whole that is the living being, animal or human.[29] And so, each soul is a kind of divinity in its own domain (its area of cover), namely a monarch and architect, in its world.[30]

Exactly on this line comes the fifth occurrence of the "world" category. In the 86th paragraph it is stated that God's domain is "a moral world in a natural world".[31]

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[27] *Monadology*, par. 53–54.
[28] *Ibidem*, par. 65–66. On the monad as living mirror, see Ohad Nachtomy, *Living mirrors: infinity, unity, and life in Leibniz's philosophy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2019.
[29] *Monadology*, par. 82.
[30] *Monadology*, par. 89.
[31] *Ibidem*.

God is simultaneously monarch and architect: he built the universe, gave birth to the universe machine[32] and, simultaneously, is monarch, ruler of the spiritual domain.[33]

The interpretation that I propose to this essential aspect of Leibnizian metaphysic is the following: Leibniz needed to separate the scientific knowledge of the *universe* from the spiritual knowledge of the *world*. The universe and the world are, in my interpretation, distinct categories: to the universe we have access by science, through intellect and reason namely intellection and comprehension; however, to the spiritual world, to divinity, we have access through a reasonable soul – in Leibniz terms; we can know the universe through intellectual understanding, respectively we can ascend to the divine domain through reasonable understanding. This reasonable understanding from the Leibnizian metaphysics is what I have called spirit.[34]

4. THE INFINITE UNDERSTANDING

This endless Leibnizian dance with reason leads as, like we've seen above, from understanding as a mean of intellection and comprehension to understanding as a mean of reason, namely it is leading us straight to reason. In a way, for Leibniz the "reason" category denotes science, namely the possibility of knowing the universe, but also, simultaneously it means God.

God as the ultimate reason comes to enhance the need to separate the world from the universe. Leibniz cannot follow the way traced by the moderns (Descartes, Galileo, Newton etc.) about the scrutiny of the universe, namely strictly the way that would have led to the invention of modern science. This extra element is the one that makes Leibniz rehabilitate substantial forms (in his early works) or to create the monadological system. He appears to his contemporaries as an anti-modern, because he walked on the path traced by the ancients and scholars. The proposed change at the same time with the monadological metaphysics (after 1696) allows him to emphasize exactly these aspects of surpassing his era, but not towards the past, to Aristotle and the scholars, but to our modernization, of the 21st century. Between the 17th and 19th century reason was not only the supreme instance, but it was the only instance. Through his monadological metaphysics, Leibniz manages to be a modern and at the same time our contemporary, as we see in the letter addressed to Sophie Charlotte in 1702. God is the ultimate reason of all the things, thanks to the link he has with all the natural parts. Just as the human have something immaterial, the light of reason, that allows them to know and to act inside a limited domain and less extended compared to the proper force of divinity.[35]

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[32] To more details, see Michel Fichant, *Leibniz et les machines de la nature*, *Studia Leibnitiana*, Bd 35, H 1, 2003, pp. 1–28.

[33] Juan Antonio Nicolas, *Körper, Geist, Monaden: Monadologie und Metaphysik bei Leibniz*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 2020.

[34] Adrian Nita, *Epoca spiritului* (Age of spirit), *ed. cit.*, Ch. 4.

[35] Leibniz, *On what is independent of sense and of matter* (1702), L 551–552.

Reason is the ground both for knowledge (when we take it as a means of intellect), and also for action; the virtue, the happiness come from here.[36] Understanding the thing in this way, it is easy to observe that reason in Leibnizian sense is not the reason of Descartes, or the reason as a faculty of ideas in a Kantian sense.[37] Reason, in the interpretation that we propose in this research is a spiritual reason, namely a reason that is close to what we understand today as spirit – sometimes, even Leibniz uses the „spirit" category just to refer to reason.[38] „But it is the knowledge of necessary and eternal truths which distinguishes us from simple animals and gives us *reason* and the science, lifting us to the knowledge of ourselves and of God. It is this within us which we call the rational soul or spirit."[39]

Referring to the human, the intellective understanding appears, of course, as being limited, however the one proper to God is limitless. How to understand this intellection? If in the logic writings, Leibniz offers a response through the link that exists between the parts of a syllogism, in *Disputatio metaphysica de principio individui* (*Metaphysical dispute about the principle of individuality*) – from 1663, the intellectual understanding is that operation of the intellect through which the separated things are linked, just like for example the individualities are within the universal.[40]

The human has finite understanding meaning that he can know the contingent truths, but cannot extend to infinity this series of knowledge. No matter how much the knowledge will progress, the human cannot reach the end of the series of causes if the series is infinite.[41] In this manner the human has an intellectual knowledge only of the world in which he lives, namely the only world from the infinity of worlds that exists in the divine intellect. This is what we call science. However, God has knowledge in the means of wisdom, namely an infinite intellectual knowledge, because he knows all possible worlds.

5. REASON AS LAW

The fact that the principle of sufficient reason functions both at the level of real existence and also at the level of possible existence he must be underlined very strong, especially though the perspective of two philosophical consequences. Firstly, as we already mentioned, the reason gives means to the series of contingent things. So, the

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[36] Paul Rateau, *Leibniz et le meilleur des mondes possibles*, ed. cit., III.

[37] On Kant and the early modern philosophy, see Désiré Nolen, *La critique de Kant et la métaphysique de Leibniz*, Paris, Germer Baillière, 1875 (reprint L'Harmattan, preface Adrian Nita, Paris, 2006), Daniel Garber, Béatrice Longuenesse (eds.), *Kant and the Early Moderns*, Princeton University Press, 2008; Brandon Look, *Leibniz and Kant*, Oxford University Press, 2021.

[38] Leibniz, *On what is independent of sense and of matter* (1702), L 551–552.

[39] *Monadology*, par. 29; L 645.

[40] *Disputatio metaphysica de principio individui, A VI, 1,* 17–19; GP IV, 23–26.

[41] *Generales inquisitiones de analysi notionum et veritatum* (General researches on the analysis of notions and truths), 1686, A VI, 4, 777.

reason is not only the instance that verifies the upholding of a few criteria of order, harmony, etc., not only is it the supreme instance regarding the shifting from one state to another (the relation with the perception and the appetition appears in a clear light), but also the fact that the reason is responsible of the series itself, namely the assembly of contingent things. As long as Leibniz states that God is the sufficient reason that we find when we want to explain the series of things, we see, in fact, that Leibniz identifies reason with God.

In order to clearly, maybe, these aspects, we can go in reverse, from God to the series of contingent things: this way it can be sustained that God is the architect of the world we live in. He makes these exact things, the acts, the events happening, by the choice he makes between the infinite possible worlds that exists in the divine intellect.

The second aspect comes to underline the importance that Leibniz gives to the function of the principle at the level of essence and existence: reason is the fundamental law of existence. To clearly see this aspect let's remember how, in Newton, the law of universal attraction is the one that assures the unity of the universe, namely it structured the universe to be uniform, homogenous, open and infinite. To the contrary, the classic Greek-Latin cosmos, which functioned for more than a millennium, presents the things completely different: what is happening on Earth is an imperfect copy of what is happening in the Sky, the lower part is imperfect, fleeting, ugly, and fallen; the upper part is perfect, eternal, beautiful etc.[42]

Leibniz poses as a modern by the maintain of the universe understanding, but simultaneously by the accent put on reason as a fundamental law – as we will detail in the following chapters – he wants to bring God into the equation, especially as a reaction to the atheist consequences of modern theories. Even if both Descartes, and also Newton tried to reject some of the atheist consequences, the theories that they sustained were not, for a person as devoted as Leibniz, satisfactory. The implementing of reason as a means for God, or in the means of law, as a structured elements comes to underline Leibniz's need to safeguard the faith in front of the invention of modern science (physics).[43]

The fact that just the reason is the term he uses makes us see how Leibniz is situated, in one point of view, in comparison with the dominant trend of modernization; the reason appears to the modern as a vein instance, namely one that pretends the absolute truth of the self-promotion of the observer, of the ideal condition of knowledge etc. Leibniz, as a scientist and a philosopher, knew very well that such ideal conditions cannot exist for the human being, because the human cannot manifest his emotions and feelings, even when they are doing science.

We see in this way how many meanings are the ones that Leibniz works with when he uses "reason". And for things to be even more complicated, I will underline

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[42] Alexande Koyré, *Galileo and Plato*, "Journal of the History of Ideas", vol. IV, n. 4, 1943, pp. 400–428.

[43] On Leibniz's theology, especially the theology of love, see Maria Rosa Antognazza, *Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrines*, In *The Oxford Handbook of Leibniz*, Oxford University Press, Online Publication, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199744725.013.45; idem, *Leibniz: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016.

that there is a meaning through which Leibniz is distancing himself even more from his contemporaries when it comes to the role of reason and understanding – I have in mind the relation with the spirit.

6. REASON AS SPIRIT

Leibniz takes the clearest distance from the moderns when he understands the man as a spirit. We already saw something very close by approaching the aspects of reason as God. But, in *Monadology*, a supplementary meaning appears. After he shows that the simple substance is gifted with perception and appetition, and the souls have, as a plus, distinctive perception and memory, we need something more to particularize the humans in the ranks of simple substances. Contrary to the animals, the human has reason through which he can rise to the "knowledge of eternal and necessary truths". At the same time, through reason, the human knows the things that belongs to the universe he lives in (i.e., science), but can also rise to the knowledge of God. As a reasonable soul, the spirit is the things that makes the human have "reflexive acts", to thinks about the "me", "I", and to form philosophical categories.[44]

On this ground, Leibniz sustains that we have access simultaneously to nature and to God. Although the way to know nature (science) is different from the way to know God (theology), the possibility of communication between the two is left opened; between science and theology there is no rupture, just like we see at many moderns, because the reason is the one that offers this common access.

Plus, in spite of the reason as a topic and in spite of reason as a law, Leibniz introduces in the game some sort of super-principle, named *the optimum law*, through which God and the wise choose between the largest quantity of good. Whether we talk about the series of contingent things (something is happening by virtue of the fact that it was good to happen), or about the choice of the best world from all the possible worlds (the best world is always choses), the super-principle of good structurates both the essence and the existence, to use the Leibnizian terms, namely its structurates the world in which we live in, and also each of the possible worlds that exists in the divine intellect.

We clearly observe these aspects in the Leibniz–Clarke correspondence – just because the dialogue marks the differences between a scientific view of the world – which came from the line of the intellectual understanding and a metaphysical view of the world – which came from the line of reasonable understanding (spiritual). And so, it is done that the two approaches show the different paradigms about space, time, freedom, God etc. No wonder that Kant was not only impressed, but also profoundly influenced by this debate of ideas.[45]

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[44] *Monadology*, par. 30.

[45] As it is the case on time and composition; see Adrian Nita, *La métaphysique du temps chez Leibniz et Kant*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2008, Ch. 8.

In the beginning of the dialogue, Leibniz underlines the role of reason: nothing happens without a reason. The great foundation of mathematics is the principle of contradiction, namely the one that one statement cannot be both true and false at the same time. But to shift from math to physics, we need another principle, this is the principle of sufficient reason. This principle "may demonstrate the being of a God and all the other parts of metaphysics or natural theology and even, in some measure, those principles of natural philosophy that are independent upon mathematics".[46]

Reason used to demonstrate divinity sends to the idea of the existence of the demonstrations on the base of reason for the existence of God. So, the knowledge of God cannot be made using the instruments given by the modern science, based on the size, shape, motion properties,[47] but on the metaphysical data and instruments.

Clarke responds by saying that the mathematical principles of natural philosophy are contrary to the material principles to the sense that materialists propose that the structure of the universe was produced in the virtue of mechanical principles of matter and movements. On the other hand, according to Newton, the state of things, the constitution of the planets and the Sun could have only been produced by an intelligent cause. Clarke agrees to the principle of sufficient reason, but completes it with the means that here we have to see the divine will.[48]

Leibniz response is that, although Clarke admits his principle, in fact he revokes it; for Leibniz even God listens to this fundamental principle of the world. Clarke admits the form (the announce) of the principle, but then "he adds that this sufficient reason is sometimes the simple will of God, just like when it is asked why the matter was not arranged in a different way in space, keeping the same relations between the corps. This means exactly the addition that God wants a thing without the existence of a sufficient reason for his will, against the axel, namely the general rules regarding all that it is happening. It is relapsing in things way the vague indifference that we have showed to be absolutely chimeric, even when we talk about the creatures, and it is contrary to the wisdom of God – considering that he could operate without acting to the virtue of reason."[49]

Clark responds that even though it is real that nothing exists without sufficient reason to its existence, when we are talking about the things that are indifferent in their own way, the simple will is sufficient to give them existence or to make them exist in some way.[50] The creator does not have external reasons; he chooses a state or another based on the internal reasons.[51]

In his fourth reply, Leibniz shows that will cannot exist without a reason, because this would be not only contrary to the divine perfection, but also something that is

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[46] Leibniz's second letter to Clarke, L 678.
[47] Descartes, *Meditationes de prima philosophia,* III.
[48] Clarke's second reply, L 680.
[49] Leibniz's third letter to Clarke, L 683.
[50] Clarke's third reply L 686.
[51] *Ibidem.*

contradictory.[52] God is not determined by something outside of him, but by the reasons that are inside him, namely his knowledge.[53]

Clark, in his fourth reply, says that Leibniz proposes that the motives that are with the will of the agent in the same report to the weights of the balance is a tricky image, a false one, because the balance is not an agent. The intelligent beings are agents, but the motive does not act to them in the same ways in which the weights are acting to the balance.[54] Furthermore, it is not at all impossible for God to make two drops of water that are exactly the same, even if he admits to the Leibnizian law of indiscernibility of identics. It is true that we cannot find two leaves, or two water drops that are perfectly the same, because they are composed body. The things are not the same when the parts of simple and solid matter are at hand.[55]

In his response, from the last letter, Leibniz mentions that God always choses the best solution. The contingent things exist in the virtue of sufficient reason, namely to the "principle of what is best".[56] Indiscernible are the contraries of the divine wisdom[57] – it would have been a consequence to the understanding of this world.

Arriving here we need – in order to interpret Leibniz's idea – to strongly underline the idea that the good functions as another versant of the world structure, alongside reason. As a structurant element, the good is not put in relation with the universe, but in relation with the world; the good is the principle of the world (not of the universe). Leibniz remains a modern by admitting the fact that the universe is structurated by its laws, such as the law of universal attraction and, simultaneously, makes a step beyond modernity.

As a supplementary argument, we can propose *per a contrario,* the optimal law that functions in the universe. Newton makes considerable efforts so that the physics system created can surpass the strict efficient image, determined. For example, the law of universal attraction is linked with the masse of the body inside the universe and with the distance between the bodies. No other element is needed to calculate the movement of the bodies, the trajectories, to foresee the eclipse etc. The law of attraction is not influenced by what is good for one corps or another, just as it is not even influenced by God; the system functions on its own, in the virtue of the mechanical proprieties size, shape and motion.

For Leibniz, things look different just because he does not operate with the *universe* category but with the *world* one. Just as we see in the *Essays on theodicy* the laws of the world, be it real existence or possible existence, are strongly linked to the idea of good; we live in the best world out of all because it has the capacity of the greatest good, so we picture a metaphysical scale and/or a theological one, not a scientific balance.

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[52] Leibniz's fourth letter to Clarke, L 687.
[53] *Ibidem*, L 689.
[54] Clarke's fourth reply, L 691–692.
[55] *Ibidem*, L 692.
[56] Leibniz's fifth letter to Clarke, L 697.
[57] *Ibidem*, L 700.

7. THE SPIRITUAL MEMBRANE

To undertake the category of *spiritual membrane* we already have a few important elements: understanding, reason, the good. We also need to add another aspect. We go from Heidegger, to see how the understanding (*Verstehen*) is an existential, namely the constitutive part of this privileged being that is *Dasein*.[58] When we ask the question about the being, *Dasein* understands himself in its own being, considering that the understanding of the being is itself a determination of the *Dasein* being.[59]

The understanding functions, in my interpretation, as a membrane of the *Dasein* in the sense that it is on the same plan with the-being-in-the-world, to-live-with, the-being-for-death, etc., and that it is a structure that gives meaning not only to the present, but also to the future, or, maybe, in a way, gives a more accentuated meaning to the future (because the future is a primordial ecstasy of temporality). We understand this not only from what we are now, in this moment, but moreover from the perspective of what we have in front of us, namely by the perspective of a project.[60]

As a static image, the Heideggerian metaphysic shows how the *Dasein* is – in my terms – a set of membranes (the-being-in-the-world, the mundanity, the facticity etc.) that can be mega-membranes (the existence, the facticity, the falling) or micro-membranes (understanding). Considering that the relation between these structures is not pure and simple about ordering, the image must be upgraded by adding the temporal aspects, just like we see in the second sections of the famous work *Being and Time*. Each component part, each membrane needs to be seen synchronically and diachronically. The understanding, as a fundamental membrane of *Dasein* is not just a simple sheet with a few spatial dimensions, like it is for example a physical object that has width, length and height.[61]

The relation of the world with the good can be seen in Jean Luc Marion more matching than in Heidegger (that missed, in fact, the ethical dimension of the *Dasein*). Especially in *Negative certainties* (2009), Marion demonstrates how important the reason is when we talk about the nature of the human. If for Augustine, the human is a soul (soul and body), and for Descartes and Kant the human is a reasonable being, Marion makes a step forward and considers that the human is a spiritual being. The famous meditation regarding reflection and being, which went from Augustine (from *Soliloquies*) and passes though Descartes (from *Meditations*), is related by Marion, at the beginning of the 21st century in other terms.

When I reflect, I am not certain about my existence, or, in another way, I have negative certainties, namely negations that I am needed to look over when I am asking who am I, the one who thinks. The thread of my thinking leads to me. What is this

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[58] To more details on Heidegger's metaphysics, see Walter Biemel, *Heidegger*, Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1973; Rüdiger Safranski, *Ein Meister aus Deutschland: Heidegger und seine Zeit*, München, Hanser, 1994; Otto Pöggeler, *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers*, Pfullingen, Neske, 1990 etc.

[59] Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 12.

[60] *Ibidem*, 144.

[61] To more details, see Adrian Nita, *Epoca spiritului* (Age of spirit), *ed. cit.*, pp. 134–139.

"me"? It means that I need to double myself to understand the me–me relation. But to know myself, I need to object myself. I see in this way how Socrates's phrase "know yourself" becomes "I know that I don't know myself"[62]

What puts me in the situation of knowing myself? The contact with my face, says Marion, because the face is not just a simple object to be known, but a something that glows, that irradiates intuition. Furthermore, the face shows so much intuition that it blinds myself. The face is a saturated phenomenon, namely super-intuitive, extraordinary one.[63]

Just as for Marion to determine is to negate we arrive to the idea to determine by definition the humanity is in fact to finish with the human.[64] In this way, we arrive at the idea that I can only love another that I don't know – like we have in paradigmatic mode when we talk about donation and paternity. The phenomenology of reducing the gift at donation accentuates the relation that exists between the good and the soul. The gift, in its proper sense, means something done without the terms of changing, as it is for example the gift of a flower instead of money for a service, an embrace in the form of thanksgiving or sympathy etc. The lack of materiality is needed also at the level of the one that receives (named by Marion "adonate") so that we avoid the temptation of this one to reward what he received; this is the case of a gift received by a stranger or an inheritance left to the descendants without them knowing about it etc.

If all the three aspects of the non-materialization are met (regarding the one that gives the gift, the one regarding the gift and the one regarding the one who receives it) we have a bracket of the change and we arrive at donation: I give myself; although I don't give anything, I don't receive anything, I give myself. The case of love and pater-nity can function as a paradigm (to be discussed in the case of maternity – in the *Negative certainties* it is not done.)[65]

After all these historical considerations made to show the actual context regarding the researched problem, we come back to Leibniz to underline that monad is not an atom. Furthermore, when he mentions that the monad is an atom of substance, we need to remove the aspects that lead us to the idea of body and the idea of sphericity. The monad is not a body in the sense that an electron has a body, although the monad is something, it is an entity. Having a being, and so an identity (in Quine's words[66]), the monad needs to be seen as what it is building: is that part of the world that is responsible for unity, for existence and reality.

As a thing that builds, the monad needs to be seen, in the interpretation that we propose in this paper, not by a planetary model (atomic) regarding the existence, just as the planets that circle the suns or the electrons that circles the core of an atom. Leibniz

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[62] Marion, *Certitudes négatives*, Paris, Grasset, 2009, Ch. I.

[63] *Ibidem.*

[64] *Ibidem*, ch. II.

[65] For more details on world, donation, spirit in Marion, see Adrian Nita, *Epoca spiritului* (Age of spirit), *ed. cit*., pp. 145–150.

[66] Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 23.

was and was not an atomist in the proper terms. I will underline the aspects that distance him from this understanding of the world: quasi-monism and unit in diversity.

The interpretation that I propose goes from the fact that the human being consists of body and soul as a starting point, as the first image that comes in our mind when we want to know the human nature. But to a more profound research, that has the right metaphysical instruments, we will find the matter and the form; at a level that is even more profoundly, we have primary matter united with a substantial form; and more profoundly, we will find the primitive passive force united with the active force. In this way, the Leibnizian dynamic proposes an image against the grain with the atomist approach (corpuscular), used by Galileo,[67] Descartes,[68] Newton.[69] The Leibnizian world is a system of forces, in which the laws of physics (discovered by Bruno, Kepler, Galileo, Brahe, Newton etc.) is meeting the laws of biology (Leeuwenhoek, Harvey, Hooke, Steno etc.) and the metaphysical ones (the law of reason, principle of *optimum*). Only if we have in mind this image, we will be able to understand the complexity of the metaphysical system of Leibniz, in which the category of good structures the world.

From the perspective of the couple one–many category, the monad is one in the sense that it is something simple, lacking the parts. In this way, the monad is the simplest part in the elementary sense, not in the physical sense, given the fact that it constitutes, namely structurates the world. We will never find a monad if we decompose the things in the universe.

The aspect of multiplication must be seen from the following perspective: the monad is a multiple in the sense that it has many points of view, many perspectives through which it can reflect the universe and God. This expressive capacity gives meaning to the sense of distinct perception *versus* confused perception: in the means in which the simple substance has distinct perceptions it is said that it is active, and it has confused perception the simple substance has passion.[70]

8. MONAD AS SPIRITUAL MEMBRANE

From the perspective of Leibnizian dynamics the world is a system of forces that acts and interacts, determining all that is happening at a metaphysical level, and also microphysical. In *Specimen dynamicum* (1695) Leibniz underlines the role played by the primary matter undertaken as a primitive passive force. Having an eminent capacity to divide, the matter permits a series of characteristics to be transmitted at any dimension of the world. The fact that at a macro-physical level we acknowledge harmony, order,

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[67] Galilei, *Il Sagiatore* (1623), 350–352; *Dialogues about the two system of the worlds* (1632) etc. To more details, see William R Shea, *Galileo e l'atomismo*, "Acta Philosophica", vol. 10 (2001), fasc. 2, pp. 257–272.

[68] See, for example, Descartes, *World* III.

[69] Newton, *Optica* 31.

[70] *Monadology*, par. 49. To more details on expression, see Valérie Debuiche, *Leibniz et l'expression*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2021.

homogeneity, thanks to the divisibility of the matter we will also find harmony, order and homogeneity at any micro-physical level.[71]

According to Leibniz, the body is not a simple matter in an Aristotelian or Cartesian sense, but an aggregate of monads. And so, the human is not a simple *compositum* of body–soul, but a kind of *compositum* central (dominant) monad–subordinate monad.[72]

The quasi-monist metaphysic, as we have called it,[73] can be seen as a box inside of a box, going from the macro-physical level to the micro-physical level in an undefined mode. I introduce now in the game the quasi-monist model using the rope metaphor; the human is body and soul, just as a rope is knotted by two threads twisted around each other. At a more profound level, we find matter and form; deeper, we will find primary matter united with substantial form; and even deeper, we have the primitive passive force united with active force. This last level is the one that interests us at this moment of research. The human as a system of forces, and to an extent, the world as a system of forces, if we have in mind that, according to Leibniz, we have monads and its manifestations everywhere,[74] it shows an image of a rope knotted with different force threads. Another intuitive image is offered by the string theory (from quantic physics)[75] or the chain of ADN (from modern biology).[76]

This force threads are the ultimate constituents of the world; we will not find other elements to be the fundamental constituents of the world. For example, we will not find atoms if we have the right instruments of research at a deeper lever;[77] we will find the same force threads, namely what Leibniz calls *living force*.[78]

In contrast to the accelerated force (ma), the living force ($mv2$) gives means of energy, the energetic aspects of the world. Of course, in the 17th century savants could not have been using these terms. Leibniz talked about the living force, but not about energy – a conceptual conquering of the 18th and 19th centuries. I use this term strictly to help the interpretation I propose.

To end I will retake and underline the role played by the living force in the Leibnizian metaphysics: it allows me to advance and sustain an interpretation of the monad as a set of spiritual membranes. Even if the author of the *Monadology* did not properly utilize this term, the interpretation I reached in this paper is consonant with the letter and the spirit of Leibnizian metaphysics.

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[71] Leibniz, *Specimen dynamicum* (1695), L 436–7.

[72] Leibniz, *De ipsa natura* (1698), L 503–4.

[73] See Adrian Nita, *Leibniz's quasi-monism*, Analele Universității din Craiova. Seria Filosofie, vol. 46, nr. 2, 2020, pp. 47–60.

[74] *Monadology*, par. 61.

[75] Werner Heisenberg, *Der Teil und das Ganze*, Munchen, Piper Verlag, 1969; Brian Green, *The Elegant Universe*, New York, Norton, 1999; Stephen Hawking, Leonard Mlodinov, *The Grand Design*, New York, Bantam Books, 2010; Richard Dawid, *String Theory and the Scientific Method*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

[76] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1976.

[77] For more details on atoms and souls, see Richard T.W. Arthur, *Monads, Composition, and Force. Ariadnean Threads through Leibniz's Labyrinth*, Oxford University Press, 2018, especially Ch. 3.

[78] *Specimen dynamicum* (1695), GM VI, 238–239, L 439.