VI. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongreß

unter der Schirmherrschaft des Niedersächsischen Ministerpräsidenten Gerhard Schröder

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Beasts, according to Leibniz, possess the ability to perceive connections between past events and to consequently elaborate expectations concerning the development of present events. This ability is due to the faculty of recalling images of past sensations (memorativa) that accompanies imagination, and not to "thought", as it is to be found in rational beings. Leibniz writes in the Nouveaux essais that the empirical linking made by beasts is nothing but "une ombre du raisonnement ... une connexion d'imagination et un passage d'une image à une autre; parce que dans une rencontre nouvelle qui paroit semblable à la précédente, on s'attend de nouveau à ce qu'on y trouvoit joint autrefois" (A VI 6, 51). His alter ego Théophile praises Locke's denial to beasts of any aptitude for abstract knowledge: they proceed from image to image merely "par la liaison, qu'elles y ont sentie autres fois" (A VI 6, 143). If the master takes a stick, the dog remembers to have been beaten — the image of the strokes it received in the past comes back to its imagination — and it behaves according to its instinctive reaction to blows. In the Monadology, Leibniz states at the hand of the same example that memory confers to the soul "une espèce de Consecu

tion" (GP VI, 611), that can imitate rational thought to some extent. Beasts retain perceptions that were very intense, or that presented themselves many times. When they perceive something that strikes (frappe) them — this time not as a blow — they recollect something similar that happened previously and expect "par la représentation de leur mémoire à ce qui y a été joint dans cette perception précédente et sont portés à des sentiments semblables à ceux qu'ils avoient pris alors" (ib.).

Among the traditional functions of imagination, this doctrine lays stress on memory and on imagination in the strict sense (vis imaginativa). Together with the so called common sense, they apparently take charge of all the operations relating to sensible knowledge, and make up the imagination in a more general sense — i.e., according to Leibniz, the internal sense. For instance, it was common opinion that a "vis aestimativa" formed a first judgement, of the species of the common sense (thus explaining, by the way, animal behaviours like those we are discussing). But in Leibniz's opinion, the representations of the internal sense suffice to direct the appetition, even without any conscience of past thoughts: "In bruits itaque perceptionem agnosco sive sensum eorum quae flunt,
agnosco et imaginationem, sensu cessante manentem, et ideo recursum priorum imaginum, si qua nova imago uni priorum similiis occasionem praebat; sed non agnosco in illis conscientiam, ut scilicet oblata quadam cogitatione percipiant eam vel aliam similarem, jam sibi affuisse” (VE 290).

Human reason on the contrary is conscious, reflects on past thoughts, knows and extrapolates the causes of events, and therefore needs not “d'expérimenter les liaisons sensibles des images, où les bêtes sont réduites” (A VI 6 51). But Leibniz maintains that human beings are similar to beasts, when they base their decisions on the memory of past facts; disciplines based on experience, as medicine, also partake of such non-rational knowledge: “Les hommes agissent comme les bêtes en tant que les conséquences de leur perceptions ne se font que par le principe de la mémoire, ressemblans aux Médecins Empiriques, qui ont une simple pratique sans théorie, et nous ne sommes qu’Empiriques dans les trois quarts de nos Actions” (GP VI, 611). This kind of cognition pervades our everyday life; e.g. we expect that the sun will rise tomorrow since we anticipate it empirically, because it always happened previously: “Il n'y a que l'Astronome, qui le juge par raison” (lb). Of course, physicians do not entirely depend on the association of imaginations and appetitions. Even if they make use of empirical knowledge without trying to corroborate it by a rational analysis, i.e. without any knowledge of the causes, they attain a higher degree of generality than beasts. In a letter, Leibniz attempts to define the difference between an expert of some art and someone who only knows its rules in theory: “sciendum est, artem [medicam] et si non ad Socratem pertineat, tamen nec ad hominem tantum referri, sed adalem hominem, colerici, febrilaborantem, et a medico experto etiam in curando animum dirigil a universalia seuaed ea, in quibus Socrates ilis quisubcurn antea egit Medico assimilatur. Experti igitur prærogativa super eum qui sola habet præcepta, in his potissimum consistit, quod peritus in ipsis quaebamertus est, plus habet fiduciae, quam is qui præcepta tantum tenet, si non et rationes (ut plerumque fit) intelligat” (GP VII, 472; Leibniz criticises Aristotle, Met., I, 981 a 15 f.). An “expert” physician, who builds on his superior knowledge on the memory of past cases (“imaginatione priora aut similia representante”, lb.), is thus trying to grasp at least some universal features. We may hence assume that a first difference between humans and beasts, as far as the role of imagination in empirical knowledge is concerned, consists in the way human beings integrate the support of the imagination with some intellectual element.

It is anyway clear that both beasts and human beings, though the latter to a lesser extent, make use of the imagination to decide their behaviour. So the
imagination seems to play a role not only in cognition, but in volition as well. Bacon distinguished three kinds of imagination in his *Silva silvarum*: “Prima est conjuncta cum fide rei futurae; secunda cum memoria præteritæ; tertia est præsentis; aut quasi præsentis, qua complotor quicquid imaginatio confingit & animi gratia fabricat” (Opera omnia, 1665, p. 956). The first kind is indeed connected to volitions, since it provides a representation of the object to the appetition. We find occasionally similar expressions in Leibniz, but mostly in the years when he still used “imagination” to mean “representation” or “thought” in general; e.g. in 1670, in his sketches for the *Elementa juris naturalis*: “fateor esse stultum sed felicem qui quod bono deest possit imaginatione fortuita supplere” (A VI I, 432). Imaginations are representations associated to the desire also in a writing titled *L'auteur du peché*, which dates approximately 1673: “Le Physique ou reel du Vol, par example, est l'object, ou la proye qui irrite l'indigence du Voleur, les rayons visuels qui frappent ses yeux, et qui entrent jusque au fond de son ame; les imaginations, les inquietudes et les deliberations qui se forment là dessus, et qui se terminent en fin à la conclusion, qui est de profiter de l'occasion, et d'entreprendre l'exécution du crime” (A VI 3, 150). But in the mature writings we find a more tangible relation between the ability to represent in the imagination both past events, and possible future objects, on one hand, and the connection of appetite and will on the other hand. Motives are internal objects in the strict sense: “L'ame est excitée aux pensées suivantes par son object interne, c'est à dire par les pensées precedentes. Car il y a une suite ou liaison comme dans les momens” (GP III, 464-65; this is — by the way — the foundation of Leibniz's *Theodicy*). And, as Leibniz writes to Sophie Charlotte in 1704, “comme le mouvement mene la matiere de figure en figure, l'appetit mene l'ame d'image en image” (GP III, 347).

It is well known that Leibniz generalises the association of practical and cognitive, and tributes to every substance perception and appetition — or, in the rational soul, intellect and will. The genesis of the will relies in the end on a mechanism analogue to the small perceptions; or better, it is founded on the dynamic aspect of small perceptions: infinitesimal distressing sensations, that bring about imperceptible appetitions. “Il y a (...) des efforts qui resultent des perceptions insensibles, dont on ne s'apperceoit pas, que l'ame mieux appeller appetitions que volitions (quoiqu'il y ait aussi des appetitions apperceptibles), car on n'appelle actions volontaires que celles dont on peut s'appercevoir; et sur les quelles nostre reflexion peut tomber lors qu'elles suivent de la consideration du bien et du mal” (A VI 6, 173).

The faculty of perception is common to all substances. It is one of the
three primary faculties, corresponding to three fundamental "perfections":
perception, sensation, and intellection. In a group of recently published medico-
philosophical handwritings, Leibniz formulates his conception of the animal body as
"Machina Hydraulico-Pneumatico-Pyrobolica", hydraulico-pneumatically and
pyrobolical (chemical) machine (see Pasini, L'Immaginazione in Leibniz, diss.,
1991-92). It includes a physiological interpretation of perception, "functio
hominis primaria", i.e. a theory of the physiological correlate — in the form of
corporeal elastic vibrations — of Leibniz's pointillist theory of sensation, accord-
ing to which sensations are made of innumerable imperceptible perceptive
elements. In a machine of that kind, "non tantum ... hydraulico-pneumatic[a], sed
et pyri[a]", movement and perception are performed in conformity to this
character. Effervescent fluids push their corporeal vessels against rigid parts;
thus a movement is generated, whose alternation allows locomotion. Other
vessels push against each other in equilibrium, as if innumerable minute vesicles
were enclosed in some kind of envelope and inflated all at the same time. An
external solicitation is transmitted immediately from each elastic vesicle to its
neighbours, and a small push can produce a main change.

This dynamic doctrine of perception fits quite well in Leibniz's opposition
of metaphysic, or active, and geometric, or materially passive. Moreover, those
contrivances offer such promptness and fineness in reacting to external stimuli
as required by Leibniz's doctrine of small perceptions. Each of them expresses a
conformable modification both in the body and in the soul; they all are per-
ceived, indeed, but can't draw attention individually. And since we receive
impressions from surrounding bodies in the form of small perceptions, through
such infinite environmental perceptions, each being is somewhat connected to
the whole universe. The pre-established harmony between bodies and souls is
assured by the exact correspondence of insensible perceptions and elastic
corporeal modifications.

In the form of undulations of a fluid, elastic vibrations present themselves
also in the brain. The sensorium commune, according to Leibniz, might well be
«un fluide» (VE 2233) whose movements accomplish the reception of corporeal
impressions. These compose here more complex and apperceivable patterns of
sensation, even if we aren't able to resolve them properly in their components:
«comme si on jettoit à la fois dans l'eau plusieurs pierres, car chacune ferait ses
propres cercles qui ne se brouillassent pas dans la vérité» (GP 7, 557). In the
common sense, ideas are formed that refer to the objects of different particular
senses; e.g. our soul compares numbers and figures in sounds, colours or
tangible forms. The internal sense embraces both the notions of the particular
senses and those of the common sense, and some abilities connected with these ideas or notions. Considered as a whole, the internal sense is in principle one and the same faculty (a doctrine already held by Suarez, Opera omnia, 1856-78, III 709), better known as the imagination.

The smallest parts of natural bodies have always very quick insensible movements, that we perceive only at the level of non-apperception, and interpret in our imagination as continual surfaces — just as we perceive the glowing end of a segment rotating in the dark, as a circle. Through such mostly involuntary and automatic processes, our imagination pre-digests for the intellect the infinite complexity of our perceptive world, and thus builds up an image of the external world out of our environmental perceptions. Something similar may occur not only concerning cognitive processes, but volitional processes as well.

The engine of the will is, fundamentally, a manifold of imperceptible events and microscopic memories. Together they generate obscure stimuli, that cause a sort of uneasiness we wouldn't be able to associate with pleasure or displeasure: "Cette inquietude (...) n'est pas toujours un deplaisir; comme l'aise où l'on se trouve, n'est pas toujours une satisfaction ou un plaisir. C'est souvent une perception insensible qu'on ne saurait distinguer ny démèler qui nous fait pancher plutôt d'un costé que de l'autre, sans qu'on en puisse rendre raison" (A VI 6, 183). Leibniz's thinking can be excellently characterised as a philosophy of oxymorons, and he coins one more oxymoron to describe these "aiguillons du desir", these minimal elements of the volition process: "des petites douleurs inappercettibles". Leibniz states in a quite subtle analysis of sentiment, that they give us the benefits of pain without its annoyance: "cette continuelle victoire sur ces demies douleurs, qu'on sent en suivant son desir et satisfaisant en quelque façon à cet appetit ou à cette demangeaison, nous donne quantité de demiplaisirs, dont la continuation et l'amas (...) devient enfin un plaisir entier et veritable" (A VI 6, 165). Now will, in conformity to Leibniz's dynamic substance theory, is a tendency: "la Volition est l'effort ou la tendence (conatus) d'aller vers ce qu'on trouve bon et loin de ce qu'on trouve mauvais, en sorte que cette tendence resulte immédiatement de l'apperception qu'on en a" (A VI 6, 172). And there can't be complete indifference to the alternatives considered by the will, since no decision is taken, that isn't influenced by Imperceptible motives: "ce sont des determinations confuses, en sorte que souvent nous ne savons pas ce qui nous manque ... Ces impulsions sont comme autant de petits ressorts qui tachent de se debander, et qui font agir nostre machine" (A VI 6, 166). Even if equipoise is obtained, an imperceptible internal or external alteration "changera d'abord la balance, et les fera faire quelque petit effort pour se remettre dans le
meilleur estat qu'il se peut" (lb); so the will is modified over again and the course of the action is affected (a process that reminds somewhat Hobbes' reduction of the will to the last term in deliberation).

It is still unclear whether the imagination performs a relevant function for human will, as it does in animal behaviour. In the human soul, will is determined partly because, partly in spite of those infinitesimal solicitations. The soul has indeed some power on its confuse perceptions of its own elementary motives: "car quoyqu'elle ne puisse changer ses passions sur le champ, elle peut y travailler de loin avec assés de succès, et la donner des passions nouvelles, et même des habitudes. Elle a même un pouvoir semblable sur les perceptions plus distinctes" (GP VI, 137-38). Here the will is considered as a faculty of the rational soul, together with the intellect, and the acts of the will as originated inside processes belonging to the category of thought acts. A list of categories and concepts, written after Leibniz settled in Hanover, enumerates the genres of thought. In general, Leibniz writes, we "think", i.e. we act on ourselves; we start with such immediate representations as concepts or images, i.e. sensible and confuse knowledge that becomes distinct in the intellection; then comes the feed-back of sensation and perception, where probably "perceive" means what Leibniz usually calls "apperceive": "Concipimus seu imaginamur. Intelligimus (su distincte concipimus). Sentimus. Percipimus (su cum certitudine sentimus)" (VE 336). This is followed by two degrees of assurance ("Statuimus. Scimus (su cum certitudine statuimus)", lb) and by the cognitio. Last comes the will: "Est igitur velle idem quod conari seu agere ob sententiam; seu ideo quia statuimus" (lb). Will is a thought that puts in action a deliberation, actualising a tendency or an endeavour, but it only comes after a "sententia". This word means literally "advice", "opinion", "intention". Leibniz explains in the Elementa verae pietatis that a sententia is "cogitatio practica, seu cogitatio cum agendi conatu" (VE 236). A sententia is more than a simple representation: it involves the disposition to act in conformity to what is maintained. It implies some intent, a seed of deliberation — even if an act of the will is required to actually put it into execution.

The sententia seems to hold an intermediate place between thought and will. But its differentia specifica from representation in general, or from imaginations, should be found in some more definite feature, that may account for its intentional side, but that directly refers to its content. Now in a sententia, the plain representation of the content is accompanied with persuasion, a subjective disposition that has, according to Leibniz, immediate practical consequences: "Hoc scilicet discimen est inter simplicem cogitationem seu considerationem, Imaginationem, representationem, et inter sententiam, quod est qui aliquam
sententiam habet paratus est ad agendum modo aliquo qui sit huic sententiae conformis" (VE 236). We saw that the will, at the microscopic level of inquietude, is moulded by little, imperceptible appetitions; at the level of the organisation of thoughts, on the other hand, we can say that the will consists in deciding to put in action a persuasion: if I'm persuaded that what I see is fire, I decide not to put my hand on it — I don't want to. Conversely, representations in thought — e.g. the sensation offered by the internal sense — must contain something more than a simple identification of the object: the representation of a fire must already contain an idea (i.e. the memory of an experience, or the presentiment) of its dangerousness, in order that, by virtue of persuasion and not of further inspection, knowledge develops into will (there is here some resemblance with Suarez, Opera omnia, 1856-78, III 650). This is required both for empirical knowledge (the image of the fire offered by the common sense and what is joint to it by the imagination), and for intellectual knowledge (the adequate idea of fire, and the rational judgement that there really is a fire and not a resembling appearance). Since we are, according to Leibniz, “empirical” in most of our decisions, it can be maintained that it is chiefly the imagination that supplies those representations (precisely resulting of empirical concatenations, of associations, of sensible reminiscences) which form, joint with persuasion, the object or motive of the will.

Leibniz presumably had no reason to confer to the cognitive faculties in general, and to the imagination in particular, any function immediately volitional. Nevertheless, just as beasts are directed by their imagination, that inclines their appetitions by representing objects and events of the past as possible or as impending, so the behaviour of rational creatures is strongly influenced by the same faculty. The quick concatenations of the imagination can persuade the mind of certain representations, to which the will applies or from which the will starts. The imagination, at least, provides representations that are suitable to the needs of volitional processes, not only in their content, as we discussed above, but presumably in their vividness and efficacy as well. In corroboration we can adduce the remarkable disposition of the imagination to deceive our mind. Its so-called chimeras are indeed a leitmotif of traditional debates on the power of imagination (a power counterbalanced by the symmetrical theme of its weakness, due to its feebleness in comparison to present sensations and to its doubtful hold on reality). According to Leibniz, the imagination, or the internal sense, succeeds in imposing its own conclusions to the intellect itself, even when they are false, i.e. erroneously empirical, or merely fantastic concatenations. This has considerable effects on volition, as we read in the Theodicy:
"C'est nostre sens interne qui nous fait souvent aller trop vite; et cela se trouve aussi dans les bêtes, comme lorsqu'un chien aboie contre son image dans le miroir: car les bêtes ont des consecrions de perception qui imitent le raisonnement, et qui se trouvent aussi dans le sens interne des hommes, lorsqu'ils n'agissent qu'en empiriques" (GP VI, 87). When the intellect lets itself be driven by the "fausse determination du sens interne" (Ib), it is mislead in judging the effects of phenomena, "et il en infere plus qu'elles ne portent" (Ib).

Another interesting point is whether the internal sense performs a definite task in this process, e.g. as collector of those "petit ressorts", just as it is a collector of perceptions. The momentous role of the imagination in relation to volition could rest upon the fact that the internal sense performs, as for the appetitions, the same function it has towards perceptions in general. Imperceptible appetitions aren't heterogeneous to small perceptions, they are "des efforts qui resultent des perceptions insensibles, dont on ne s'apperçoit pas" (A VI 6, 173); the uneasiness (inquiétude) we mentioned above consists in the end in a "perception insensible qu'on ne saurait distinguer ny démeler" (A VI 6, 183). Since these insensible appetitions are in fact the actual medium of interaction, through the body, between the individual and the physical world — they are the form in which, at a microscopic level, environmental sensations originate — we may suggest as a conclusion that the internal sense, i.e. the imagination, plays to some extent the role of a channel through which such environmental perceptions are collected and organised; here would the sentiment of phenomenal reality take its form and structure its image, that would then be offered both to knowledge and to practice.