

Leibniz's Metaphysics of Relations Revisited

Arthur Dony, University of Liège

Compendium of Texts

* *Harmony and Relations*

1. *Harmony* is unity in variety [*unitas in varietate*]. [...] Harmony is when many things are reduced to some unity. For where there is no variety, there is no harmony [...]. In turn, where variety is without order, without proportion, there is no harmony. Hence, it is evident that the greater the variety and the unity in variety, the greater the harmony [...]. Now from this it is clearly evident that Harmony is perfect cogitability. For it was said [...] that the more perfect is that in which there is more reality. But thinking is also a kind of reality, and so much the greater because the things thought of are in a way multiplied, for individual minds contain some representation of the whole world. Hence, that is a more perfect manner of thinking, where one act of thought extends to many things simultaneously, for in this way there is more reality in that thought. This is done, moreover, with the work of relations, for a relation is a kind of unity in multiplicity [*quaedam unitas in multis*]. And species of relations are the connections and reasons of things among themselves, the proportions, the proportionalities. It is from all of these taken at the same time in a given object that harmony results. (*Elementa Verae Pietatis*, A VI, iv, p. 1358-1360)

* *Substances as Living Mirrors*

2. Nature is uniform in its variety, uniform qua principles, but varied qua modes. (*Commentatio de anima brutorum*, GP VII, p. 329)
3. This is as if God has varied the universe as many times as there are souls, or as if he has created as many abridged universes, fundamentally agreeing, but diversified through appearances. There is nothing so rich as this uniform simplicity accompanied by a perfect order. (*Letter to Sophie-Charlotte*, GP III, p. 347)
4. [F]or when God turns, so to speak, on all sides and in all fashions, the general system of phenomena which he finds it good to produce for the sake of manifesting his glory, and when he regards all the aspects of the world in all possible manners, since there is no relation which escapes his omniscience, the result of each view of the universe as seen from a different position is a substance which expresses the universe conformably to this view. (*Discourse of Metaphysics*, §14)
5. When we say that every Monad, Soul, Spirit has received a particular law, we should add that this is nothing but a variety of the general law that rules the whole universe, analogously to the fact that the same town appears different according to the different points of view it is seen from. (*Remarks on Bayle's Dictionary*, art. *Rorarius*, GP IV, p. 553)
6. [T]his interconnection, or this adapting of all created things to each one, and of each one to all the others, brings it about that each simple substance has relational properties that express all the others, so that each monad is a perpetual living mirror of the universe. / And just as the same town when seen from different sides will seem quite different – as though it were multiplied perspectively – the same thing happens here: because of the infinite multitude of simple substances it is as though there were that many different universes; but they are all perspectives on the same one, differing according to the different points of view of the monads. / And that is the way to get the greatest possible variety, but with all the order there could be, that is, it is the way to get as much perfection as there could be. (*Monadology*, §56-58)

* *Universal Connection*

7. In my opinion, there is nothing in the whole created universe which does not need, for its perfect concept, the concept of everything else in the universality of things, since everything flow into every other thing in such a way that if anything is removed or changes, everything in the world will be different from what it is now. (*Letter to De Volder*, GP II, p. 226)
8. There is no term which is so absolute or so detached that it does not involve relations and is not such that a complete analysis of it would lead to other things and indeed to all other things, so that you can say that relative terms indicate expressly the relation they contain. (*New Essays*, II, xxv, §5)
9. It can even be said that [...] all things harmonize – *σύμπνοια πάντα*, as Hippocrates put it –, and that eyes as piercing as God's could read in the lowliest substance the universe's whole sequence of events; *quae sint, quae fuerint, quae mox future trahantur* [those which are, which have been and which will happen in the future. (*New Essays*, Preface)
10. It is all too true that there is no part of nature that could be known perfectly by us, and the very interconnection of things [*περιχώρησις rerum*] proves this. No creature, however elevated, can perceive distinctly or comprehend the infinite at the same time; but, on the contrary, whoever comprehends even one part of matter likewise comprehends the whole universe on account of the same interconnection [*περιχώρησις*] I mentioned. My principles are such that they can hardly be separated one from another. Whoever knows one well, knows them all. (*Letter to Des Bosses*, GP II, p. 412)
11. If we consider the thing correctly, it seems impossible that a proposition concerning any subject should become false without any change taking place within it. Indeed the world is practically one single individual [*Nimirum Mundus est quasi unum*], and any thing is influenced by all the others. (A VI, iv, p. 308)
12. It must be known that all things are connected in each one of the possible worlds: the universe, whatever it may be, is all of one piece, like an Ocean: the least movement extends its effect there to any distance whatsoever [...]. Therein God has ordered all things beforehand once for all [...]; and each thing as an idea has contributed, before its existence, to the resolution that has been made upon the existence of all things; so that nothing can be changed in the universe (any more than in a number) save its essence or, if you will, save its numerical individuality. (*Theodicy*, §9)

* *No Purely Extrinsic Denominations*

13. *Philalethes*. However, a change of relation can occur without there having been any change in the subject: Titius, “whom I consider today as a father, ceases to be so tomorrow, only by the death of his son, without any alteration in himself”.
Theophilus. That can very well be said if we are guided by the things of which we are aware; but in metaphysical strictness there is no purely extrinsic denomination (*denominatio pure extrinseca*), because of the real connection amongst all things (*New Essays*, II, xxv, §5)
14. [T]here are no extrinsic denominations, and no one becomes a widower in India by the death of his wife in Europe unless a real change occurs in him. For every predicate is in fact contained in the nature of the subject. (*De modo distinguendi phaenomena realia ab imaginariis*, GP VII, p. 321-322)
15. It is undeniable that, when the mind perceives something in matter, whilst it perceives various things there is also a change in it. When someone, by growing, becomes bigger than me, then some change occurs in me as well, since a denomination of mine is changed. In this way, all things are in a way contained in all things. (*De Formis Simplicibus*, A VI, iii, p. 523)

* “*Superessentialism*”

16. When one considers in Adam a part of his predicates, for example, that he is the first man, set in a garden of pleasure, from whose side God fashioned a woman, and similar things conceived *sub ratione generalitatis*, in a general way (that is to say, without naming Eve, Paradise, and other circumstances that fix individuality), [...] all this is not sufficient to determine the individual, for there can be an infinity of Adams, that is, an infinity of possible persons, different from one another, whom this fits. [...] Therefore, we must not conceive of a vague Adam, that is, a person to whom certain attributes of Adam belong, when we are concerned with determining whether all human events follow from his assumption; rather, we must attribute to him a notion so complete that everything that can be attributed to him can be deduced from it. [...] It, therefore, also follows that he would not have been our Adam, but another Adam, had other events happened to him, for nothing prevents us from saying that he would be another. Therefore, he is another. (*Letter to Arnauld*, GP II, p. 41-42)
17. There is contained in this complete notion of a possible Peter, which I concede is observed by God, not only the essential or the necessary, namely, that which flows from incomplete or specific notions, and which are demonstrated from terms so that the contrary implies a contradiction, but also the existential or contingent so to speak are contained therein, because it is of the nature of an individual substance that its nature be perfect and complete. (*De Libertate, Fato, Gratia Dei*, A, VI, iv, p. 1600)
18. And this notion of the complete individual includes, I believe, relationships with the whole series of things [...]. (*Letter to Arnauld*, GP II, p. 37)
19. [T]he concept of an individual substance includes all its events and all its denominations, even those which are commonly called extrinsic, that is, those which pertains to it only by virtue of the general connection of things and from the fact that it expresses the whole universe in its own way. (*Letter to Arnauld*, GP II, p. 56)

* *Reformation of the Notion of Substance*

20. I do not know if the definition of substance as that which requires only the concurrence of God to exist fits any created substance known to us, unless we interpret it in some less usual sense. For not only do we require other substances, but we require our accidents even more. (*Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum*, GP IV, p. 364)
21. All substances are co-requisites for each other. (*Notes on Cordemoy*, A VI, iv, p. 1800)

* *Leibnizian Monism*

22. It can easily be demonstrated that all things are distinguished, not as substances (i.e., radically) but as modes. This can be demonstrated from the fact that, of those things which are radically distinct, one can be perfectly understood without another; that is, all the requisites of the one can be understood without all the requisites of the other being understood. But in the case of things, this is not so; for since the ultimate reason of things is unique, and contains by itself the aggregate of all requisites of all things, it is evident that the requisites of all things are the same. So also is their essence, given that an essence is the aggregate of all primary requisites. Therefore the essence of all things is the same, and things differ only modally, just as a town seen from a high point differs from the town seen from a plain. If only those things are really different which can be separated, or, of which one can be perfectly understood without the other, it follows that no thing really differs from another, but that all things are one, just as Plato argues in the *Parmenides*. (*Quod Ens Perfectissimum Sit Possibile*, A, VI, iii, p. 573)

23. There is the same variety in any kind of world, and this is nothing other than the same essence related in various ways, as if you were to look at the same town from various places; or, if you relate the essence of number 6 to the number 3, it will be 3×2 or $3 + 3$, but if you relate it to the number 4 it will be $6/4 = 3/2$, or $6 = 4 \times 3/2$. So it is not surprising that, in a certain way, different things are produced. (*De Formis Simplicibus*, A VI, iii, p. 523)
24. It seems to me that the origin of things from God is of the same kind as the origin of properties from an essence [...]. So just as these properties differ from each other and from essence, so do things differ from each other and from God. (*De Origine Rerum Ex Formis*, A VI, iii, p. 518-519)

* *On the Trinity*

25. A person in general is a substance, single in number, and incommunicable, which in God essentially involves relations and constitutes, with its correlatives, an absolute substance in number. (*Examen Religionis Christianae*, A VI, iv, p. 2365)
26. [W]e do not say that persons are relations, but that they are constituted through relations [*per relations constitui*]. (*Ad Christophori Stegmanni Metaphysicam Unitariorum*, p. 188)
27. One should then say that there are relations within the divine substance that distinguish the persons from each other; since these persons cannot be absolute substances. But one should also say that these relations must be substantial and that they are not sufficiently explained by modalities. Also one should say that the divine persons are not the same concrete being, under different denominations [...], as one man could be both a poet and an orator; but three different concrete relative beings in a single absolute concrete being [*trois différents concrets respectifs, dans un seul concret absolu*]. (*Remarques sur le livre d'un Antitrinitaire Anglois*, p. 549)

References

A = Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften (ed.), *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1923–, 120 vols. expected.

GP = C. I. Gerhardt (ed.), *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, Berlin, 1870-90, 7 vols.