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Another Beginning for Conceptual History: From Leibniz to Koselleck¹

Introduction for Eugeniusz Górski

ABSTRACT: The frequent use in philosophical literature of such concepts as “modernity” and “post-modernity” incites a more fundamental reflection on splitting history in “epochs” and “periods” as well as a philosophical consideration of the concept of “crisis”. Despite current interpretation of his thought, Leibniz displayed a set of principles, which allows historical discourse in any form it may assume. They are not only “rigid” ones, such as “progress”, “providence”, “overall harmony”, but also “flexible”, referring to ontological, historical and anthropological pluralism (“change”, “contingence”, “freedom of choice”). Consequently, Koselleck’s analysis of the notion of crisis can be compared with Leibniz’s crypto-historical categories.

KEY WORDS: Leibniz • Koselleck • modernity • history • philosophy of history • crisis

In the world of Spanish academia we have an unwritten tradition which we usually follow when it comes to paying tribute to someone, which dictates that we have to dedicate to them either a piece of original work in our field, or some reflections, or some biographical reflections, the common ground between these options being the recognition of the person being honored with regard to their impact on our own intellectual journey. Well then, I wish to dedicate these initial lines to stress the importance that our encounter with Professor Eugeniusz Górski and our continued discussion with him has had for the CSIC Institute of Philosophy – which I currently direct – and for my own research. Professor Górski’s annual presence with us goes back to the very creation of our institute in 1986, now a little over 25 years ago,

¹ This article is written within the framework of the projects “Filosofía de la historia y valores en la Europa del siglo XXI” (Philosophy of History and Values in Europe in the Twenty-First Century, FFI2008-04279/FISO), “Leibniz en español 2” (FFI2010-15914) and “Enlightenment and Global History” (ENGLOBE: Marie Curie Initial Training Network: FP7-PEOPLE-2007-1-1-ITN).

although he had already been working in the Luis Vives Institute since 1977, the institute which preceded the current one² and even prior to that at the University of Salamanca. Something I must mention is that it was at that university that Eugeniusz Górski took part in the international conference “The philosophy of history faced with the challenges of the present”, organized alongside Professor Maximiliano Hernández within the framework of the research project I direct and which was a good culmination of our work together over the past few years, during which time we took part in various conferences and other publications together, among which I would like to highlight my article *Enlightenment, Philosophy of History and Values: A Critical Approach to the Idea of Europe*, published in Poland in the journal “Dialogue and Universalism” XIX (2009, 7–20).

The work that I am presenting here is one of my latest reflections on the subject matter which I had the opportunity to discuss with Professor Górski during his last visit to our institute and for that reason I would like to dedicate it to him with my recognition and friendship.

1. The origins of the Conceptual History of Modernity

If we had to define what the intellectual history of modernity consists of in an aphorism, we could claim that it is no different from the history of the formation of modern language. Now, the difficulties begin when it comes to agreeing on the aforementioned, which is, in short, nothing but a sum of categories, traditions, assumptions, preconceptions, concepts and metaphors, too varied to attribute a strong identity to it. No doubt, the so-called “linguistic turn” and postmodern criticism came to animate those debates in the last decades of the twentieth century, making it increasingly important for us to analyse and define the “fundamental concepts” of our ethical and political resources, in order to settle what semantic content they maintain from their past and what they contribute that is radically new in the construction of our postmodern rationality, as remains or indications of a language that we must continually reinterpret, either from the perspective of continuity, or from that of discontinuity. That is what our task entails as historians of ideas, uncovering the pertinent elements of the past and interpreting their effectiveness in the contemporary panorama, since if the past is open, our inheritance is no longer unambiguously determined, but feeds on a range of possibilities able to crystallize into various histories.

From the perspective of conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) the key ideas of our moral and political arsenal (freedom, autonomy, progress,

² A brief history of the Institute of Philosophy can be consulted at www.ifs.csic.es.

legitimacy, sovereignty, or secularization) have usually been defined in two parts: on the one hand, what they have that is radically innovative – showing a specifically modern experience; on the other, what they retain, in the manner of a palimpsest or *pentimento*, of different ways of thinking and classifying the world from prior to the emergence of the *novum* of modernity. So the genuine modern identity is captured – or so it seems – when, over the confused background of a multiplicity of languages and traditions the gleaming spark of the new and innovative can be made out; when (in the words of Koselleck) “a new *Erwartungshorizont* or horizon of expectations is freed from the *Erfahrungsraum* or habitual space of experience”³.

The majority of our categories would then prove to be, in accordance with this approach, what resulted from the different means of resolving the “quarrel of the ancients and the moderns” (*querelle des anciens et modernes*) or, on the assumption that we are now witnessing the emergence of new development, what has arisen out of the “quarrel between the moderns and the postmoderns”. “From critique arises the philosophy of history. Critique is the herald of crisis” – wrote Koselleck in *Kritik und Krise. Pathogenese der Bürgerlichen Welt*⁴. And in his later reflections Koselleck will state clearly that we are the inheritance of a modern worldview created in the *Sattelzeit* (a time period which for him lasts from 1750 to 1850), during which, in his opinion, our semantic identifying marks would be shaped.

Many criticisms have already been made of the father of *Begriffsgeschichte* for the strict circumscription that he makes of the birth of modernity, due to which he specified it throughout his life, sometimes claiming that he only referred to Germany, at other times that the dates could be flexible, but always maintaining it in a very close range to his position of “enjambement of modernity”. It is not my intention now to enter into the thorny issue of the periodization of history – or of the history of philosophy. Rather I wish to draw attention to the problem that this temporal fixation that the theory of conceptual history has in its issuing of the diagnosis of modernity, namely, precisely its insistence on a “triumphant line” of the Enlightenment, poses to our possibility of “objective” reconstruction and interpretation of the same – apart from our present ideologies, convictions and experiences. In my opinion, the origins of the modern concepts⁵ would

³ Cf. R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, Suhrkamp, 1989, above all pp. 349–375.

⁴ *Kritik und Krise*, Freiburg/München, 1959, p. 6.

⁵ In this sense, I have a lot more sympathy for the periodization that Giuseppe Duso implements for the genesis of the main modern concepts (understanding these to be those which are disseminated socially and become common sense during the period of the French Revolution), which would occur in the context of the doctrines of natural law

have to be set a century earlier, and Leibniz be given greater prominence in this enterprise, as long as we do not lose sight with that of the major premise of our reasoning here, namely, that there is no “privileged” historical reconstruction of the dialectic of modernity which ensures “objective” access to the logic of the great modern moral and political concepts, in the end a plurality of aporetic concepts from which the perspectives endorsed by the established power emerged.

If the decades of postmodern criticism have had any clear repercussion it is precisely this: having left in shatters the mirror in which universal history was seen as an absolute truth, in order to propitiate the emergence of a plurality of histories that enable us to discover approaches that at a given moment remained in the shade and which, paradoxically, at some other time contribute to shedding light on a particular set of problems, or, more to the point, to adopting a different perspective on past debates, spurred on by current problems. In this sense, both the diagnosis (the theory of conceptual history) and the prognosis (the practice of the same) pass through the relationship of implication (both epistemological and political) that we have with our present interests. As C. Thiebaut wrote in this respect:

The classics are the other face of the present [...] The classics do not exist by themselves, or they exist only in a disquieting neutrality, as if they were not so much texts as existing in a pretextual form, waiting for the interested act of reading that provides them relevance, life and meaning, and they owe their being to the hard work of the construction of the present by means of the construction of a past⁶.

So then, on breaking the chains of a prophetic conception of the philosophy of history we not only vindicate an undetermined and contingent future, but also an open past, as Arthur Danto has already suggested: “We are always revising our beliefs about the past, and to suppose them ‘fixed’ would be unfaithful to the spirit of historical inquiry”⁷.

Do not think, however, that I wish to uphold an absolute relativism with these reflections, nor maintain that structures may not be discovered

and of the social contract, insofar as an origin of a new way of understanding man, the political community and practical science. Cf. *La rappresentanza politica: genesi e crisi del concetto*, Milan 2006.

⁶ Cf. *Cabe Aristóteles*, Madrid 1988, p. 17. Not far from this perspective Leibniz wrote in *Preceptes pour avancer les sciences*: “J’ay trouvé apres de longues recherches qu’ordinairement les opinions les plus anciennes et les plus receues sont les meilleurs, pourveu qu’on les interprete equitalement”, GP VII, 164.

⁷ Cf. *Analytical Philosophy of History*, London & New York, 1965, p. 145.

in the historical analyses of the concepts that may enable us to explain better than others the development of past or future events: for example, the fact that during so-called “moments of crisis” we return to the ancients (Plato, Aristotle) is a constant that proves already familiar to us in the intellectual history of modernity. Rather I am concerned with a practical professional caution: we do not believe anyone is safe in our interpretations of the ideologies and interests that hold sway over us. There is no such thing as the ideal observer or the ideal chronicler and, least of all, the objective interpreter of history *par excellence*. That said, take the exercise which I present here as “one more history”, which perhaps may contribute to shedding a little light, albeit fragmentary, on the problems of the conceptual ups and downs of inherited modernity.

2. The prominence of Leibniz in *Begriffsgeschichte*

As I have stressed in my earlier work on Leibniz, in the face of the simplification and pigeonholing which is usually applied to him in the histories of philosophy, the complexity and argumentative richness of this thinker, his multidisciplinary talent, and his curiosity for all fields of knowledge and all cultures, enable us to discover in his philosophy elements that are illuminating for the reorganization of our philosophical reflections on history and the concept of rationality itself. The hard work of Leibniz was a matter of connecting the different sciences so that each one should be enriched thanks to the rest, forming a kind of web or net in which everything was relevant to everything else, overcoming that barrier of specialization that philosophers of science and historians of ideas lament so much at present, but above all, of making human activity, and the transformation of reality and institutions for the sake of the attainment of greater happiness, the goal of all wisdom, as his motto, *Theoria cum praxi*, well reflects. Now, what doubtless makes Leibniz attractive when it comes to confronting the problem of rationality is that, at that crucial moment of the “quarrel of the ancients and the moderns”, he knows to render his innovative proposals compatible with a critical dialogue with the preceding philosophy, as with the philosophers who we like to think of as the pioneers of modernity (Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Hobbes, Locke, Thomasiaus, Wolff, Newton, *etc.*), behaving like a true practitioner of hermeneutics, since he is not content with counterposing to his adversaries what he considers to be a stronger theory, but also explains the appeal of the model he criticises, from a perspectivism that makes him even more admirable nowadays, with the aim of shedding light upon and perfecting theoretical knowledge, and guiding practical skills. We could say without

fear of being mistaken, as Marcelo Dascal has stressed⁸, that the best of Leibniz's thought is shaped in the context of the controversies he maintained with his contemporaries. María G. Navarro insists on this when she claims on a Kantian note that "a history of concepts without beforehand telling the history of the controversies of the era would be futile and a history of the controversies without telling the history of the concepts present in the social history would be vacuous"⁹.

Indeed, and in this our analysis will coincide with that of Koselleck, some of the concepts of Leibnizian metaphysics, when taken to their ultimate consequences become the *humus* on which the edifice of the classical philosophy of history, which we have criticised so much, was built; these reflections will occupy the following subsection, which we could classify as "the negative conceptual legacy of Leibniz". Now, and this will be my proposition in the other subsection, there is another group of concepts in Leibniz which also form the basis for modernity and which constitute the other face of the Enlightenment – the friendly face if you like, which I have characterized here as the "positive legacy" – in which the concepts of contingency, freedom, tolerance and pluralism join hands in order to loosen the deterministic straightjacket to which the history of humanity seemed condemned, either by nature, or by convention. If the first group of concepts are presented as "persistent" for nearly two centuries, the second group knew to be "resistant" and survive in undercurrents of thought until they were able to emerge in full force in our contemporary thought¹⁰. But all are indebted to that modernity that lives on, more or less moribund, nowadays. That is what legitimizes us, in my opinion, to speak not only of the prominence, but also of the relevance of Leibniz, which (aside from his great scientific intuitions which are beginning today to be recognised little by little) lies precisely in a "rational attitude", which seems to me worthy of bearing in mind in our approaches, in which fragmentation sometimes leads to an excessive simplicity and the critique of the arrogance of reason leads to new separations, to use the terms of M. Dascal¹¹.

⁸ Cf. G.W. Leibniz. *The Art of Controversies*, The Netherlands, 2006.

⁹ "Teoría y práctica conceptual: vida de los conceptos, vida de la lengua", [in:] F. Oncina, *Teorías y prácticas de la historia conceptual*, Plaza y Valdés/CSIC, México–Madrid, p. 183. In this sense, it is interesting to consult his recreation of the Gadamerian principle of historical productivity, of the productivity of the concepts resulting from his dialectic, in his book *Interpretar y argumentar*, Plaza y Valdés/CSIC (*Theoria cum Praxi, Studia* 7), México–Madrid 2009.

¹⁰ Cf. M. J. Villaverde and J. Ch. Laursen (eds.), *Forjadores de la tolerancia*, Tecnos 2011.

¹¹ Cf. M. Dascal, *La arrogancia de la Razón*, "Isegoría" 2 (1990), p. 75.

3. Leibnizian concepts for a Philosophy of History

It is true that many thinkers in our Western tradition are concerned with history, if not as a discipline, then at least as a concept. However, despite its prolegomena¹², reflection on history – which for centuries has been known to us as “philosophy of history” – is genuinely a phenomenon of the Enlightenment. Every periodization established in the presentation of any history of philosophy is arbitrary, but, although we may be unable to defend absolute divisions, it is clear that at a certain point in history the right conditions can be found for a way of thinking, which had been gestating before but lacked the necessary pressure to rise to the surface, to reveal itself. In this sense, although we could talk of a prehistory in reflection on history both in the ancient and medieval world and in the Renaissance and at the start of modernity, the philosophy of history – understanding that to mean a reflexive and critical way of thinking – first appears during the Enlightenment. But that is possible, in my opinion, due to the prior gestation during the origins of modernity (which Max Wundt referred to as the “early Enlightenment” or “first Enlightenment”¹³) of some generic concepts such as *r a t i o n a l i t y*, *h u m a n i t y*, *l i b e r t y* and *p r o g r e s s*, but above all due to the change of significance of some other concepts, which transfer their genuinely philosophical (or even metaphysical) meaning to the field of historical reflection. Which, on a separate issue, will mean an important step in the development of a *m e t h o d* that enables the veracity of the historical accounts to be vouched for, a documentary method based on philology¹⁴.

The contribution of Leibniz in the constitution of what we have referred to as the “dominant line of philosophy of history” – which led from the Enlightenment up to its academic consecration in the nineteenth century – is fundamental in this sense and forms part of what I have come to refer to as the “negative legacy” of Leibniz, insofar as it lays the foundations for a determinist philosophy of history, subject to a unidirectional finalism.

Although Leibniz did not exactly develop a philosophy of history, it can be claimed that he exercised considerable influence on this discipline,

¹² For greater clarity cf. the first chapter of my book *Entre Casandra y Clío*, “La prehistoria de la filosofía de la historia”, Akal, Madrid, 1997 (2nd ed. 2005), pp.19–46.

¹³ Cf. *Die deutsche Schulphilosophie im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, Hildesheim 1945. M. Wundt upholds a broad concept of Enlightenment that is not restricted to the eighteenth century. Cf. also in this respect, C. Roldán, *La aurora de la filosofía de la historia*, [in:] *Entre Casandra y Clío*, *op.cit.*, p. 47 and ff.

¹⁴ Cf. J.C. Bermejo and P.A. Piedras, *Genealogía de la historia*, Madrid 1999, pp. 36–37.

much greater than that which is usually granted him¹⁵, since we also owe to him the idea of philosophy as a continued historical tradition to him¹⁶, in which the advances do not arise from the postulation of new and revolutionary ideas so much as from the conservation of what he referred to as *perennis philosophia*. Some scholars of the philosophy of history have insisted on this point, for example, R. Flint, who maintains that the philosophy of Leibniz – due to its comprehensiveness and universality – “was the first philosophy which was profoundly historical in spirit”¹⁷, or F. Meinecke, who even includes him among the precursors of historicism, stressing that there appears in his thought the idea of individuality which operates and develops according to its laws and that, however, only obeys a universal law¹⁸. In fact, the Leibnizian position indicates a clear approximation between the fields of philosophy and history, which until then were practically estranged, although it insists on the differentiation between philosophy – as a demonstrative science which refers to possible and necessary things, and history – which concerns knowledge of facts or particular issues, knowledge of which also requires memory and not only reason like philosophy¹⁹. But his interest in historical criticism is revealed not only in his work as a historian – we recall that in Hannover he devoted himself to writing a history of the Braunschweig family – but also in his application of his methodology to the study of the history of philosophy, linking philological with historical studies²⁰.

Now, his greatest contribution is found, without a doubt, in his philosophical conception itself, where there appear suggestions of some ideas that were developed by the first philosophers of history from the middle of the eighteenth century; in this sense J. Thyssen has claimed that “it is possible

¹⁵ An interpretation established by L. Davillé, who in his well-known work *Leibniz Historien* (Paris, 1909, p. 666), in the chapter dedicated to the philosophy of history, states specifically that Leibniz never investigated – as his disciples, e.g. Herder, would do – the linking of cause and effect in history, nor did he attempt to deduce the general laws that govern historical phenomena. A conviction insisted upon by K. Fischer, *G.W. Leibniz*, Heidelberg, 1920, p.764. Cf. W. Hübener, *Leibniz – ein Geschichtsphilosoph?*, [in:] *Leibniz als Geschichtsforscher*, „Studia Leibnitiana“, Sonderheft 10, 1982, pp. 38–48.

¹⁶ Cf. A. Heinekamp, *Die Rolle der Philosophiegeschichte in Leibniz' Denken*, [in:] *Leibniz als Geschichtsforscher, op.cit.*, pp. 114–141.

¹⁷ R. Flint, *The Philosophy of History in France and Germany*, William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London 1874, Book II, p. 344.

¹⁸ Cf. F. Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, Leibniz Verlag, München 1946, pp. 34–35.

¹⁹ Cf. G.W. Leibniz, *Nouveaux Essais sur l'entendement humaine*, III, 5. Vgl. a. C, 524. Cf. also *De fine scientiarum*, in Grua, I, 240. Cf. también Couturat, *Opusc.*, p. 524. Cf. also *De fine scientiarum*, in Grua, *Textes inédits*, I, 240.

²⁰ Cf. R. Flint, *The Philosophy of History in France and Germany, op.cit.*, p. 21.

to maintain the view that in Herder we find the philosophy of history itself of Leibniz's metaphysics²¹. I am referring in short to his metaphysical principles of continuity, perfection²² and universal harmony²³, which are established on the basis of the idea of progress towards the better – characteristic of the speculative philosophy of history – and whose framework will provide a clear antecedent to the secular and rational version of providence which in Kant will be presented as the “hidden plan of nature” and in Hegel as the “cunning of reason”. Without wishing to simplify, for Leibniz, the harmony of the universe – which is based on the principles of sufficient reason and perfection – is presented as a secularized transposition of the idea of divine providence, charged with introducing order and continuity into the contingent development of historical events, and that is possible because all the beings in the universe spontaneously follow their own basic laws – the idea of the individual notion of each substance, which scandalized Arnauld – which in human beings attains the level of freedom, that is, of “rational determination to the good”, so that it can be claimed that “the present is pregnant with the future”²⁴. Now, the Leibnizian best of all possible worlds is not an accomplished reality, rather the anticipation of an absolute mind, which is why human beings are called to promote the moral progress of humanity²⁵. In this sense, Leibniz attempts in his correspondence with Bourguet to make clear that his hypothesis that we live in the best of all possible worlds is compatible with another hypothesis, that of the progress of humanity; to that end, he will distinguish between two types of perfection, “metaphysical” and “moral”, so that although the world taken in its entirety

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 58. The influence of Leibniz on the philosophy of history not only makes itself felt in the eighteenth century, but is also prolonged through Hegel during the whole of the nineteenth century; thinkers such as Comte, Marx and even Darwin quote Leibniz at critical moments of the exposition of their ideas. On the presence of Leibniz in Kant's philosophy of history, cf. C. Roldán, *Le fil d'Ariane de la détermination rationnelle et les enchevêtrements de Cassandre*, [in:] D. Berlioz et F. Nef (éd.), *L'actualité de Leibniz: Les deux Labyrinthes*, «Studia Leibnitiana» Supplementa 34, 1999, pp. 55–68.

²² On the principle of perfection, cf. C. Roldán, *Das Vollkommenheitsprinzip bei Leibniz als Grund der Kontingenzen*, [in:] „Studia Leibnitiana“ XXI/2 (1989), pp. 188–195.

²³ R. Flint (*The Philosophy of History in France and Germany*, *op.cit.*, pp. 21–22) talks of some conceptions of Leibnizian philosophy – the law of analogy, the law of continuity, vitalism, the general theory of pre-established harmony and optimism – which have later been “transported” to the philosophy of history, but it does not seem pertinent to him to argue about something of which Leibniz himself did not make historical application.

²⁴ Cf. C. Roldán, *La salida leibniziana del laberinto de la libertad*, [in:] *G.W. Leibniz. Escritos en torno a la libertad, el azar y el destino*, Madrid, 1990, pp. IX–LII.

²⁵ On the idea of progress in Leibniz, cf. C. Roldán, *El principio de perfección y la idea de progreso moral en Leibniz*, “Il cannocchiale. Rivista di Studi filosofici” (1992), pp. 25–44.

– that is, considered as possible in the divine understanding – always maintains the same perfection, it is, in addition, capable of perfectibility through an infinite process, thanks to the progressive advancement of the arts and sciences, which enables him to state in § 341 of the *Theodicy*: “Il se peut même que le genre humain parvienne avec le temps à une plus grande perfection, que celle que nous pouvons nous imaginer presentement”²⁶. From his point of view, and by virtue of the principle of continuity, the gradual extension of civilization takes effect continuously, in spite of the apparent periods of stagnation and even regression, since “if it takes a step back, it is in order to spring forward with greater force”²⁷, so that even the greatest evils and misfortunes – the discord in history – will end up as further progress towards the good – the harmony of the best of all possible worlds. Thus, from my point of view, it can be claimed that Leibniz’s concepts of perfection and continuity shape the idea of enlightened progress, just as his conception of rationality and harmony form the basis of historical explanation; these are the basic concepts that will form the basis of the speculative philosophy of history, above all in the Enlightenment and German idealism.

4. Leibnizian Concepts for a historical Semantics

As I mentioned above, alongside those concepts that we may term as “rigid”, there appears in Leibnizian thought another group of concepts that contribute to redressing the balance of the “negative legacy” with other concepts, which we can refer to as “flexible”²⁸ and which are instrumental in introducing diversity, gradualism and a certain pragmatism²⁹ into our reflections. Those concepts are none other than those of contingency, freedom (autonomy) and tolerance, and all of them are found under the umbrella of a broader principle, that of plurality, which Leibniz describes, from an ontological-gnoseological point of view in his *Monadology*, as “perspectivism”:

²⁶ GP VI, 317.

²⁷ Cf. *De rerum originatione radicali*, GP VII, 308: “Atque hoc est de quo diceres retrocedi ut majore nisu saltum facias in anteriora (qu’on recule pour mieux sauter)”.

²⁸ I prefer to opt for a concept like ‘flexible rationality’, faced with that of ‘soft rationality’, employed by Marcelo Dascal building on a text in which the philosopher of Leipzig speaks of ‘blandior ratio’.

²⁹ Cf. in this respect Txetxu Ausín’s excellent articles: “Weighing and gradualism in Leibniz as instruments for the analysis of normativa conflicts” (*Studia Leibnitiana* XXXVII/1, 2006, pp. 99–111) and “The Quest for Rationalism without Dogmas in Leibniz and Toulmin” (D. Hitchcock & M. Verheij eds, *Arguing on the Toulmin Model. New Essays in Argument Analysis and Evaluation*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2006, pp. 261–272).

And just as the same city viewed from different sides appears to be different and to be, as it were, multiplied in perspectives, so the infinite multitude of simple substances, which seem to be so many different universes, are nevertheless only the perspective of a single universe according to the different points of view of each monad³⁰.

The plurality of points of view expresses metaphorically in Leibniz a particular “hermeneutic rationality”, which concentrates on the grasping of the part of truth present in each perspective of reality (that of the ancients, that of other scholars of that time, that of the other varieties of Christianity, that of other cultures). It is a pluralism that provides, on the basis of its conception of contingency and individuality, a foundation for the idea of tolerance, with cosmopolitan and even multicultural overtones. The plurality of perspectives will be the best safeguard for an approach to truth free from prejudice and dogma, not prioritizing any of them; in this approach, however, a compromise will need to be found to avoid leading to relativism, since it should be granted that looking at a city will not be the same from the centre or from the suburbs, from its sewage system or from a skyscraper, or even from a helicopter.

The Leibnizian conception of knowledge combines two ways of approaching knowledge and reality, which Leibniz terms *ars demonstrandi* and *ars inveniendi*, depending on whether we can deduce them *a priori* from first axioms – evident and non-contradictory, to put it simply – or, on the contrary, whether they require human creativity to earn a place in knowledge. This epistemological movement, which goes from the known to the unknown, is not much different, in my opinion, from the methodology used by historical semantics – the foundation of what I have called the “new philosophy of history” – in its analysis and definition of concepts, and cannot but evoke the pair of conceptual tools that Koselleck terms “space of experience” and “horizon of expectations”.

The Leibnizian methodology – which he uses both in his more abstract philosophical considerations and in his historical and linguistic investigations – is based on Leibniz’s notion of “metaphysical hypothesis”. Thus, when our author refers, for example, to his theory of “pre-established harmony” he does so under the determiner of “hypothesis” or “assumption”³¹, since,

³⁰ *Monadology* § 57 (GP VI, 616). Cf. in this regard *Nouveau System* § 14 (GP IV, 484). Cf. also *Conséquences Métaphysiques*, Couturat *Opusc.*, 15. A first approximation to these reflections appeared more than a decade ago now in my article published in *Isegoría* 17 under the title “Theoria cum praxi: la vuelta a la complejidad”, *loc. cit.*

³¹ Cf. *Nouveau System* §15, GP IV, 485, or *Monadology* § 59, GP VI, 616. Cf. also GP I, 149: “... per suppositionem sive hypothesin... ”.

as he himself claims, “establishing a hypothesis or explaining the mode of generation of something is little more than demonstrating the possibility of that something”³². In the proofs that proceed from known propositions or hypotheses, all that needs to be done is to show which hypotheses contradict each other³³. Now, once the coherence has been demonstrated, that is, that the argument unfolds in a duly logical form, remember that the conclusions obtained are hypothetical³⁴, which in Popperian language would be equivalent to claiming that “are subject to falsification”. So then, it being coherent, Leibniz should consider his “metaphysical hypothesis” as one more hypothesis that competes with the rest (for example the “hypothesis of occasional causes”) in the explanation of the possibility of things. In previous work I have been concerned with a detailed intratextual analysis of these complex Leibnizian theses, which do not fall into incoherence, and which arise from linking the controversy of human free will and of divine prescience or providence with his theory of truth and with infinitesimal calculus³⁵. Now I only wish to underline here the contingent nature of this Leibnizian discourse itself, which Leibniz himself would not hesitate to describe as “plausible explanations” which, furthermore, for him there is only room for on the assumption that God exists and has created the world, since then and only then – let us not forget the subtitle of the *Theodicy* – would it be necessary to justify the goodness of God and the existence of evil in the world. In this way, making the hermeneutic effort of putting brackets around that transcendent perspective and adopting the plurality of perspectives of the sublunar world, we will understand that the same is considered by Leibniz as “hypothetically necessary” from the point of view of the absolute and as “absolutely contingent” from the human perspective. Therefore his rationalist disposition does not prevent Leibniz from stressing the importance of *a posteriori*³⁶ experience, which in human beings must, in most cases, replace *a priori* reasons, and following this scientific model, he will claim that it must be accepted that freedom is a *factum*, which is not subject

³² *De Synthesi et Analysisi universali seu Arte inviniendi et judicandi*, GP VII, 295.

³³ Cf. *De principiis* (post. a 1683), in Couturat, *Opusc.*, 184.

³⁴ *Meditationes de Cognitione, Veritate et Ideis*, GP IV, 426.

³⁵ Cf. C. Roldán, “La salida leibniziana al laberinto de la libertad”, introduction to the edition of Leibniz’s texts: *Escritos en torno a la libertad, el azar y el destino*, Tecnos, Madrid, 1991, pp. IX–LXXVII. In his theory of truth, which is based on the inclusion of the predicate in the subject, Leibniz is also indebted to Aristotle: *Posterior Analytics*, A IV, *On Interpretation* 17a and *Categories* 1a. Cf. Couturat, *Opusc.*, 519. However, Leibniz owes the claim that in contingent truths the predicate is also contained in the subject to the knowledge afforded him by geometry and infinitesimal calculus.

³⁶ Cf. *De necessitate et contingentia*, VE 3, 456.

to any determinism and which enables the choice of evil, that is, as Quintín Racionero has emphasised in his work, that “the hypothesis that must be proven is that of necessity and not that of liberty”³⁷.

Everything in the universe is contingent, but what is contingent *par excellence* is history, that is to say, that which immediately depends on human action, and which manages to a large extent to escape from natural determinism, because free or intelligent beings are not tied to subordinate determined laws of the universe, but act solely in their own spontaneous capacity³⁸. And, naturally, Leibniz is convinced he can intervene in historical reality: hence his political activities to contribute to the reunion of the churches, or his mission of founding scientific academies. In this regard, the Leibnizian theory of freedom will, then, be a theory of action that cannot resign itself to gaining ground on natural determinism, but rather aims at what human beings can really achieve, at that radical creativity that stems from deep within taking form as theoretical controversies which acquire their validity from their capacity to influence in the real world. Contingency³⁹ is not, then, merely a metaphysical principle, but above all a moral principle, which renders human freedom possible and, consequently, renders it impossible to predict human actions. In this sense, throughout his writings Leibniz will oppose the idea that all human activity is futile because everything occurs inevitably, that is, the classical conception of destiny which the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus had characterized as *argós logós*, that is to say, the “lazy reason” existing, according to Leibniz, in the Muslim world, that “everything that is supposed to happen, will necessarily occur whether or not you act”, whether you do this or that. For the philosopher of Leipzig, on the contrary, human action is not only free, but also it is stated in a number of ways and human history, individual and social, depends on that.

By way of conclusion: Responsibility for Concepts

Allow me, then, in this contribution to the volume conceived as an homage to our colleague and friend Eugeniusz Górski, to finish by dedicating a few paragraphs to the relevance of Leibniz in the moral and political importance of some concepts that make up the universality of human thought⁴⁰ without


³⁷ “La racionalización de la política”, *Revista latinoamericana de filosofía* XVIII, nº 1, Autumn 1992, p. 96.

³⁸ Leibniz claims, criticising Art. 6 of Descartes’ *Principia*: “We have free will not when we perceive but when we act” (GP IV, 357). Kant will call this ‘causality through freedom’.

³⁹ Cf. C. Roldán and O. Moro (eds.), *Aproximaciones a la contingencia*, Catarata, Madrid, 2009.

⁴⁰ Cf. E. Górski, *Civil Society, Pluralism and Universalism*, Washington DC, Polish Philosophical Studies VIII, 2007. Cf. Also C. Roldán, “Enlightenment, Philosophy of History

wishing to eradicate a pluralism that, on the contrary, would be encouraged by the philosopher of Leipzig.

The concept of “crisis”⁴¹ has served both Leibniz and Koselleck to refer to a change of era, to the break in the bridge between antiquity and modernity, to the entrance into history of a vertiginous acceleration that shakes individuals, ripping them away from the accommodating experience of continuity. Both – notwithstanding the historical distance – resist the change and dedicate their reflexive efforts to constructing a conceptual structure that endows the new era with a “common rationality”, a support that provides them shelter from the sense of uprootedness, of not belonging, of loss of identity. Leibniz is an eyewitness to the breakthrough of that new era; Koselleck is one in the manner of the historian (*histor*) who draws near to the semantic and iconographic strata of the past. Both are known to be and are responsible for the evolution of concepts which seemed to cover life itself, bursting decisively into the sociopolitical history. The only way to face up to that semantic whirlwind was to apply oneself to understanding its genesis, the logic of the concepts hidden behind words so charged with meaning..., shielded by the belief that ideas have no powers of action outside the mind itself (*mens agit, ideae non agunt*). A work that is meant to be reflexive and critical cannot make a blank slate of the problems of the past, but rather applies part of its efforts to questioning the received philosophical tradition, in the belief that historical knowledge helps us to know about the present and to construct the future. In this sense, Newton claimed – following Diego de Stúñiga: “we are dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants”, and we cannot fall into the temptation of discovering the Mediterranean at every turn, since, as Koselleck notes, each innovative element in the history of philosophy – “horizon of expectations” – emerges from the humus of many previous attempts at conceptualization – “space of experience” as “perspectivism”. Leibniz died without having drafted his *Encyclopaedia*, Koselleck left us hard at work on his *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. Both take on their shoulders a task of responsibility for the concepts they analyse and define, because when events overtake the language, the intellectual cannot ignore his task: he must take responsibility for concepts. 

and Values: A Critical Approach to the Idea of Europe”, published in Poland in the journal “Dialogue and Universalism” XIX, 2009, pp. 7–20.

⁴¹ Cf. P. Hazard, *La crise de la conscience européenne: 1680–1715*, Paris 1935; there is a Castilian translation in Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1988. Cf. likewise Koselleck, *Crítica y crisis*, *loc. cit.*; and the word ‘Krisis’ of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, also translated into Castilian by J. Pérez de Tudela.

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