

**G. W. LEIBNIZ'S PHILOSOPHY AND
PRACTICAL PROJECTS**

Licentiate thesis

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PART II : LEIBNIZ'S PRACTICAL PROJECTS FOR PERFECTING THE WORLD

3. Leibniz's Practical Projects for Perfecting the World

"In the last centuries science has been promoted; partly because it has been hoped that God's goodness and wisdom is best understood by and through it - the main motive in the soul of great Englishmen like Newton -, partly because it has been believed in the absolute usefulness of knowledge especially to the utmost unity of morals, knowledge and happiness - the main motive in the soul of the Frenchmen (like Voltaire), partly because it has been thought that science is something altruistic, harmless, self-sufficient, really innocent, where the bad instincts are not at the least part of, - the mental main motive in Spinoza, who felt when he knew he was divine : - so: because of three mistakes!"¹

In this cheerful citation from Nietzsche the philosophers of the 17th century are divided to three categories. It is very typical that Leibniz does not fit exactly to neither of them, but all of them (one has to note, however, that Nietzsche does not mention any of the German philosophers).

We have seen that the moral philosophy of Leibniz presents a challenge : one does not have to be content with the destiny he is set (although his fate is previously directed by the master of the universe, God). He can choose and act for the benefit of the others, which will result in happiness and pleasure besides the perfection of the world. In particular Leibniz promotes the study of nature.

¹Nietzsche, *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, p. 83, my translation.

"By understanding the laws or the mechanisms of divine invention, we shall perfect ourselves far more than by merely following the constructions invented by men. For what greater master can we find than God, the author of the universe?"¹

Leibniz's practical conception of science resembles the one adopted by Francis Bacon. Whereas Bacon thought that the theoretical sciences result in practical applications, Leibniz considered all the sciences as the same - the difference is only in the point of view from which it is observed. Ethics is just as demonstrative a science as the natural sciences. And practical philosophy is a combination of ethics and politics.²

In English classical humanism there was a strong emphasis on the common good. The main aim of human life was said to be the advancement of the common good which could only be attained by a relentless pursuit of a virtuous *vita activa*, active life. The argument underlying in this was that the common good could not materialize unless everyone was fully committed to promote this aim by exercising the full range of civic virtues. Education was also an important element of these programs.³

Nicholas Jolley sees the whole of Leibniz's philosophy as an ambitious enterprise to synthesize the new mechanical science to traditional metaphysics and natural theology.⁴ This view might be a little simplifying since Leibniz's metaphysics, albeit based on traditional metaphysics, differs from previous metaphysics in many important respects - one has to only think of his pluralism or the pre-established harmony in order to see the difference.

¹(*Elementa physicae*) L, p. 280.

²Grua, *La justice humaine selon Leibniz*, p. 30.

³Peltonen, *Classical Humanism in England*, p. 35 & 45.

⁴Jolley, *Leibniz & Locke*, p. 2.

Science is essentially an ethical science to Leibniz. One can also gain happiness from it :

"Since happiness consists in peace of mind, and since durable peace of mind depends on the confidence we have in the future, and since that confidence is based on the science we should have of the nature of God and the soul, it follows that science is necessary for happiness."¹

Logic serves as a tool or medium for inventing and arranging scientific issues or arguments. Leibniz's conception of science is based on the tripartition from antiquity : physics, ethics and logic.² This is evident in his division of the universe into the Kingdom of Nature and the Kingdom of Grace, as we saw before. Logic is above both of these kingdoms.

These three domains form the basis of Leibniz's practical program. Following Leroy Loemker³, I will next present four different projects, which guided Leibniz's practical action all through his life :

1) Legal reform - a new, more logical and up-to-date jurisprudence would result to just convictions. Leibniz's own logical and philosophical interests made him seek for the principles of logic and ethics upon which a normative system of law and justice must rest. The law must be reduced to its primitive notions, which is an application of his general scientific method. These axioms of law form the basis for universal jurisprudence. Jurisprudence is the charity of the wise, an ethical action with logic as a tool. A practical goal of jurisprudence is peace as Grotius had already maintained earlier.

¹Cited in Den Yul, *The Aristocratic Principle in the Political Philosophy of Leibniz* (Journal of the History of Philosophy XV (3) 1977), p. 324.

²McRae, *Unity of Science: Bacon, Descartes, Leibniz* (Journal of the History of Ideas 18 (1) 1957), p. 48.

³L, p. 6-13.

2) Religious unification - All through his life Leibniz tried to achieve unity between the confessions. He was well aware that the religious controversies of his century were often cloaks for more earthly designs - by religious unification the changes for cultural development would significantly improve as well as the changes for peace. Leibniz had also personal reasons for the project of church reunion : according to some commentators like Loemker, his religious conviction was an important reason in this action. I feel however, with Adams, that Leibniz was more like a theist. It is certain at least that Leibniz was not a very severe Protestant - he was willing to accept many Catholic dogmas, which were unacceptable to Protestant theologians at the time.

3) Advancement of science - if religion and law were to provide the pattern and motive for European harmony, the advancement of science and technology was to supply the tools. The practice of science should be performed as scholarly co-operation in scientific academies. The technology of science should be developed by researching the scientific language and methodology. The church, too, was to support the scientific research; monasteries were to become scientific institutions. The science would work as a missionary tool also - the new inventions and methods would gain followers to the Christian missionaries using those novelties.

4) Happiness of man - in these aforementioned efforts Leibniz never forgot the basic motive, which was the well-being of man and his happiness. He granted that the prince's duty was not only to secure the security of his subjects but also their happiness. He was no patriot either. In a letter to chancellor Golofkin in 6th of January 1712 he wrote as follows :

"From my youth my final goal has been to act for the glory of God by promoting the sciences, which best mirror the divine power, wisdom and goodness...I am always prepared to direct my thoughts to this great goal, and I have only been looking for a prince, who would share these

objectives...in this respect I favor no nation or party."¹

The promotion of arts and sciences is the most central feature in Leibniz's "utopia", a religious mission, which will be practiced by wise individuals for the glory of God in a perfect Christian community. The state of harmony and devoted love to God would be attained by collecting all the knowledge in the world into an encyclopedia, which would be based on universal language. New knowledge of the nature would result in practical applications for example in medicine and in agriculture. Charity is the action for prudent persons - when you work for the glory of God, you will also help your fellowmen and this will increase your own well-being and happiness.

This principle is vital in Leibniz theory of the close relation of church and science. In his model the ecclesiastical institutions would practice science for the greater glory of God. The monasteries would be transformed into scientific communities and the monks and bishops would become scientists.²

Leibniz's youthful mysticism is shown in his early plans, for example, *Societas Theophilorum*, 1676, which resemble the societies of the Rosicrucians.³ Although Leibniz favored a kind of mystic union in his earlier writings, pure church state was not what he had in mind : "According to the law of nature, ecclesiastic in the state cannot be more than councilors, following the example of doctors whose jurisdiction is purely voluntary."⁴ Another close resemblance is Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, which promotes a society called Solomon's House :

¹"Et comme depuis ma jeunesse mon grand but a été de travailler à la gloire de Dieu par l'accroissement des sciences, qui marquent le mieux la puissance, la sagesse et la bonté divine...je suis toujours prest à tourner mes pensées vers le grand but, et je n' ai cherché qu' un grand prince qui ait le même but...et en cela je ne distingue ny nation ny party."

FC VII, p. 502-503.

²Manuel & Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, p. 402.

³Aiton, *Leibniz, a Biography*, p. 85-86.

⁴R, p. 33.

"Ye shall understand (my dear friends) that amongst the excellent acts of that King, one above all hath the pre-eminence. It was the erection and institution of an order or society which we call Solomon's house; the noblest foundation (as we think) that ever was upon the earth; and the lanthorn of this kingdom. It is dedicated to the study of the works and creatures of God."¹

Campanella's *City Of The Sun* is also a precursor to Leibniz's scientific utopia. Campanella's ideal city was in form of a huge memory system with all scientific knowledge depicted in its concentric walls. Scientific knowledge was already complete and could be kept in "only one book". Strangely enough, there was no mention of scientific research.²

Leibniz's utopia is based on the existence of God. He thought that this basic principle would gain adherents to his plans, but he soon found out that his concept of God is not quite compatible with all the other Christians. The famous correspondence with Antoine Arnauld was a first sign of this and the correspondence with the famous theologian, Benigne Bossuet, sorted this out completely. Leibniz was not discouraged, however, but kept on believing that the simple truth in his views would persuade all wise men to act for the good of the mankind.

This duty included not only the Europeans, but all mankind. The learned societies should spread Christianity (or, to be exact, *Leibniz's version* of Christianity) all through the world. This would be easy because by analyzing the religious doctrines of the different confessions the scientific academies would attain such an irresistible corpus of dogmas that all mankind would convert themselves to Christianity. Leibniz does not approve of conversion by force : the persuasion should be intellectual and on the other hand the achievements of western

¹Bacon, *The works of Francis Bacon*, vol. V., p. 382. The King mentioned here is referring to James I. Ibid, p. 383.

²Davis, *Utopianism* (In : *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*. Edited by J. H. Burns and Mark Goldie), p. 336.

science would prove to be very tempting to other civilizations.¹

he main emphasis is naturally in Europe. The continent would form a paradigm, so to speak, which would act as a model for the rest of the world. Leibniz's *Consilium Aegyptium* (where France is persuaded to divert its expansion to East) is clearly a plan, which strives for the enlargement of Europe's hegemony and against the influence of Islam. In his more theoretical works, like the *Theodicy*, Leibniz refers to mankind as an universal concept. He was also very interested in Chinese civilization and studied Chinese thoroughly.

When scholarly co-operation is commonly accepted as a moral and religious duty by the princes (the *gloire* of individual is certainly more modest than promoting the *gloire* of God and gaining happiness on the side, says Leibniz) and subjects alike, the reunion of the churches would become possible and in the process peace in Europe would also be reached.

In Leibniz's great vision Germany would unite first, then the Holy Roman Empire would be restored to its former glory and by the lead of the Emperor and the Pope the whole Europe would reunite into a great Christian community, where the practice of science is a honored and sacred duty. This plan hints also at Leibniz's anti-French sentiments : the balance of Europe would be maintained by the Emperor and the Pope together - there is no place for expansionist politics like the one practiced by Louis XIV, the Sun King.

Europe would be a republic of scholars, which would be led by the Emperor as a temporal and the Pope as a spiritual leader. This scheme is at its strongest in Leibniz's early memoir *Caesarinius fürstenerius* (1677), which was written in Paris when he was becoming frustrated with French politics :

¹This has become true in certain degree, although the achievements are not necessarily utilitarian by nature!

"All Christendom forms a species of republic, in which Caesar has some authority - from which becomes the name, Holy Empire, which should somehow extend as far as the Catholic Church."¹

The united Europe would form a federal state of some kind (*Respublica Christiana*), where a council led by the Emperor would decide on common things.² Leibniz's plan is thus a mixture of a medieval system and the constitution of Holland or Switzerland. In comparison with the administration of the empire of his time, the Emperor would have more power in order to maintain the unity of Europe. Leibniz leaves open the question of how the individual princes would consent to this plan. It seems to me that he had such great hopes for the power of faith in science and God as the author of the nature that he thought that these alone would be enough for the princes.

This naive aspect of Leibniz's character is less evident in his later political writings but at this stage he believed that the unified Europe would spread Christianity all through the world and would also receive new information, new inventions and financial advantages in the same process. His plan of spreading Christianity to China via Russia and the *Consilium Aegyptium* are part of the same scheme.

Finally the whole world would unite with science and Christian truth into a great community. Leibniz was strongly influenced by the Church father Augustine's *City of God*, where the grand scheme of all humans under the one God in one congregation, one city, one state is presented. In Leibniz the notion *Mundi Civitas* (civilization) means the same thing as Augustine's *Civitas Dei* (the City of God).³ The God's kingdom (*Respublica Optima*) is an absolute monarchy with God as its sovereign.

¹"Totam Christianitatem unam velut rempublicam componere, in qua caesari autoritas aliqua competit. Hinc sacri imperii nomen, quod aequale ecclesiae Catholicae quodammodo porrigi debet..."

A IV, 2. Bd., p. 15-16; R, p. 112.

²R, p. 112.

³Schneiders, W., *Respublica Optima*, p. 6.

Leibniz's plan is a curious mixture of absolutism, colonialism, medieval thought and new science. This strange and often confusing combination seems like a fairy-tale at first, but when one looks at it more closely, one will find out that the scheme is surprisingly consistent in its own limits. The whole system can be traced from his moral philosophy and metaphysics. The Greek term *Monas*, which is the basis of Leibniz's term for his substance, *monad*, means unity - and this is no accident.

Leibniz's plans are interlaced in number of ways. The scientific study of nature not only points the way towards the good life, but also puts into our hands the tools by which the prime aim of ethics, the advancement of human welfare, can be achieved. As Ernst Cassirer noted, the theodicy becomes a logodicy : the reason is the last hiding place, before which even God bows.¹

Leibniz's plan was not the only one of his time, but the scope and extent of the plan exceeded all others. Fontenelle commented on Leibniz's *Respublica optima* : "The idea of Christian community like this would not have been very surprising for a German Catholic, but Leibniz was of Lutheran faith : in religion his love of order far exceeded his spiritual needs."²

In the following chapters we will see how Leibniz tried to realize his plans in real life. With *theoria cum praxi* as his motto it was clear that he had to do something. It might be that God had chosen him, Leibniz, as His tool for promoting the perfection and well-being of mankind. At least he could dedicate his life to this noble goal. And so he did.

¹Cassirer, *Leibniz's System in seinem wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen*, p. 474.

²Hostler, *Leibniz's Moral Philosophy*, p. 94.