

## **Leibniz on the Passions and Perfectibility of Man**

Research plan

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The proposed study, to be conducted in the Department of Philosophy, University of Helsinki and The School of Philosophy, Psychology & Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh, focuses on G. W. Leibniz's (1646-1716) theory of the perfectibility of man. The starting-point of the study is his theory of passions which is a little known, but important part of Leibniz's practical rationality. In general, one might say that passions or emotions in Leibniz-studies are usually ignored and there is next to nothing written on how individual passions arise, what passions Leibniz holds important, how they affect our action, especially in respect to our moral perfectibility and how they can be controlled. This is a gap which I intend to address in my study.

My dissertation (*Leibniz on Rational Decision-Making*, 2007) included a preliminary account of the role of passions in human practical rationality. In this study the goal is to go deeper and consider in detail the character and birth of the different passions and how passions and their combinations affect the human action and especially the perfectibility of man.

### *Perfectibility and passions*

Leibniz regards the perfectibility of man as a long-term process where one achieves wisdom eventually by studying nature and promoting science as well as acting justly or charitably towards one's fellow men. He followed Thomas Aquinas and the Aristotelian intellectualists in holding that in our deliberation the will usually follows the recommendations of the intellect. The will is an intellectual appetite and always directed to the apparent good. The job of the intellect, in turn, is to compare different goods, weigh them against each other, consider the consequences of different proposed acts and try to find an option which is not only good in itself, but also beneficial to the common good, that is, it should promote the progress of perfection in the world. The goal of moral action is thus to distinguish apparent goods from real goods and strive to promote one's own perfection which is usually thought as happiness or flourishing.

In Leibniz's consequentialist ethics, the virtuous action is both motivated and harmed by passions and consequently Leibniz attaches a great significance to them. My claim is that it is essential to note that controlling and utilizing passions is a central part of man's perfectibility in the Leibnizian best possible world.

In his *Nouveaux essais* (1704), *Essais de Theodicée* (1710) and elsewhere, he again and again emphasizes the fact that once men learn to develop their attention, resist harmful temptations and follow clear and distinct ideas, they can achieve happiness. This can be done by ignoring sensuous passions which consist of minute, fleeting impressions. I will present a theory according to which Leibniz thought that imagination is a connecting bridge between our confused perceptions of perfection and our clear and distinct ideas. Feeling perfection, according to my interpretation, is a combination of both clear and distinct ideas and minute perceptions. This is why Leibniz thought it to be such a motivating force in man's practical action and this is why he believed that the sheer joy which follows from our virtuous action is enough to guide men to virtue and motivate them to perfect themselves. The minute perceptions have an instant quality which combined with clear and distinct ideas form intellectual passion (joy or pleasure of the mind) and its source is the universal perfection and harmony and ultimately, the creator.

When we perceive perfection or harmony in the world, we feel joy which Leibniz defines as the sentiment of increasing perfection. According to Leibniz, we can never feel a complete joy and this is why we have to act consistently according to the good to maintain our happiness and increase it. Respectively, we feel mental pain if we act unwisely, harm others or follow our negative passions. This is a typical case for akratics. Our moral action is also partly guided by Leibniz's doctrine of moral instinct which is largely ignored in Leibniz-studies. When confused, minute perceptions produce (with the help of imagination) the sentiment of an increase in perfection or harmony in relation to some proposed course of action in deliberation, the moral instinct guides the soul to strive for that goal because it produces joy and thus motivates our moral action. In this way intellectual passions guide us to perfect ourselves and act for the common good.

The idea of utilizing the passion of joy in achieving happiness of course requires a metaphysical framework which Leibniz provides in his theory of the best of all possible worlds. According to this theory, God chooses one possible world which he finds the best and creates it instead of the others. One of the criteria in his choice is

the goodness of the world although it is by no means the only one. Consequently, the best world is good, but not perfect. The best world is an ever-changing whole that develops to a full degree of perfection gradually. Thus, although it may seem imperfect in parts, this may change in the future (*Essais de Theodicée*, §220). In other words, one of the characters of the best world is precisely the point that it gets better and better.

Leibniz strongly binds together the moral action of the individual agent and the general process of perfection in the world. One's good deeds contribute to the increase of universal perfection and respectively, metaphysical goodness is the foundation of our happiness. In a letter to his patron, Ernst August, Leibniz summarizes the relation between these two levels: "Wisdom is the science of happiness. Happiness is a durable state of joy. Joy is a sentiment of perfection. Perfection is the degree of reality." In the best of all possible worlds, the enlightened moral agent is conscious of his or her role in the world and strives to act according to God's wishes.

### *The passions*

According to Leibniz, there is in the soul at all times an infinite amount of different inclinations of varying degree of clearness leading to different directions. The final volition is a kind of compromise between these dispositions. He sees pleasure or pain as a sum of inclinations or tendencies towards a certain direction. When the direction is to a future good, we get semi-pleasures, but a mass of semi-sufferings cumulated may overcome them and cause pain. A bunch of confused, minute perceptions may gain victory over a single clear and distinct idea in the soul. For example, we may forget our noble goals and fall into temptation. These combinations of minute perceptions constitute passions, which are perceived as temporary inclinations towards some direction.

The most important passions in Leibniz's writings (of which the most important is the *Nouveaux essais*) are joy/pain, love and hope/despair. As we saw above, the principal reason for human happiness and perhaps the most important passion is joy, which follows from perceiving perfection or the harmony in the world and the source of harmony is God and the pre-established harmony which he realizes when he creates the world. Mental pain is regarded as an opposite of joy, as a perception of

disharmony (or decreasing process of perfection) in the world which decreases our activity and will in the long run lead to unhappiness. Thus pain is an indication of the world's imperfections.

It is a surprisingly little known fact that in this important respect Leibniz closely followed Spinoza's views. According to Spinoza, when our power to maintain self-preservation increases, we would feel joy (pleasure) and when it decreased we would feel sadness (pain). In his definition of joy Spinoza argues that moving from inadequate ideas (smaller perfection) to adequate ideas (greater perfection) increases our power and consequently our joy and therefore we should increase our knowledge of God or nature (*Ethics* III, prop. XI, Scholium). The joy comes in degrees – the more adequate ideas we have, the more perfect we will become and the more we will understand God or nature. Passions are usually confused ideas that cause suffering to the mind, which in turn produces sadness and inactivity. Leibniz notes in a letter to Placcius that Spinoza said many good things about emotions and this influence can be found from his writings.

It is clear, however, that Leibniz also had original ideas concerning the passions. First, his list of the most prominent passions is different from Spinoza's – besides joy and pain, he holds as important the passions of hope and love, thus belonging clearly to the tradition of perfectionist thinkers, such as Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and Thomas Aquinas. Second, Leibniz found a novel way to relate rational choice with the idea of probability. In his ethics one should not only estimate the good in question, but also the consequences the proposed act produces to the general process of perfection. This, according to Leibniz, can be eventually done with some objective criteria when the science of probability is created.

Third, in Leibniz's views on passions the element of dynamical change is prominent. Leibniz regards the passions as processes which have to be tended continually. They are built from minute perceptions (Leibniz's term is suffering) which eventually capture our attention. These "little" perceptions are either too minute and too numerous, or else too unvarying to be distinctive on their own, but when they are combined with others they make themselves known within the whole. They are perceived as clear, but confused. As an example Leibniz often mentions the roar of the sea which is formed by the sound of each wave put together. Thus it can be said that Leibniz sees passions as arising from a plurality of minute inclinations which develop gradually. They are to be understood as processes rather than states.

We saw above that happiness cannot continue without systematic virtuous action. The process-like quality of Leibniz's passions is also clearly present in his views of hope. It is not a state, but a dynamic tendency or a process towards a future good. Leibniz seems to say that hope can be understood as formed by a positive disquiet. When we gain victories in our efforts to avoid harmful sensuous minute perceptions, we get semi-pleasures, positive minute perceptions which encourage us in our action towards the pleasure or good of which in an ideal case ultimately constitutes the increase of perfection in the actual world. From these semi-pleasures arises a notable feeling which is hope, defined by Leibniz as a tendency towards pleasure. Despair is defined similarly as "a kind of strong tendency which is utterly thwarted, resulting in violent conflict and much displeasure." (NE II, xx, §9)

Closely connected to joy and hope is the social passion of love. Leibniz argued that one should do good to everyone, since it is in this way that one's own intellectual pleasures are increased. Love is simply the joy or sentiment of increasing perfection that follows from other people's happiness - it is one's own and the other's happiness combined. When one person does good for another he or she senses the increase of perfection in the world and is pleased by the other person's happiness. This pleasure is love, and consequently, he or she loves the other person. When we study nature, we gain pleasure from observing God's perfections in it, which makes us love Him. This kind of love gives us the greatest imaginable joy which motivates us to act in a manner that pleases Him. In other words, acting according to the intentions of God gives us joy and appeals to our reason. Sublime love is thus connected to joy and hope in Leibniz's big picture.

### *The Passions and self-manipulation*

The control of unwanted passions has also a character of a process. Leibniz recommends that we should manipulate ourselves in order to strive for the right goals. Our hope needs constant strengthening to maintain our confidence in achieving the good which is strived for, that is to say, in wise men the promoting of universal perfection. This encouragement takes place through the feelings of pleasure or joy and pain. When the enlightened intellect finds that a proposed course of action seems to produce semi-pleasures (with a promise of joy), it recommends it to the will which usually follows its recommendations. Similarly, when we get semi-sufferings, it should be obvious that the deed we are about to do is to be avoided. In deliberation it

is essential to reflect both one's own and others previous experiences and try to anticipate the consequences of different conceived courses of action. Eventually, hope arises and when this favourable progress continues, we may gain confidence of the direction we are following.

This process requires conscious manipulation - the idea stems from ancient sources, for example, Plato's *Phaedrus*. Leibniz emphasizes the importance of good habits and good company which help us to strive for the right goals in life and enlighten our soul. However, because of the epistemological confusedness and the plurality of different inclinations constantly present in the soul, in practice it often happens that we make mistakes concerning the ways that are beneficial to both our own well-being and the general process of perfection – for example, we may believe that a certain object of love or hope makes us happy (and promote the common good) even though the result is the exact opposite.

### *The Significance of the Study*

My study will advance Leibniz-studies with respect to the theory of passions and in general, moral philosophy, moral psychology, practical rationality and philosophy of mind. It will also bring out new insights to discussions of Early Modern moral psychology. For example, in Susan James' classic 1997 work, *Passion and Action*, Leibniz is entirely ignored.

Even among the Leibniz-scholarship the topic of passions is a rare subject and there is no book-length presentation available, only some shorter accounts, such as parts of Gaston Grua's work *La justice humaine selon Leibniz* (1956), Clotilde Calabi's article *Leibnizian Pleasures* (1993) and Donald Rutherford's article "*Patience sans Espérance: Leibniz's Critique of Stoicism*". Emotions are also shortly present in some works concerning Leibniz's metaphysics, such as Donald Rutherford's *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature* (1995) and Gregory Brown's 1988 article *Leibniz's Theodicy and the Confluence of Worldly Goods*. The emotion of love features in Patrick Riley's work on Leibniz's views on jurisprudence (*Leibniz's Universal Jurisprudence*, 1996).

Although Leibniz's theory of the perfectibility of man has a strong connection to his theory of the best world and its structure, especially the theory of pre-established harmony, it is safe to say that the theme of how the passions affect the moral action

and ultimately the perfectibility of man in the Leibnizian framework is a very little discussed topic in contemporary Leibniz-studies. Furthermore, the systematic study of the passion of hope may give new insights to Leibniz's optimism. Thus there is an interesting and substantial contribution to be made to Leibniz-studies.

My project will also benefit studies of Early Modern philosophy in general since I will also consider some predecessors and contemporaries to Leibniz's views. This is especially the case with Spinoza who is the single most important influence to Leibniz, but Leibniz's views can also be compared to the views of Grotius, Hobbes, and Pufendorf and as opposed to neostoicism. The topic of self-manipulation has interesting connections to Descartes' views and Leibniz discusses them in detail in his commentary of Descartes' *Principia philosophia*. There are also some interesting treatments of emotions in Leibniz's own time such as Christian Thomasius' 1696 work *Einleitung zur Sittenlehre* and *Ausübung der Sittenlehre*.

My study has also interesting connections to the contemporary theories of emotions and moral psychology. Leibniz's views on love and hope and the role of joy and pain in moral action are original and interesting in their own right. For example, Leibniz's view of love as a social passion may have important connections to modern theories which I will acknowledge in my study. It is also evident that Leibniz thought passions as cognitive, following from judgements, although his theory of minute perceptions complicates the picture. In this way Leibniz's theory of passions can have interesting connections to modern cognitive theories of emotions (especially Robert Solomon's theory of emotions as subjective strategies) and even shed new light on the problems in these theories which have to do with the limitations of conscious judgement with respect to emotions.

Leibniz's moral psychology is also interesting in itself. In the history of ethics Leibniz has significance as a proto-utilitarian who tried to promote the common good. The plurality of values in decision-making (of which the confused perceptions which form passions are an unavoidable feature) is a theme which has been discussed in modern theories of ethics (see, for example, Michael Stocker's *Plural and Conflicting Values* (1990)). His attempts of reconciling altruism and egoism in his theory of love is an interesting way of optimizing conflicting motives. From Leibniz one can also obtain ideas concerning the question of the relevance of moral emotions to moral judgements, a topic popular in modern discussions of moral psychology. His

discussion of the birth of joy and sadness in *Nouveaux essais*, II, xx provides an illuminating account of how minute, passing perceptions can affect our moral action.

### *The Realization of the Study*

I will use largely short fragments scattered in Leibniz's unpublished papers, although there are some important passages in his larger works *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (especially book II which discussed the moral action and chapter xx, titled 'Of modes of pleasure and pain' which is Leibniz's most systematic discussion of the birth of passions available) and *Essais de Theodicée*, where Leibniz discusses the relationship between men and God and the ways of controlling our passions. Concerning self-manipulation, the most important source is Leibniz's commentary of Descartes' *Principia philosophiae*, titled *Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum* (1692). His only study of passions is the short part I of a memoir called *De affectibus* (1679) which is an attempt to define individual emotions, but its significance to my study is marginal because Leibniz's definitions are largely unoriginal.

Other important sources in my study are Spinoza's *Ethics* (especially parts III & IV), Aristotle's *On the Soul* and *Nichomachean Ethics*, Hobbes' *Leviathan* and *De Corpore*, Neo-Stoic writings (Du Vair, Lipsius) and Descartes' *Passions of the soul* and the correspondence with Princess Elisabeth.

The study is to be realized in three years as articles written in English to well-known international journals and as a monograph which includes these articles as book chapters along additional material. Here is a preliminary plan of the articles:

- 1) A general article on the role of passions in man's perfectibility in Leibniz (part of a chapter concerning the perfectibility of man; *Studia Leibnitiana*).
- 2) An article on the role of imagination in feeling perfection (A draft exists in the form of a congress paper, presented in The Nordic Workshop in Early Modern Philosophy, Tartu, 31. 5. – 1. 6. 2008; part of a chapter concerning the birth of passions and the philosophy of mind; *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*).
- 3) An article on the passion of love in relation to the passion of hope in Leibniz (A draft exists in the form of a congress paper, held in ECAP, Cracow, August 2008; part



of a book chapter concerning social passions and their effect on perfectability; *History of Philosophy Quarterly*).

4) “Leibniz and Locke on Modes of Pleasure and Pain” – an article on the discussion of the birth of emotions in *Nouveaux essais*, II, xx (I will write a first draft of this paper to the congress Nordic Workshop on Early Modern Philosophy (NWEMP) 2009 which takes place in June in Jyväskylä; *Locke Studies*).

There is some background work done for the project already. I have written two congress papers on the theme of the proposed study which can be developed into articles (numbers 2 and partly 3 in the plan above). These papers and the articles require more background work and reading which is to be done in year one (2010). By year two the first two articles are finished and in year two (2011) I will finish the remaining two articles as well as start compiling the monograph. In year three (2012) I will complete the manuscript of the book. In addition, I will present drafts of the articles in conferences, both in Finland (especially the seminars of the PMP-unit) and abroad.

My plans include also a research visit to The School of Philosophy, Psychology & Language Sciences in the University of Edinburgh which has a strong emphasis on Early Modern Philosophy (<http://www.philosophy.ed.ac.uk/research/EarlyModernPhilosophy.html>). My hostess will be Dr. Pauline Phemister (<http://www.philosophy.ed.ac.uk/staff/full-academic/pauline-phemister.html>) who is a well-known Leibniz-scholar and author of a book called *Leibniz and the Natural World: activity, passivity and corporeal substances in Leibniz's philosophy* (Springer, 2005). Her book includes a part on the birth of passions in Leibniz which is directly related to my study and she is currently interested in the topic of perfectibility of man in Leibniz's philosophy. For this reason the article 5) above benefits greatly from this visit of three months (in autumn 2010). I have agreed on this matter with Dr. Phemister and her invitation to Edinburgh is included in my application.

In addition, a visit of one month to Leibniz-archiv, Hannover, Germany in June of 2011 is planned. In the archive one can find a near-complete archive of secondary sources concerning Leibniz and his unpublished manuscripts as microfilms (<http://www.nlb-hannover.de/Leibniz/Leibnizarchiv/Einfuehrung/>). The archive is open for Leibniz-scholars and I have visited it three months in 2001. The visit is intended for collecting material of secondary sources concerning Leibniz's views on

passions – in Finland the material written in German, French or Italian available is limited. At the same time I am able to produce prints of some of the unpublished fragments by Leibniz on passions which would otherwise be difficult and costly to gain. In addition, it is planned that the IX. International Leibniz-Kongress takes place in July-August in Hannover, so I can include the congress in my visit. I include in my application a previous invitation from the director of the archive, Herbert Breger which I used in a previous application, although if required, I am certain I can provide a fresh one.

### *Financing plan*

I am the only hired researcher for the project and the applied monthly salary of 20824 euros from the academy (80% of the whole salary) is calculated according to the UPJ-salary system of University of Helsinki (Tehtävän vaatimustaso 5 and Henkilökohtainen työn suoritustaso 4%) for a Research Doctor with a 2,5% raise each year as agreed with the research site. Thus the salaries applied from the Academy of Finland are as follows: 2010: 20824 euros, 2011: 21344 euros and 2012: 21877 euros

The share of the University of Helsinki is as follows: 2010: 15780 euros, 2011: 16171 euros and 2012: 16576 euros. The costs covered from the share of the University of Helsinki consist of the following:

#### Travel costs

- Two-three international conferences per year and at least two in Finland (yearly One word-colloquim of the Philosophical Society of Finland and Early Modern Philosophy seminars in Turku), estimated 3000 euros per year
- In 2010 a three-month stay in the The School of Philosophy, Psychology & Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh, office costs, living costs, travel costs and other costs, approximately 4000-5000 euros
- In 2011 a research visit to Leibniz-Archiv in Hannover, Germany (one month, appx. 2000 euros)

#### Books purchased

- estimated 1000 euros per year

#### Inter-library loans

- estimated 250 euros per year

#### Other costs (mail, copies etc.)

- estimated 250 euros per year

These add up to 9000 euros (2010), 6500 euros (2011) and 4500 euros (2012). The rest of the university share (2010, 6780 euros (565/month), 2011 9671 euros (805/month) and 2012 12076 euros (1006/month) is used as a subsalary.

#### *Connections to other projects and researchers*

I am currently a Research Doctor (1. 1. – 31. 12. 2009) in a Academy of Finland project of Academy Professor Simo Knuuttila (“Medieval philosophy and Theology”). Professor Knuuttila is a Leibniz-scholar in his own right and has acted as my unofficial supervisor in my dissertation. Besides doing background work for the proposed study, I am currently editing a collection of translation of Leibniz’s writings to Finnish (with Tuomo Aho; forthcoming from the Helsinki University Press in autumn 2009).

I am also an affiliate member of the interdisciplinary (theology, philosophy, history) Centre of Excellence of the Finnish Academy (Philosophical Psychology, Morality and Politics: Human Conduct in the History of Philosophy, <http://www.aka.fi/en-gb/A/Science-in-society/Centres-of-Excellence>), led by Academy Professor Simo Knuuttila. I participate in the seminars and workshops of the PMP-unit and can benefit from co-operation of its members. I also give papers in a seminar called *History of Philosophy Research Seminar*, connected with the unit. Thus my research environment in Helsinki is lively, up to date and competent, including many well-known scholars in Early Modern Philosophy in Finland, such as Martina Reuter, Tuomo Aho and Kari Saastamoinen and Petter Korkman. The latter two are especially helpful to my study, being experts on the natural law-tradition to which Leibniz’s discussion of perfectibility is related.

I have also good connections to University of Turku (Arto Repo, Valtteri Viljanen, Olli Koistinen), University of Tampere (Jani Hakkarainen, Ville Lähde) and University of Jyväskylä (Miira Tuominen, Mikko Yrjönsuuri).

My international connections to Leibniz-scholars have been built up by giving papers on various Leibniz-related congresses in past eight years and maintaining a web-portal and a discussion group *Leibnizian resources* which is perhaps the most well-known web-page on Leibniz at the moment (<http://www.helsinki.fi/~mroinila/leibniz.htm>).

I am fairly well-known in Leibniz-circles, but my closest ties are to school of Leibniz-researchers who support an idea of “soft” rationality in Leibniz. The father of the school is prof. Marcelo Dascal and I will work in Tel Aviv in his Leibniz-Locke-project in March-April in 2009 (funded by the Academy of Finland’s Researcher Training and Research Abroad-grant) which has a direct relevance to the project I am applying funding for, as it strives to examine the structure and argumentation of Leibniz’s *Nouveaux essais*. Through the “school of soft rationality” I have come to know such younger Leibniz scholars as Andreas Blank and Moegens Laerke.

I have also good connections to such Leibniz scholars as Mark Kulstad, Gregory Brown, Donald Rutherford (who has acted as a pre-examiner of my dissertation), Justin H. Smith, Pauline Phemister, Patrick Riley, Hartmut Rudolph, Peter Myrdahl (Uppsala) and in Leibniz-Archiv, Hannover, director Herbert Breger and Siegmund Probst.