

Francesco Bianchini*, Enrico Pasini**

Introduction

*Dipartimento di Filosofia e Comunicazione
Università di Bologna
Italy
E-mail: francesco.bianchini5@unibo.it

**Dipartimento di Filosofia e Scienze dell'educazione
Università di Torino
Italy
E-mail: enrico.pasini@unito.it

“Thus phenomenology leads to the monadology anticipated by Leibniz in ingenious aperçu”; with these words, Husserl concluded his lecture about “First Philosophy” in the year 1924.¹ Anticipation is a construct now barred from the history of philosophy, but it is impossible to deny all value to such first-hand allegations.

Aim of this issue is to signalize the connections, or the very continuities, between certain elements of Leibniz's philosophy and of Husserl's phenomenology in its different stages of development.² Starting from the aspects of Husserlian thought that in the eye of the scholar, or of Husserl himself, seem to be present in Leibniz's thought, we shall analyse in some deepness the relation between these two different lines of theoretical and philosophical reflection.

On the one hand, Leibniz and Husserl can be considered as the most significant stages of a philosophical view according to which thought is the lieu of abstract, ideal, and symbolic forms, that are not so distant, yet, nor separated from a reality entirely tangible. From this point of view, we can

¹ “So führt die Phänomenologie auf die von Leibniz in genialem *aperçu* antizipierte Monadologie” (Hua VIII: E. Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923/24). Zweiter Teil: Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion*, hrsg. von R. Böhm, Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1959, p. 190). He added elsewhere: “und so ist seine ganze Monadenlehre eine der großartigsten Antizipationen der Geschichte” (Hua VII: E. Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923/24). Erste Teil: Kritische Ideengeschichte*, hrsg. von R. Böhm, Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1956, p. 196).

² The ultimate origin of this collection of papers is a seminar on “Leibniz and phenomenology” (Bologna, 12-12-2012) belonging to a series of seminars on Leibniz and other thinkers (Locke, Kant, etc.) that have been organized in the years 2009-2012 by the Sodalitas Leibniana, the Italian society of Leibnizian studies.

easily remark how strictly related Leibniz's idea of *mathesis universalis*, and Husserl's radicalization of pure logic as a theory of science – better, as a theory of every possible forms of theory – really are.

On the other hand there is the reprisal of Leibnizian monadology in the Husserlian treatment of intersubjectivity; this aspect, indeed, is not disconnected from the preceding point:

le thème monadique se présente la première fois concomitamment au projet d'une nouvelle science, la phénoménologie, comme critique de la connaissance, fondée sur la description eidétiques des vécus immanents (*L'idée de la phénoménologie*). Une telle science des dernières sources de la connaissance dans le vécu de conscience est proche, aux yeux de Husserl, d'une sorte de monadologie non métaphysique. De même, la perspective temporelle du vécu de conscience renvoie à la structure dynamique de la *vis* representative de Leibniz.³

"I myself am really a monadologist", Husserl once wrote to Dietrich Mahnke, even though he added that he rather would not liken the monad's law of development to that of a mathematical series, as Leibniz had done.⁴ But this interest of Husserl's for certain ideas of Leibniz's did not develop, neither in him nor in his school, into a proper interest for a study of Leibniz's works and deeds, with the notable exception, precisely, of Mahnke's early interest for a phenomenological reading of the Leibnizian project of a universal mathematics.⁵

In time, so many aspects of their theoretical connections have been explored: from the relation between both philosophies as regards formal sciences, to the influence of Leibniz's and Husserl's ideas on contemporary philosophy of mind, artificial intelligence and cognitive science; the relation of analysis and synthesis, of *a priori* truths and truths of fact, in their philosophical methods; continuities in the use of symbolism or in the rejection of psychological conceptions of mathematics or truth; the conception of "first philosophy" in the respective meanings; the relation between the themes of Husserlian formal ontology and the logical-ontological structure

³ M. Vergani, "La lecture husserlienne de Leibniz et l'idée de monadologie", *Les Études philosophiques*, 4, 2004, p. 538.

⁴ "Ich selbst bin eigentlich Monadologe. Nicht so weit gehen kann ich wie Leibniz in der Auffassung der Monade, die sie einer Reihenentwicklung vergleicht" (Husserl to Mahnke, Jan. 5th 1917, *Briefwechsel*, III, p. 408).

⁵ Mahnke, in a work that stemmed from a doctoral thesis prepared under Husserl's guide (D. Mahnke, *Leibnizens Synthese von Universalmathematik und Individualmetaphysik*, Halle, Niemeyer, 1925) implied there to be a tension between the program of a "universal mathematics" and that of a "metaphysics of individuation" (see also D. Rabouin, *Interpretations of Leibniz's Mathesis Universalis at the Beginning of the XXth Century*, in R. Krömer, Y. Chin-Drian (eds.), *New Essays on Leibniz Reception in Science and Philosophy of Science 1800-2000*, Berlin, Springer, 2012, pp. 187-201).

of Leibniz's thought; up to the efforts to show that Leibniz's metaphysics has been in truth a phenomenology.

The same richness is apparent in studies of late-Husserlian and post-Husserlian developments. Husserl's and Heidegger's attitude towards Leibniz and their readings of him; Gödel's move from a Leibnizian frame to seeking in Husserl something that would set in motion the axiomatic machine; Nishida's phenomenology of self and its relation to monadology; these and other themes have been studied with both theoretical and historical approaches. Important contributions as the collection edited by Cristin and Sakai⁶ have referred to the views of phenomenologically connotated authors, or to the presence in Leibniz's writings of concepts that are typical of the phenomenological perspective.

And nevertheless, quite contrarily to this last attitude, phenomenological view of Leibniz's thought may even have helped in the past to avoid or contrast a reading of Leibniz's thought as sheer idealistic phenomenalism. Leibniz rather establishes the category of well-founded phenomena, with the realm of which, albeit not in full independence from metaphysics, natural philosophy, or physical science, concerns itself. In this sense, *real* phenomena are the world. In recent times Vincenzo De Risi has indeed pointed out a "phenomenological turn" in Leibniz's late philosophy, when he arrived "to define (and not just characterize) quality and quantity through a co-perceptual act".⁷

In the following pages, the authors have not only tried to keep faith to this picture of continuities and analogies, but to shed light, as well, both on the complexities that a too much optimistic view has sometimes evaded, and on aspects that in that picture were not eminent enough. On the one hand, phenomenological analysis of the transcendental subject as person brings to quite different results, since the *Identität des Ichs* "is not substantial identity".⁸ That is to say: Leibniz's metaphysics is absent, there are neither substantial pre-established harmony nor creator, and Husserl's monads clearly have windows; they are part, not of a republic of spirits, but of the human community. On the other hand, in a sense, Leibniz is innocent of the crisis of natural sciences: life, meaning, even teleology permeate his universe,⁹ although he is less eurocentric than Husserl in his views on world

⁶ R. Cristin and K. Sakai (eds.), *Phänomenologie und Leibniz*, Freiburg, Alber, 2000.

⁷ V. De Risi, *Geometry and Monadology: Leibniz's Analysis Situs and Philosophy of Space*, Berlin, Springer, 2007, p. 178.

⁸ Hua XIV: E. Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Zweiter Teil. 1921-1928*, hrsg. von I. Kern, Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1973, p. 296.

⁹ An unpublished short writing work by Leibniz, concerning the infinity that permeates nature and its relation to teleology, is presented in this issue.

history. These and other connections have been raised by the authors of this issue.

But Leibniz's philosophy is a many-sided system of thought, and the analysis of its relationships with later philosophers is able to bring about new interpretations. Husserl, and phenomenological thought in general, have been for us and, we hope, will be again for others a philosophical buttress strong enough to bring to light new perspectives on Leibniz's account of the world, of science, and of humanity.