

**THE PRINCIPLE OF DETERMINATION AND ITS PLACE
WITHIN THE LEIBNIZIAN SYSTEM**

**PRINCIPIO DE DETERMINACION Y SU LUGAR
EN EL SISTEMA LEIBNIZIANO**

ADELINO CARDOSO
Universidade Nova de Lisboa
cardoso.adelino@gmail.com

Resumen: El autor pretende indagar la relevancia del principio de determinación dentro del sistema filosófico leibniziano. La hipótesis rectora es que el principio de determinación se encuentra en el núcleo del sistema leibniziano como principio mediador entre el principio de razón y el principio de perfección. Es un principio ordenador del mundo actual tanto en el dominio natural como en el moral. A nivel metafísico y físico, el principio de determinación aclara la constitución de todo el universo y el proceso de constitución y desarrollo de los seres individuales. A nivel moral, este principio aclara la naturaleza de la voluntad y el proceso de decisión, según las disposiciones primitivas y las inclinaciones predominantes. En suma, el principio de determinación instituye una especie de orden inmanente, distinto de un determinismo estricto y excluyente del caso fortuito y de la arbitrariedad.

Palabras clave: Determinación, Disposición, Orden inmanente, Contingencia, Necesidad.

Abstract: The author aims at inquiring the relevance of the principle of determination within the Leibnizian philosophical system. The guiding hypothesis is that the principle of determination lies at the core of the Leibnizian system as a mediating principle between the principle of reason and the principle of perfection. It is an ordering principle of the actual world both in the natural and the moral domains. At the metaphysic and physic level, the principle of

determination elucidates the constitution of the whole universe and the process of constitution and development of individual beings. At the moral level, this principle elucidates the nature of the will, and the process of decision, according to primitive dispositions and prevailing inclinations. In sum, the principle of determination institutes a kind of immanent order, distinct from a strict determinism and excluding fortuitous events and arbitrary acts.

Keywords: Determination, Disposition, Immanent order, Contingence, Necessity.

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1. Actual world: an increase of order

For Leibniz, as for a long philosophical tradition that goes back to Plato, to which pertains F. Suárez, a very influential author in Leibnizian philosophical elaboration, the essence is something real rather than a mere ideal entity, since the tension or the effort (*conatus*) of existing constitutes an intrinsic part of itself. However, not all essences gain access to existence, since many of them remain in the state of pure possibility. Furthermore, the transition from essence to existence is not made individually by every entity on its own, but rather in a holistic manner by means of a combination of possible beings forming a determined world. Among the infinity of possible worlds, God chooses the most perfect one, not only by comparison with others but absolutely speaking:

And, as in mathematics, when there is no *maximum* nor *minimum*, in short nothing distinguished, everything is done equally or, when that is not possible, nothing at all is done; it may be said likewise in respect of perfect wisdom, which is no less orderly than mathematics, that if there were not the best (*optimum*) among all possible worlds, God would not have produced any.¹

So, the measure of the actual world is perfection, maximum perfection, fullness of perfection. This is an axiom or a general law according to which all phenomena and actions that occur in the actual world accomplish the maximum, the richest or most fruitful possibility: “The general rule is: there takes place always what entails more reality

¹ [GP VI, 107, (I, § 8)].

or what is more perfect”²; “Axiom: from each one (*ex unoquoque*) there ensues always the most perfect thing that may follow from it”³.

It must be stressed that, within the Leibnizian framework, the actual world contains not only a higher degree of reality, but also a higher degree of order and intelligibility than any other possible world: “For [the worlds] to be possible, intelligibility suffices, but for [their] existence a prevalence of intelligibility or order is required, for there is order to the extent that there are many things to note (*beaucoup à remarquer*) in a multitude”⁴.

The actual world denotes an increase of order and intelligibility, which entails the emergence of complexity and the plurality of principles regulating the infinitely diverse types and degrees of perfection. Indeed, the principle of contradiction, which regulates the intelligible world, holds universal validity, thus providing a foundational principle for the actual world, but it appears to be insufficient in explaining the infinite diversity concerning both the individual beings and the whole collection of things.

Given the plurality of principles, this research aims at elucidating the place of the principle of determination within the Leibnizian system. The guiding hypothesis states that this principle is located at the core of the system, at the intersection between the principle of perfection, as principle of the existent things, and the principle of reason. Indeed, the meaning of determination is the existence of the maximum or the greatest perfection: “The reason of determination is none other than this: there must exist that which entails the maximum”⁵. So, in its generic formulation, the principle of determination appears explicitly linked to the idea of maximum perfection of the actual world:

Hence it is very clearly understood that from the infinite combinations of possibilities and possible series, there is one through which the maximum of essence or possibility is brought into existence. In fact, there is always the principle of determination in things that must be based on

² [AA VI, 4, 1428].

³ [AA VI, 4, 1429].

⁴ [GP III, 558].

⁵ [AA VI, 3, 582].

the maximum or the minimum, in such a way that in fact the maximum effect is achieved with the minimum expenditure, so to speak.⁶

Now, is the principle of determination a specific principle in itself or a special subtype of the principle of reason?⁷ Despite lexical variations, the *Principles of Nature and Grace* as well as the *Essays of Theodicy* converge in recognizing the principle of determination as an inner dimension of the principle of reason. According to § 7 of the PNG, the principle of reason comprises “the sufficient reason for determining why a thing is so and not otherwise.” Similarly, § 44 of the first part of the *Theodicy* is very relevant for the purpose of the present argument, due to the force assigned to the lexicon of determination: “objective certainty or determination”, “determinate truth”, “determinant reasons”, and “principle of determinant reason”, also named “great principle”, presented as having no exceptions. This offers the paradigm of a general grounding principle, typical of a well-ordered philosophical system as the one Leibniz vindicates for himself, and which is based on two fundamental principles:

To better understand this point, we must take into account that there are two great principles of our arguments [reasonings]. The one is the principle of *contradiction*, stating that of two contradictory propositions one is true, the other one is false; the other principle is that of *determinant reason*: it states that nothing ever comes to pass without there being a cause or at least a reason determining it, that is, something to give an *a priori* reason why it is existent rather than non-existent, and in this way rather than in any other.⁸

In contrast with his customary practice, where the principle of reason is called “sufficient reason”, Leibniz chooses here the epithet “determinant”. Undoubtedly this lexical variation is significant; for the principle of reason is in itself an eminently formal principle, while the principle of determinant reason is a constitutive principle of things. There must

⁶ [GP VII, 304].

⁷ Concerning this point, see Juan Antonio Nicolás, *Razón, Verdad y libertad en G. W. Leibniz* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1993).

⁸ [GP VI, 127].

be a reason for the existence of every being and for its specific mode of being. The principle of determinant reason satisfies such a demand of real intelligibility.

Also, in the above-mentioned paragraph of the *Theodicy*, Leibniz stresses the heuristic fecundity of the principle of determination: “Were it not for this great principle, we could never prove the existence of God, and we should lose an infinitude of very just and very profitable reasonings whereof it is the foundation”⁹. We can go farther and assert that the principle of determination corresponds, at the principal level, to the kind of physico-moral necessity which regulates the actual world. Everything is determined, everything has a determinant reason, which does not necessitate, but inclines decisively towards a determined direction. The principle of determination establishes a pattern of order placed between strict necessity and fortuitous chance. As such, an event or an action is radically contingent, but it is endowed with intrinsic necessity as a bond of a series. For instance, Leibniz’s visit to Rome, at 1689, was not strictly necessary, but, given its own character and the European context, such a visit was the only option: “Determined is what is unique from data. Determined is what is not datum” (*Determinatum est quod ex datis unicum est. Determinatum est, quod non est datum*)¹⁰.

The conceptual distinction between *datum* and *determinatum* is relevant because it signals that the field of determination is dynamic, namely the constitution of beings, the course of nature, the moral action.

2. Determination as a metaphysical feature and a source of natural intelligibility

At the very beginning of his philosophical elaboration, in the *Dissertatio de principio individui* (1663), Leibniz places determination at the core of his metaphysics. Indeed, following Suarez’s metaphysical view, Leibniz assumes the whole entity (*entitas tota*) as the fundamen-

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ [AA VI, 4, 74].

tal principle for the intelligibility of the being: “[...] the whole entity is the universal principle of the being in a universal sense [...]”¹¹. The issue lies, then, in the meaning of whole entity, and the precise distinction between whole entity and a mere entity. Now, what is an entity, whose relevance lies in that it responds to the Leibnizian search for “the formal reason of an individual” (*ratio formalis individui*)?¹²

As J. Gracia remarks, there is in Leibniz’s *Disputatio* a close connection between being (*ens*) and entity (*entitas*)¹³, something which Leibniz himself clearly states: “each thing is something real through its Entity”¹⁴. Within the Suarezian framework, an entity is a primitive notion expressing the most intrinsic feature of each being: “[...] for one cannot conceive anything more intrinsic to each being than its entity [...]”¹⁵. Therefore, it is necessary to search for the principle of individuation within the dynamism of self-constitution of the actual entity. According to Suarez’s terms, restated by Leibniz: “[...] all individuals individuate themselves by their whole entity”¹⁶. Now, what does *tota* add to *entitas*? It adds the original co-pertaining between the substance and its accidents. *Tota* is the true “formal reason of the individual being”, in that it means the inherency of the predicates to their subject, and that nothing can happen extrinsically to it. Our question regards the continuity between *entitas* and *tota entitas*. What is the operator of this transition, through which the immanency of the process is assured? Such an operator is determination, which is related to the single nature of each thing: “Indeed, there is in Socrates a nature intrinsically determined to himself (*intrinsece determinate ad ipsum*)”¹⁷.

Determination is, in this framework, the intrinsic dynamics of nature, understood by Leibniz, as well as by the scholastic tradition, as

¹¹ [AA VI, 1, 12].

¹² [AA VI, 1, 11].

¹³ J. Gracia, *Individuation in Scholasticism. The Latter Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation 1150-1650* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 536-537.

¹⁴ [AA VI, 4, 12 (§ 5)].

¹⁵ [Suarez 166].

¹⁶ [AA VI, 1, 13 (§ 8)].

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

an entity ordered to action. In the lexicon of the *Disputatio*, determined is the opposite of indifferent, which represents a mere abstraction, and is incompatible with the individual nature of Socrates or of any other being: “Furthermore, is there also an indifferent nature (*natura indifferens*) in Socrates? If not, then it is obvious that Socrates’ nature is individuated by itself; if in fact there is any [indifferent nature], then there will be simultaneously a different and an indifferent human nature in Socrates”¹⁸. An individual nature determines itself by means of the actualization of the intrinsic dispositions it contains, as passive determination is grounded on a dispositional basis inherent to matter, which is inseparably connected to form, with which it constitutes a primordial unity. In fact, matter and form are two inseparable dimensions of a sole identity, rather than two different things: “[...] the material and the formal (*materiale et formale*) of an individual, that is, the species and the individual, do not really differ”¹⁹.

In the light of Leibniz’s *Disputatio*, the individual being is, following a Suarezian saying, the unique complete substance²⁰, viewed as a self-referential entity which constitutes itself *a se*. Such an atomistic view of the individual being will significantly change in the *Discourse on metaphysics* (1686) and in the subsequent correspondence with Arnauld. At the lexical level, this change is marked by the transition from *tota* to *completa* as the main characteristic of a true substance.

Within Leibnizian metaphysics, the significance of complete is both epistemological and ontological. There are complete notions and complete beings: a complete notion always refers to an individual substance, for there is not a complete notion of an incomplete being, as an abstract mathematical entity: “So, there is a complete notion only in a singular being (*in singulis tantum notio complete est*)”²¹. Now, what is a complete being and how does its process of constitution unfold? Leibniz takes the term complete in two complementary senses: the reason and foundation of all the predicates that can be attributed to a substance;

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ [AA VI, 1, 13 (§ 10)].

²⁰ “[...] solum individuum esse substantiam metaphysice completam.”, in [Suarez 142].

²¹ [GP II, 277].

and an expressive form of the entire universe. The former is common to scholastic philosophers such as Fonseca or Suarez, and a Modern such as Descartes; the latter is characteristically Leibnizian²². The complementarity of these two senses of complete being is stated in article 8 of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*:

So, we can say that the nature of an individual substance or a complete being is to have a notion so complete that is sufficient to contain and to allow [us] to deduce all the predicates of the subject to which that notion is attributed. [...] Furthermore, if we bear in mind the interconnectedness of things, we can say that Alexander's soul contains for all time traces of everything that happened and signs of everything that will happen to him, and even marks of everything that happens in the universe, although only God can recognize them all.²³

In fact, the assumption of a complete substance is closely correlated with the theory of expression which states the commensurability of each substance with the general system of the actual world²⁴. In this new metaphysical context, an individual is intrinsically a member of a community. The process of its constitution is a way of emanation²⁵ from God's thinking and the effectiveness of a peculiar form of the world, or the "general system of the phenomena", as described in the 14th article of the *Discourse on Metaphysics*:

Because God considers from all sides and from all possible ways, so to speak, the general system of phaenomena which he thinks fit to produce in order to manifest his glory, and considers all the faces of the world

²² In the concise terms of Fichant: "Mieux même: La détermination complète de l'individualité repose sur la prise en compte de la coappartenance de l'individu à un monde qui se spécifie parmi tous les mondes possibles". M. Fichant, *Science et métaphysique dans Descartes et Leibniz* (Paris: PUF, 1998), 132.

²³ [AA VI, 4, 1540-1541].

²⁴ In this regard, I realise that Rateau's approach, according to which "the access to a/the world" depends on "the consideration of the complete notion", is problematic, for the complete notion supposes its inscription within a world. See P. Rateau, *La question du mal chez Leibniz* (Paris: Champion, 2008), 298.

²⁵ See A. Cardoso, "Emanação e criação na teologia natural de Leibniz", in *Leibniz. Razón, principios y unidad / Razão, princípios e unidade* (Granada: Comares, 2020).

in all possible ways –since no aspects escape his omniscience–, the result of each view of the universe, as regarded from a certain point, is a substance that expresses the universe according to this view, if God thinks fit to actualize his thought and to produce such a substance (*si Dieu trouve bon de rendre sa pensée effective, et de produire cette substance*).²⁶

A complete being is the active or passive subject of all the phenomena in the universe. Consequently, it is “an endless series” (*series interminata*), because its relations are infinite: “The notion of Peter is complete; hence it involves an infinity of infinites, and one can never achieve a perfect demonstration of this [...]”²⁷. As one can see, complete plays with contingent knowledge, for the analysis of a complete being is an endless process.

Complete and determined are inseparable terms, which reciprocally reinforce and elucidate one another: “The nature of an individual must be complete and determined”²⁸. As is clearly stated in the correspondence with Arnauld, incomplete means rather an abstract and nominal notion than a part of a whole or a partial notion. The debate is particularly focused in the knowledge of the individual substance, taking the ego as model:

Now, I find in myself the notion of an individual nature, for I find there the notion of myself (*la notion de moy*). It is sufficient to consult it to know what is comprised in such an individual notion, as it is sufficient for me to consult the specific notion of a sphere to know what it comprises. Now, I have no other rule for this but to consider what it is, so that a sphere would not be a sphere if devoid of this.²⁹

As Arnauld clearly asserts, there is a unitary *mathesis* common to mathematical knowledge and the knowledge of individuals. The point lies there. In fact, Leibniz aims to establish two heterogeneous ways of intelligibility, endowed with different scopes and procedures. The

²⁶ [AA VI, 4, 1449-1450].

²⁷ [Grua 376-377].

²⁸ [GP II, 42].

²⁹ [GP II, 32-33].

Leibnizian strategy consists of stressing the difference of such modes of intelligibility: “[...] it is necessary to philosophise differently about the notion of an individual substance and about the specific notion of a sphere”³⁰. Hence, Leibniz establishes a contrast between an abstract, generic and vague knowledge, within a basically indefinite and undetermined continuum, and a distinct and real knowledge focused on entirely determined singular unities: “Also, the notion of a sphere in general is incomplete and abstract, i.e. one considers solely the essence of the sphere in general or, according to the theory, regardless of singular circumstances, and consequently it does not include what is required to the existence of a certain sphere [...]”³¹. So, in the Leibnizian framework, all mathematical notions such as space, unity, sphere are abstract, vague and undetermined, while the physico-metaphysical notions are complete and determined.

Concerning specifically the ego, the question is whether one remains the same individual substance independently of its accidents – e. g. to make or not to make a trip – or if, conversely, the accidents are intrinsic features of the individual ego. Arnauld clearly asserts:

I am certain that, while I think, I am myself. (*Je suis assuré, que tant que je pense je suis moy.*) However, I can think that I will make such a trip or that I will not make it, being absolutely certain that neither indeed travelling nor not travelling will prevent me from being myself. Thus, I am absolutely certain that neither to travel nor not to travel are contained in the individual substance of myself.³²

The Leibnizian reply concerns mainly the fact that “[...] the notion of myself and of every other substance is infinitely more extensive and more difficult to understand than a specific notion, as is the notion of the sphere, which is merely incomplete”³³. For Leibniz, the completeness of a notion implies its infinite comprehension, since all the phenomena occurring in the universe can be taken as its passive or active predicates.

³⁰ [GP II, 38-39].

³¹ [GP II, 39].

³² [GP II, 33].

³³ [GP II, 45].

Instead, the incompleteness results from the assumption of something in itself, isolated from other things.

This point concerns the mode of connection between vague and determined, within Leibnizian philosophy. Is there, or is there not, a passage from one to the other in the process of constitution of a being? Is the complete notion of Adam formed by means of derivation, from the nominal notion of himself? At the logical level, it is clear that the creation Adam, considered in the state of possibility, is an element included in the class of possible Adams, who reciprocally are in a relationship of disjunction. The core of the question is the relationship between the predicates vague and possible. The term possible qualifies the state of a being as an essence that tends to existence, whose notion is complete and related to a real being. In this sense, the notion of the real Adam as possible is the same as his notion as an existent being: a complete notion, comprising all its predicates and so, a determined notion: “[...] what determines a certain Adam must include absolutely all his predicates, and it is that complete notion which determines *rationem generalitatis ad individuum*”³⁴. By means of his *Fiat*, God does not modify the features of “such a full notion of the Adam who is accompanied by all his predicates and conceived as possible”³⁵. Between the possible and the real world, there is not only continuity, but also a perfect identity: “[...] it is obvious that this decree [the *Fiat*] does not alter anything in the constitution of things, and that it leaves them as they were in the state of pure possibility, i. e. it does not change anything, neither in their essence or nature, nor even in their accidents, which are already perfectly represented in the idea of this possible world.”³⁶ The actual Adam is the possible Adam under the mode of effectiveness: his notion is, since the very beginning, complete. On the contrary, the notion of a vague Adam is nothing but an abstract and generic notion.

Leibniz does not refuse the validity of formal sciences, which work with incomplete abstract notions. His criticism concerns the presumption that this knowledge corresponds to the true viewpoint of real

³⁴ [GP II, 54].

³⁵ [GP II, 50].

³⁶ [GP VI, 131].

things. Therefore, Leibniz simultaneously asserts the scientific value of the mathematical view of nature and the insurmountable limits of such a knowledge. This double perspective is quite obvious in the letter to Thomasius, dated 20-30th April 1669, where Leibniz enthusiastically expresses his adherence to mechanism –“[...] I confess that I am nothing more, nothing less than Cartesian”³⁷–, excluding all causal efficacy from nature: “Therefore, only in the spirits do freedom and spontaneity take place”³⁸ but, at the same time, the young philosopher assigns an important role to the substantial form as a source of distinction between the physical bodies: “Who could not accept also the substantial form, that is to say, that which distinguishes the substance of a body from the substance of another?”³⁹. So, the Leibnizian adherence to the mechanical explanation in the Cartesian version is accompanied by a significant restriction, for it demonstrates the insufficiency of the mechanism: “In Descartes, I love only the purpose of his method”⁴⁰, not his doctrines. Indeed, mechanism is insufficient as a philosophy of nature and, furthermore, it is insufficient at the level of Physics insofar as it does not elucidate what constitutes the singularity of a body:

From the extremity of space, greatness and figure arise from the body. Indeed, the body immediately has the same greatness and figure as the space it fills. However, a doubt remains concerning why it fills this space rather than such or such space, and then why, e. g., it is rather tripedal than bipedal, and why it is rather square than round. The reason for this cannot be provided by the nature of the body, for the same matter is undetermined towards any figure, be it square or round.⁴¹

Even in the phase of his stricter mechanism, Leibniz views a physical body as something other than a mathematical body, thus denying the identification between extension and matter: “Space is an originally extended Being or a mathematical body which truly contains nothing more than three dimensions and is the universal place of all things. The

³⁷ [AA II, 1, 2.^a ed., 25].

³⁸ [AA, II, 1, 2.^a ed., 32].

³⁹ [AA, II, 1, 2.^a ed., 25].

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ [GP IV, 106].

matter is a secondarily extended being or what as well as extension or mathematical body has also a physical body”⁴².

Leibniz’s assumption of the validity of the mechanical explanation goes hand in hand with the acknowledgement of a specific intelligibility of individual natures, rising to a highly complex system, within which there is a place for contingency as the ordered domain of nature itself⁴³, founded upon the principle of *convenientia*: “Physics deals with actual and, therefore, contingent things, it resorts mainly to the history of the phenomena and, from them, it constructs universals, making use of mathematics, and it achieves the laws of nature, the reason for which is the *convenientia* rather than necessity”⁴⁴. The matrix expression of this order is to be found in the *Discourse of Metaphysics*, § 13, where the necessity *ex hypothesi* is presented as contingent, insofar as its certainty *a priori* is not absolute. For

[...] it supposes the sequence of things which God freely chose”. Hence, each natural event is connected with the whole sequence of things, and its sufficient reason lies in the nature of the subject and that of the accident which happens to it:

“Since one considers properly that all contingent propositions have reasons for being so and not otherwise, or (what is the same), that they have proofs *a priori* of their truth, which make them certain and prove that they have not necessary demonstrations, for such reasons are founded exclusively on the principle of contingency or of the existence of things [...].”⁴⁵

That is the meaning of “natural consecution”, whose scope is absolutely general in the realm of existent things: “Every actual state of a simple substance follows naturally from its previous state, so that the present is pregnant with the future”⁴⁶.

⁴² [GP I, 24].

⁴³ Concerning the specificity of natural order in view of the essential order of things, see *Theodicy*, art. 383.

⁴⁴ [AA IV, 6, 147].

⁴⁵ [AA VI, 4, 1549].

⁴⁶ [GP VI, 610].

A natural consecution presents two main features: the immanency of the changes / alterations to the thing itself as their active or passive subject; the contingency in regard to the modality of their way of occurrence. Hence the Leibnizian assertion according to which “[...] all that flows from the nature of a thing is determined”⁴⁷. One could, reciprocally, state: all that is determined flows from the nature of a thing. Indeed, determination is the equivalent dynamic term of the inherency of the predicates to their subject, thus qualifying the very flux of phenomena that take place in an individual being. In this sense, a thing determines itself since it is “foundation and reason” of all its actions and passions. In this regard, determination means the passage from potential to act, in terms of immanent causality.

Determination viewed as self-determination implies a close affinity between force and determination: determination means a certain use of the force intrinsic to a being. Hence, the view of nature as self-determined is accompanied by the inscription of the force in the core of the material nature. It is a guiding line of the new special physics which Leibniz inquires, and whose most relevant moments are *De corporum concursu*⁴⁸ (1678) and the writings where the author formulates his dynamic system⁴⁹. So, force becomes the founding concept of a new scientific discipline. However, force is more than a local concept with a precise role in dynamics, insofar as it implies the reorganization of the field of knowledge. Dynamics amplifies the scope of Physics, connecting it with metaphysics: “[...] through geometry physics subordinates to arithmetic, through dynamics it subordinates to metaphysics”⁵⁰.

The notion of force contributes to the improvement of metaphysics, but concomitantly the metaphysical conceptual exercise contributes to a new and deeper meaning of force. In the years following the

⁴⁷ [GP VI, 299].

⁴⁸ The most relevant is the new notion of force as “quantity of effect”, rather than “quantity of motion”: “In omni motu semper eadem vis servatur. Vis est quantitas effectus”. M. Fichant, *La réforme de la dynamique. De corporum concursu (1678) et autres textes inédits* (Paris: Vrin, 1994), 71.

⁴⁹ The most relevant writings are: *Dynamica de potentia* (1689), *Essay de Dynamique* (1693), *Specimen Dynamicum* (1695).

⁵⁰ [GP IV, 398].

elaboration of Dynamics, mainly in the *New System* (1695) and *On the nature itself* (1698), Leibniz distinguishes several senses of force, considering a primordial level of force. His lexicon varies, but the goal is one and the same: to establish a dispositional potency which tends *per se* to the act, and whose potentiality is intensified by the accomplishment of the act. In the *New System*, the author uses two words which reinforce each other: inner force (*force interne*, § 15) and original forces (*forces primitives*, § 3). Force is rather a source of action (the agent itself being the principle of its actions and passions), not so much an instrument of the agent's efficiency. In *De ipsa natura*, Leibniz resumes the notion of inner force (*vis insita*), he stresses the dynamic sense of the force as active force (*vis activa*, §§ 3, 7, 12, 13) and establishes an original level of the force (*vis agendi primitiva*, § 12), accomplishing its effects "immanently and, therefore, vitally" (*vim agendi immanenter*, § 10). In sum, force is not only the formal and efficient cause of the true substantial action, but also a requisite of substantiality, as a principle of inner action according to an immanent order:

However, if one attributes to our mind the inner force for producing immanent actions or, what is the same, the force for acting immanently, nothing can prevent the same force from being intrinsic to other animals or forms, or, if one prefers, to the natures of the substances, something that is rather rational.⁵¹

Force is also a requisite of substantiality, as the operator of the subsistence of actual beings: "[if one banished the efficiency of things, then one would also banish their subsistence]"⁵².

Within the metaphysical framework, force is characterized above all by its disposition to act, which becomes effective *per se*, since there are no obstacles: "By force or potency [...] I understand the mediating point between potency and action, which involves effort, act, entelechy, because the force spontaneously becomes act, since nothing

⁵¹ [GP IV, 510].

⁵² [GP IV, 515].

prevents it”⁵³. Now, that is precisely the definition of force which better elucidates the determination in the natural level: “Determination is the state from which something follows, as long as no other thing hinders it”⁵⁴. According to his peculiar philosophical style, Leibniz inseparably connects tendency and state: each state comprises a trending dimension, or the tension for a more perfect degree of action.

Force and determination are synonyms with nature, seen as spontaneity. Now, spontaneous activity is a mark of the substance, which constitutes the *forma princeps* of the determination: an ordered flux of actions and passions, according to an inner law. The notion of substance is quite determined since each substance is a multiform unity and a unique course of phenomena. Taken as a general term, substance is a nominal or vague term, an empty abstraction: “Moreover, I do not distinguish here between general and determined notion of substance, because every substance is determined, although diverse substances determine themselves differently”⁵⁵.

3. The determination at the moral level

The demand for determination concerns the sensitive souls because there is an “original individual difference between souls”⁵⁶ in general, and *a fortiori* between minds or rational souls. Indeed, Leibniz rejects the Cartesian assumption of the mind as a thinking nature, considering such a definition as nominal and vague: “It is not enough that I feel to be a thinking substance, for it would be necessary to conceive distinctively what distinguishes me from all other minds, but in this regard I have only a confuse experience”⁵⁷. While the intrinsically incomplete notion of the sphere has a limited number of essential properties, the notion of oneself is more difficult because it is omni-comprehensive. Hence, the statement according to which I am the same whether I do or do not do a

⁵³ [GP IV, 472]. The same definition in *De affectibus*, in [AA VI, 4, 1411].

⁵⁴ [AA VI, 4, 1426].

⁵⁵ [GP II, 227].

⁵⁶ See Leibniz, G. W., *Essais de Théodicée*, I, § 106, en [GP VI, 160].

⁵⁷ [GP II, 45].

trip, is nothing but a prejudice: “I am unsure whether I will make such a trip, but I am not unsure that, whether I make it or not, I will always be myself. This is a prejudice that one must not mistake for a distinct notion or knowledge”⁵⁸.

The determination of minds flows from their original constitution, consisting of “fundamental dispositions”. Such dispositions are the basis of a mental life which follows an ordered course according to an intrinsic motivation, expressed through each one’s inclinations. Now the question at hand concerns the genesis of our inclinations. Namely, what is the force, in the precise sense of a potency tending to the act, by means of which a mind orients itself rather to an evolving process than any other?

In the pamphlet *De affectibus* (1679), where Leibniz aims to furnish the bases of his philosophy of mind, *affectus* is the term through which one explains the beginning of a determined flow of thoughts, in the general meaning of *cogitatio*, comprising all the mental. In a more specific sense, the affect is the passage or the transitional moment from a unique thought to other: “Affect is the state of the self which is determined from one thought to another thought” (*Affectus est status animi a cogitatione una ad aliam prae alia determinati*)⁵⁹. *Affectus* is determination as the beginning of a mental series, and also the operator of the passage from one state to the other: “The affect is determination of the self for a certain series of thoughts”⁶⁰. So, the place of *affectus* is “the admirable passage from potency to act” or that which one can designate as the point of determination of the mind. *Affectus* is here, then, the analogous of *conatus*, as expressed in the *Confessio philosophi* (1673-1674). *Affectus* is a *conatus* specific to minds: “What *conatus* is to the body, that is *affectus* to the mind [...]”⁶¹.

Another definition of affect in *De affectibus* points to a peculiar way of thinking, deemed sentence, which makes the articulation between the intellective and the affective-voluntary levels: “Affect is the occupation of the self (*occupatio animi*), born from some judgement about our

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ [AA VI, 4, 1424].

⁶⁰ [AA VI, 4, 1428].

⁶¹ [AA VI, 1, 141].

good and harmful”⁶². Therefore, sentence occupies a primordial place in the genesis of affect itself, and even more, in the genesis of will: “Sentence is the intellection from which results will.” (*Sententia est intellectio ex qua sequitur voluntas*)⁶³. Differently from *conceptus*, whose nature is to form ideas, sentence is a perception of the present good or harmful, within which the incitation to act is inscribed.

There is a close connection between affect, inclination, and determination. In a sense, determination is affect, and determination is also inclination. Leibniz does not identify determination and inclination, but one finds a double definition of “*occupatio animi*”: as “determination” and as “inclination”⁶⁴. In a sense, the correspondence between these terms is perfect. The most relevant is that inclination is not a blind and disordered force, it is in a way determinant and a source of order.

Just like the understanding, will is a “primordially”, i. e. a principle of self-determination of the agent. However, while the understanding constitutes itself through the relationship with its intelligible object, will presupposes the understanding in the process of its constitution.

As P. Riley correctly remarked, Leibniz was opposed to the various forms of voluntarism in place at his time⁶⁵, especially the Cartesian theological voluntarism, according to which divine will has an infinite power, comprising the power of creating eternal truths, i. e., the founding truths of universal intelligibility. This is a point of divergence among the philosophers of the 17th century, and a decisive issue to Leibniz, as well as the most relevant topic in the correspondence with Echard (1677). Against the doctrine of the creation of eternal truths, Leibniz replies “I do not understand”. Now, this saying is rather a harsh criticism, not so much a confession of doubt. In fact, such a doctrine is unintelligible for it shows complete ignorance of the nature of will,

⁶² [AA VI, 4, 1414].

⁶³ [AA VI, 4, 1412].

⁶⁴ “*Occupatio animi est inclination ad aliquid prae alio cogitandum*”, in [AA VI, 4, 1412]. “*Occupatio animi est determination ad aliquid cogitandum*”, in [AA VI, 4, 1424].

⁶⁵ P. Riley, “Leibniz and modernity: against the ‘voluntarism’ of Calvin, Descartes, Hobbes and Spinoza”, in *Leibniz und die Entstehung der Modernität. Studia Leibnitiana SH – 37* (Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010), 41–48.

which “requires the understanding”. This is a general thesis, valid for every will, including the the divine will: “Also in God, understanding is by nature prior to will, because God does not will anything which he does not understand, and he understands many things that he does not will. Will is a certain consequence of understanding”⁶⁶. Or, in the terms of a letter addressed to Morell: “[...] will arises when force is determined by enlightenment”⁶⁷.

Leibniz criticizes voluntarism, and also moral intellectualism, either in regard to the foundations of morality and the manner of determination of the moral agent. Indeed, Leibniz aims to found morality on solid principles; however, such principles are intrinsic dispositions, rather than self-evident truths: “It is absolutely impossible that there are self-evident truths of reason, such as identical or immediate truths. And even though one can truly say that morality has indemonstrable principles, and that one of the first is that we must follow happiness and avoid sorrow, it is necessary to add that this is not a truth which one can know purely through reason, for it is based upon inner experience or upon confused notions, because one cannot feel what happiness and sorrow are”⁶⁸.

The indemonstrable moral principles are confused notions comprised within our inner experience, so their status is that of practical axioms, a sort of instincts or primordial dispositions, not “reasonings”: “However, the maxim I just alleged seems to be of another nature; it is not known through reason, but through instinct”⁶⁹.

Just like the natural appetite, to which it responds, will is defined as “conatus of the rational being”⁷⁰, whereas voluntary action is a superior degree of spontaneity⁷¹. Now, is moral spontaneity of the same kind as natural spontaneity, viewed as an ordered sequence of actions according to an inner principle? In such a case, what happens to freedom conceived as free will? No doubt the Leibnizian statement of moral

⁶⁶ [GP I, 257]

⁶⁷ [Grua 138].

⁶⁸ [GP V, 81].

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

⁷⁰ [Couturat 498].

⁷¹ On this regard, see M. Murray, “Spontaneity and freedom in Leibniz”, in *Leibniz. Nature and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 194-216.

spontaneity implies the reformulation of the field of will, insofar as it rejects the notion of free will and freedom of indifference, through the articulation between freedom and determination.

The main question concerns the process of decision and subsequent disposition to act. Since “[...] choice is always determined by perception”⁷², the determination culminates the exercise of the practical understanding: “Determination is the ultimate judgement of our practical understanding, or the conclusion to the issue we deliberate”⁷³.

Now, what is practical understanding, and how does it work? It is an exercise taking into account the prodigious diversity of phenomena, rather than a mere rational exercise. Practical understanding involves our commitment with the present situation or the consciousness of such a situation. In turn, consciousness is the manifestation of the inexhaustible perceptive life; a life which overflows the scope of consciousness. Indeed, consciousness is largely constituted by feelings and beliefs that are formed within us, spontaneously, without the interference of will.

In the writing *De obligatione credendi* (1677), Leibniz establishes a close articulation between consciousness and belief. Consciousness is intrinsic to belief, as part of its definition: “To believe is to be conscious of reasons that persuade”⁷⁴. Neither of them, belief and consciousness, “depend upon our will” or are “in our power”. Since “Consciousness is the memory of our actions”⁷⁵, it comprises “all the play of the mind and its thoughts, which very often is imperceptible and confuse”⁷⁶. As such, self-mastery is not the mark of true morality, for “will is not in our power”⁷⁷. The moral task consists of attention and application to our dispositions and intellectual habits, in order to nudge our will toward such or such actions in the future: “However, though our choice *ex datis* upon all inner circumstances taken together is always determined, and that concerning the present it does not depend upon us to change will, it remains true that we have a great power upon our future volitions,

⁷² [GP V, 168].

⁷³ [Couturat 498]

⁷⁴ [AA VI, 4, 2149].

⁷⁵ [AA VI, 4, 2151].

⁷⁶ [GP V, 164].

⁷⁷ [Grua 132].

choosing certain objects of our attention and getting accustomed to certain ways of thinking”⁷⁸.

4. Conclusion: what kind of principle?

The principle of determination is a structuring principle of the actual world, reinforcing its pluralism and complexity. Indeed, determination means self-determination of the whole and of each of its components. So, the principle of determination implies a semantics operating both in the natural and moral worlds, by means of nuclear concepts; potency and act as correlative terms, disposition, inclination, ordered process, contingency.

This principle is also a source of the most perfect and intelligible order combining the maximum variety with an immanent order. In fact, determination does not mean a strict determinism, but an original form of necessity, within which nothing is so fortuitous or so necessary that its contrary implies contradiction. The world structured through the principle of determination is an inexhaustible source of possibilities, always open, where the sole best prevails unfailingly over all other possible achievements.

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⁷⁸ [Erdmann 449].

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