

Gilles Deleuze – The Deleuze Seminars (deleuze.cla.purdue.edu), summaries: Charles J. Stivale

Leibniz: Philosophy and the Creation of Concepts, April-May 1980

At the start of the 26 February 1980 seminar, Deleuze explains, “some of you asked me to do something that would be a kind of presentation on a very great philosopher, one that is very difficult, named Leibniz. ... So, it could be very useful again to take up certain notions that we have worked on over several years. So anything is possible; it’s up to you, but as of now, or in a coming meeting, I will do something on Leibniz... a special request.”

We should note that during the 1979-80 academic year, the topic for the third examination (*épreuve*) in the national *agrégation* degree was “History of Philosophy: Stoicism, Leibniz, Schopenhauer”, so Deleuze’s choice, as for the four-session Kant seminar (winter-spring 1978), may have linked his students’ needs with his own interests in Leibniz. As we know, he will return to Leibniz again in his final seminar, in 1986-87, as a means to examine the specific concept of the fold.

Moreover, it is helpful to recall what texts Deleuze was developing at the time of the 1980 lectures: besides reworking the 1970 *Spinoza. Textes choisis* (Paris: PUF, 1970) as *Spinoza. Philosophie pratique* (Paris: Minuit, 1981), Deleuze most certainly had begun work on *Francis Bacon. The Logic of Sensation*, also published the following year (La Roche-sur-Yon: Éditions de la différence, 1981). Several notions important to Deleuze in this short work ostensibly on painting will emerge forcefully (notably, “the cry”) as he lays the groundwork for concepts from Leibniz to which he will return later in the decade.

Session 1, April 15, 1980

These five sessions on Leibniz constitute a systematic overview of a series of principles that contribute to understanding Leibniz’s “strange kind of thought”: identity, reciprocity, sufficient reason, inherence, causality, point of view, apperception, expression, compossibility and impossibility, pre-established harmony. After providing some biographical details, Deleuze describes Leibniz as the first great philosopher to conceive of activity and thought as a vast symbolization and as someone whose philosophical expression depends on the level of his interlocutor. Then, enunciating the initial principle of Leibniz’s thought, that of identity, distinguished at once by reciprocity and by inclusion, Deleuze describes how Leibniz shows all propositions to be linked to the judgment of attribution, naming this the principle of sufficient reason, his “scream” being “everything must surely have a reason”. “Hallucinatory concepts” then emerge, the scream, Leibniz’s conceptual madness, and considering an elementary true proposition, “Caesar crossed the Rubicon” or “Adam sinned”, an event-related proposition, the predicate contained in the notion of Caesar or Adam, Deleuze indicates this as Leibniz’s concept of inherence or inclusion, the first development of sufficient reason. Then, the principle of causality, requires that not just the attributed thing but also the totality of the world to be forced into the subject, that is, through the indefinite series of causes and effects, for example, from “crossing the Rubicon”. Yet, Leibniz could not say that, in this way, there would be but one single subject that would express the world since his construction suggests that substance is individual such that “crossing the Rubicon” as event acts only to “unfold” something

encompassed eternally in the notion of Caesar. Thus, to distinguish an individual substance from another, Leibniz creates the concept of “point of view”, i.e., each individual notion expressing the totality of the world for Leibniz but from a certain point of view, thus defining individual essence. Moreover, the totality of the world is in the individual but in the form of infinitely minute, unconscious perceptions, like differentials of consciousness, whereas Leibniz calls conscious perceptions “apperception”, with each subject having a small portion of the world that he/she expresses clearly and distinctly, whereas other subjects do so confusedly and obscurely. In fact, a subject’s clear and distinct zone of expression is defined by what relates to or affects my body such that, since individual substances do not express the same clear and distinct portion, Leibniz offers his “craziest concept”, the possibility of Adam non-sinner or Caesar not crossing the Rubicon through the distinction of truths of essence and truths of existence. This concept of their contradictory status is possible through the principle of impossibility since Adam non-sinner or Caesar not crossing the Rubicon is possible in himself but impossible with the world that exists, hence existing only in a world that was not chosen. For God, having conceived of an infinity of possible worlds, chooses the “best of possible worlds”, where Adam is a sinner. Finally, in the *Monadology*, Leibniz argues that the world that individual notions express is interior, without doors or windows, and yet there is a world common to all individual notions, i.e., where everything is included in each one, compossible with what the others express, through the concept of pre-established harmony.

[Deleuze will develop these concepts in chapter 2 (inherence, inclusion, point of view), chapter 4 (sufficient reason) and chapter 5 (impossibility) of *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque (Le Pli)*.]

Session 2, April 22, 1980

The general heading for this session is “Substance, World, and Compossibility.” After an opening review of the concepts outlined in the first session, Deleuze states that under the session’s general heading, he will consider the concepts of inclusion and compossibility (although he will leave compossibility of session 3). With the definition of inclusion in place – if a proposition is true, the predicate must be included in the notion of the subject --, Deleuze supports Leibniz in affirming that if a single thing is contained in the notion of the subject, then the totality of the world is contained in this individual notion. While demonstrating inclusion for truths of essence (e.g. twelve divisible by twelve) for finite, determinate operations, Leibniz must distinguish these from truths of existence (Adam sinned; Caesar crossed the Rubicon) and demonstrate inclusion for these propositions, for which the analysis extends to infinity, created in the understanding of God. As Deleuze established in the first session, the principle of compossibility allows for a possible world with Adam non-sinner but not compossible with ours due to God’s choice of the world in which Adam sinned as the best possible world by virtue, for Leibniz, of a theory of games. Recounting a dream that Leibniz relates in the *Theodicy* and then linking this to Jorge Luis Borges as a Leibnizian writer (cf. “The Garden of Forking Paths”), that Deleuze summarizes the story as placing all the impossible series in the same world, in contrast to Leibniz’s distinct yet possible worlds. Returning to infinite analysis, Deleuze reminds us that to judge a Leibniz text, one must know to whom Leibniz addressed it to assess its level of clarity or obscurity and argues that as regards truths of existence, Leibniz’s analysis is infinite, a passage of infinitely small elements one to another, or rather infinitely small relations between elements, a distinction that links to Leibniz’s invention of differential calculus. Regarding truths

of existence, Leibniz is interested in the passage from one predicate to another, and another, from the point of view of an infinite analysis, that is, from the maximum of continuity, e.g., for worlds, whereas impossible worlds are separated by discontinuity such that the “best” of worlds is the most continuous world. As the terms continuity and compossibility relate to differential calculus, Deleuze provides a lengthy explanation (with notations on the blackboard) of this calculus that finds its level of application when one is faced with incomparables, or quantities raised to different powers. After providing a detailed explanation of differential relations between two triangles based on Leibniz’s *Mathematical Writings*, Deleuze argues that differential calculus provides a means to approach God’s understanding of maximum continuity, the predicate included in the subject. Leibniz considers that God created the world by calculating, and he explains games, first, through the example of tiling (figures and forms filling the maximum of space-time while leaving the least emptiness). Then, through the chess example, Leibniz argues that “God plays”, determinate pieces with determinate values occupying the maximum space, or in the world, the maximum of continuity which is the means to obtain the maximum of reality.

[See part II of *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque (Le Pli)* titled, “Inclusions”, composed of chapters 4, “Sufficient Reason,” 5 “Impossibility, Individuality, Liberty,” and 6 “What Is an Event?”.]

Session 3, April 29, 1980

Deleuze starts by emphasizing the role of singularities as both psychological and mathematical concepts for infinite analysis. After responding to students’ queries concerning remarks in the previous session, he considers the second aspect of his explanation of Leibniz’s infinite analysis through the concepts of compossibility and impossibility, for which Deleuze offers three “solutions”: first, impossibility as an infinite contradiction (solution rejected the previous session); second, given our finite understanding, the roots of compossibility will elude us (another rejected solution); third, Leibniz’s solution, to introduce the mathematical-psychological theory of singularities. After examining each solution, Deleuze addresses the singularity as a mathematical notion by contrasting earlier philosophical usages (singularity vs. “universal”, as well as “particular” and “general”) to mathematicians’ usage, the latter being “singular” and “regular”, and also “remarkable” (to which Leibniz adds “notable”) and “ordinary” (no longer in relation to the universal). Explaining this for successive figures (a square, a curve, then a complex curved defined by its singularities), he concludes something changes in the neighborhood of a singularity whereas the ordinary is what is between two singularities. Momentarily thrown off track by a student comments, Deleuze reads from Henri Poincaré on singularities’ four types (crests, knots, thresholds, centers) already present in Leibniz. Defining singular as a function of curvilinear problems, in tension with the ordinary, Deleuze argues that the theory of singularities is inseparable from a theory of extension and proposes to define continuity in relation to points, i.e., the continuous as the extension of a singular point onto a series of ordinaries. Shifting to the psychological domain, Deleuze describes Leibniz’s view of perception as endowed with consciousness, “apperception”, while the unconscious perceptions we do not perceive are “small perceptions”. Hypothesizing that death would simply be one’s reduction to infinitely small unconscious perceptions enveloped into this infinity, Leibniz sees the soul as having two faculties, conscious apperception and “appetition”, or desire, gross appetites made up of an infinity of small appetites, vectors corresponding to small perceptions all becoming a strange unconscious. Deleuze considers a

Leibniz text regarding conscious perception made of small perceptions as a question of the whole-parts relationship, but also another relationship, that of derivation, conscious perception deriving from the infinity of small perceptions, via tiny augmentations. And Deleuze calls Leibniz's diabolical master stroke his suggestion that we pay attention only to thoughts that are "the most distinguished", i.e., notable, remarkable, singular. Finally, returning to the compossible and the impossible, Deleuze offers a summary and then, considering the mathematical explanation of the singularity, he concludes that the world is constituted by a continuity of continuity, and that the existing world is "best" because it assures (as God's choice) the maximum of continuity. Deleuze points out the polyvocal nature of the concept of singularity which may be grasped through mathematical apparatuses, psychological thought experiences, and philosophy.

[Deleuze will develop these reflections on perception, small perceptions, and differentials in chapter 7 of *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, cf. pp. 85-99; *Le Pli*, p. 113.]

Session 4, May 6, 1980

While intending to outline of the principles of identity, sufficient reason, indiscernibles, continuity, and finality, Deleuze first allows Georges Comtesse ten minutes to read a "rather strange text", an eighteenth-century treatise about Chinese religion by Reverend Nicolas Longobardi, to which Deleuze responds briefly. Deleuze then names this session "Deduction of principles", notably to follow the progression of Leibniz's philosophical deduction of principles (some discussed previously): first, the principle of identity, i.e., the rule of essences or of the possible (*ratio essendi*, reason for being); second, the principle of sufficient reason (*ratio essendi*, reason for existing), the reciprocal principle of the first, the reciprocation possible only by extending the analysis to infinity; third, the principle of indiscernibles, there being one thing only per concept, i.e., every difference is conceptual in the final instance (*ratio cognoscendi*, reason for knowing); fourth, the principle of the "law of continuity", a given singularity extending itself into whole series of ordinaries all the way to the neighborhood of the following singularity. Given that this principle's *ratio* is the *ratio fiendi* (reason for becoming), Leibniz argues that in each individual notion that expresses the world. Hence, God first creates the world and not the individual notions that express the world (e.g., Caesar's world but not Caesar), and second, the world exists only in the individual notions that express it. Thus, the world may be considered as a complex curve with singular and ordinary points, the former series extending in continuous manner into the latter series, with a maximum of continuity, a world existing only in the individual notions expressing it, i.e., the monad, which encompasses a small, determined number of singularities, or a point of view on the world explaining the subject and not the reverse. In the final ten minutes, Deleuze explains Leibniz's notion of two states of the world which will be the basis of the 1986-87 seminar, on developed or unrolled states (or "explicated", *explicare*) and an enveloped, rolled up states (or "implicates", *implicare*). For Deleuze, this two-fold dynamism provides the underlying movement for Leibniz's philosophy since the dynamics resolve the earlier apparent contradiction, the law of continuity as the law of development and the indiscernibles as the principle of envelopment. As for God, Leibniz considers him/her to be "the great complicator", with "complicate", *complicare*, as the third term with explicate and implicate, taken as a form of understanding. In Leibniz's perspective, continuity is the principle of all laws of phenomena while the indiscernibles are the principle of all reasons of a thing or

subject. Deleuze leaves the fifth principle for the next session, an aggregate presented as the principles of finality (the *ratio agenda*, reason for acting), and also proposes to consider the case of a philosopher who does not agree with Leibniz, namely Kant, hence a study of the Leibniz-Kant opposition.

Session 5, May 20, 1980

In the final session, Deleuze considers what the Leibniz-Kant opposition means and what the conditions are of the propositions related to this opposition. Proposing to organize four propositions, two for Leibniz, two for Kant, he comments on them as a function of Deleuze's real project: what are concepts in philosophy? He addresses Kant's critique of Leibniz by "localizing the oppositions" from the point of view of knowledge, thereby presenting "a dialogue of the dead" between Leibniz and Kant. Deleuze explores what knowledge means for each author: for Kant, knowledge is a synthetic operation, whereas for Leibniz, his infinite analysis is Kant's finite synthesis, and hence, knowing who is right is unimportant since they are both saying the same thing. Deleuze argues that this opposition hints at a second, deeper one, so he recalls Leibniz's principle of indiscernibles (any difference is in the final instance conceptual) which presupposes that knowing is knowing through differences (the first proposition of this confrontation with Kant). As for Kant, the world is composed of at least two sorts of irreducible determinations, conceptual determinations and spatio-temporal determinations, which can never be found by analyzing concepts. And while it may appear that Leibniz wins this second opposition, Deleuze argues that for Kant, Leibniz's point is unimportant since it matters little what can be conceived "by right" if it cannot be conceived "in fact". But Deleuze argues that for Kant to assert the proposition about the irreducibility of spatio-temporal determinations, he had to change radically the traditional definition of space and time, which brings Deleuze to the third stage of the confrontation, the two distinct space-times to which two philosophers' propositions are distributed. Leibniz pushed the ancient conception of space (as the order of coexistences) and time (as the order of successions) to an extreme limit, while Deleuze reviews Kant's novel perspective in relation to classical philosophy and also links this to scientific and social mutations. Moreover, whereas Leibniz's space is a closed space, Kant's form is open, the form of emergence, of the open, which links to German Romantic and post-Kantian philosophers, undertaking a "return to" Leibniz after having pushed Kant as far as possible. Deleuze's fourth point is to search for what changes Kantian philosophy brought about in relation to Classical thought as well as Leibniz's philosophy. In preserving the phenomenon-thing in itself, Kant keeps something from the former opposition, while also offering the innovative conversion of notions, apparition-conditions of the apparition. Meanwhile, Leibniz pushed the relation between appearance and essence in the direction of a theory of symbolization (the phenomena symbolizes with essence). By positing subjectivity as created by God, Classical philosophers reach the threshold of subjectivity without crossing through until Kant for whom the thinking subject is not a thinking thing but rather is pure form of the apparition of all that appears in space and in time, from which the problem of foundation (*fondement*) emerges. Deleuze recalls previous discussions about Classical and Baroque music, and providing some notable examples (Schubert, Mahler), Deleuze maintains that the territory-earth doublet corresponds exactly to phenomenon-apparition and that Kant institutes the finite ego as first principle of the true fundament, finitude as the founding of the world with the tendency to go beyond itself. Deleuze closes with two points, first, regarding what it would mean to be Leibnizian today, and also reviews Kant's

radically new directions: the thinking or finite ego conditions and finds the phenomenal apparition appearing in space and time. He also points to another of Kant's revolutions, one left aside, concerning the infinite as act of finitude insofar as it surpasses itself, thereby constituting the world of apparitions and substituting the viewpoint of genesis, not that of the condition. Deleuze closes with a reference to Paul Klee's *Theory of Modern Art* in which he speaks of admiring painters of previous eras, for example, Cézanne who went in search of "the motif", not reproducing. So, in relation to Leibniz and Kant, today's interest is not infinite analysis nor finite synthesis, but something else, perhaps synthesizing as in synthetic thought in a new sense, toward something else.