

INDIVIDUAL CERTAINTY AND COMMON TRUTH: LEIBNIZ'S PHILOSOPHICAL GROUNDS FOR TOLERATION

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Abstract. A noteworthy aspect of the theological controversies arisen both in Catholic and in Protestant fields after the Reformation is the use of Cartesian philosophy for supporting the respective creeds. Theologians such as Antoine Arnauld or Pierre Jurieu appeal to Descartes's theory of judgement, which states that errors depend on the free will, and extend it to every religious or theological error. Hence, according to them, to make a religious or a theological mistake is a *voluntary* fault, and must not be *tolerated*. Also for this, a "champion" of toleration like Pierre Bayle harshly criticizes Cartesian epistemology, by denying that errors depend on the will and that the truth is knowable by us. Therefore, Bayle - but also Voltaire, who receives his legacy - give up on the philosophical foundation of toleration and commit it to the State. In this way, toleration becomes more a political practice than a philosophical principle, an idea that, with the present crisis of the States, seems to give rise to many problems. But in the same years another philosopher was developing arguments for religious tolerance without renouncing a strong definition of reason and truth: Gottfried Leibniz. In this paper, we will try to explain, first, Leibniz's criticism to Descartes theory of knowledge and the role it plays in the defense of toleration, and, second, how Leibniz's definitions of truth and knowledge can provide useful arguments for a positive foundation of toleration.

Keywords: Leibniz, Toleration, Tolerance, Knowledge, Truth, Religion, Controversy, Certainty

"...there are lots of truths and they often say different things, we won't know who is lying until the fighting starts."

Josè Saramago, *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*

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Introduction

Even if the early modern age is often characterized as a period in which scientific reason made the first steps toward a secularized world, the relationship between that new philosophy and religious thought nevertheless remained very strong. A noteworthy aspect of this relationship is the use of Cartesian philosophy by Catholic and Protestant groups after the Reformation in order to bolster their respective creeds. Theologians, such as the Catholic Antoine Arnauld or the Calvinist Pierre Jurieu, appealed to the Cartesian theory of knowledge in order to combat their opponents,¹ ironically betraying Descartes' attempts to separate the domain of theology from the domain of philosophy.² In particular, these theologians take Descartes's theory of judgement, which states that errors depend on the free will,³ and extend it to cover every (supposed) religious or theological error. Since the truth is taken to be revealed in a clear and distinct way to anyone who pays attention to it,⁴ if we err, it means that we have not considered every side of a question, or that we have judged too quickly – perhaps because we were driven by the passions. According to Arnauld or Jurieu, the conclusion of Descartes' *Fourth Meditation* – “I shall unquestionably reach the truth, if only I give sufficient attention to all the things which I perfectly understand”⁵– should be extended to every truth. For this reason, to make a religious or a theological mistake is a fault, a *voluntary* fault, and, therefore, must not be *tolerated*, because we can attain the truth if only we really want it.

This result is one of the most important and tragic effects of the theological application of Cartesian epistemology. According to this view, since every rational being can reach the truth by themselves, those having different religious opinions must be brought to the right view by any means necessary, as it is within her or his power to change his or her mind.⁶ Hence, it is not surprising that a champion of toleration like Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) harshly criticizes Cartesian epistemology, first by claiming that errors do not depend on our will,⁷ and second, by denying that the truth is knowable by us. As Bayle writes in his masterpiece, the *Historical and Critical Dictionary*:

The reason is too feeble [...]. It is a principle of destruction and not of edification. It is only proper to raising doubts, and for turning things on all sides in order to make disputes endless.⁸

The legacy of Bayle was received by Voltaire, who pleads for tolerance precisely by appealing to human weakness:

What is tolerance? It is the consequence of humanity. We are all formed of frailty and error; let us pardon reciprocally each other's folly—that is the first law of nature.⁹

According to Bayle and Voltaire, the philosophical ground of toleration cannot be founded on a strong Cartesian reason, which, in their account, necessarily brings about religious absolutism and, then, intolerance.¹⁰ As a consequence, both thinkers gave up on the philosophical foundation of toleration and put it in the hands

of the State, which was conceived as a more or less enlightened monarchy.¹¹ In this way, toleration is seen more as a political practice than as a philosophical or ethical principle, an idea that, considering the present crisis of the States (and of enlightened politics) seems really problematic.¹²

Nevertheless, in the same period, another philosopher, Gottfried Leibniz, was developing arguments that support religious tolerance without renouncing a strong definition of reason and truth. In the following pages, we will address his thought, attempting to explain Leibniz's criticism of Descartes' theory of judgement and the role it plays in the defense of toleration, and show how Leibniz's definitions of truth and knowledge can provide useful arguments for a positive foundation of toleration.

Leibniz's Theory of Judgement: The Negative Ground of Toleration.

Leibniz's criticism of Descartes' philosophy can be seen throughout his life.¹³ But for understanding his rejection of Descartes' theory of judgment a good place to look at is the *Critical Thoughts on the General Part of the Principles of Descartes*, written in 1692 and unpublished in his lifetime. In the comment on articles 31 to 35 of the *Principles*, Leibniz imperatively declares:

I do not admit that errors are more dependent upon the will than upon the intellect. To give credence to what is true or to what is false – the former being to know, the latter to err – is nothing but the consciousness or memory (*conscientia aut memoria*) of certain perceptions or reasons and so does not depend upon will except insofar as we may be brought by some oblique device to the point where we seem to see what we wish to see, even when we are actually ignorant [...]. Hence we make judgements not because we will but because something appears.¹⁴

Therefore, according to Leibniz, judgement follows from reasons that we perceive (or have perceived), which we then recall through a reflexive act of the mind – i.e. “the consciousness or memory.”¹⁵ Hence, what produces our beliefs is not a decision, an act of the will, but things (objects or states of affairs¹⁶) perceived. As Leibniz explains in a previous note,

We have a free will not in perceiving but in acting. Whether honey will seem sweet or bitter to me does not lie in my will, but neither does it lie with will whether a proposed theorem will seem true or false to me; it is the business of consciousness merely to examine what appears to it.¹⁷

Assent, then, is a feature of the intellect that consciously “examine[s] what appears to it,” but does not have, or – as we will see – does not always have, complete power over its perceptions or its memory:

There are matters which escape us or do not occur to us through no fault of ours; in these we suffer from a defect, not of judgement, but of memory or of

mental capacity, and so are not so much in error as in ignorance, since it is beyond our power to know or to remember all that we will.¹⁸

For understanding this passage we have to remark that Leibniz's theory of knowledge strictly depends on his metaphysics of substance.¹⁹ As is well known, Leibniz holds that every individual substance, the monad, is fully determined by its concept and that to be entirely determined is precisely what defines an individual.²⁰ Every individual experience – present, past and future – is inscribed in the *notio completa*: the idea of the individual in the mind of God.²¹ This is the reason why, as Leibniz will explain in the *New Essays on Human Understanding*, every thought we have, we have had or will have is already present in us:

We know an infinity of things which we are not aware of all the time, even when we need them; it is the function of memory to store them, and of recollection to put them before us again, which it does often – but not always – when there is need for it to do so.²²

But not every thought can be remembered, because some experiences cannot even in principle become conscious. According to Leibniz's principle of pre-established harmony, in fact, every mental state of the substance has a correspondent corporeal state and *vice versa*. This means, for instance,

that something happens in the soul corresponding to the circulation of the blood and to every internal movement of the viscera, although one is unaware of these things.²³

Moreover, this pre-established harmony explains not only the mind-body relation but also the relationships that each monad has with the other monads and, generally, with the world.²⁴ In Leibniz's words, the individual substance expresses the whole universe²⁵ (i.e., contains some traces of whatever happens, has happened and will happen in the world). This means that at every moment our soul is crossed by an amount of perceptions, some of them conscious, at present or at other moments, and others which will never become conscious – such as, for instance, what happened yesterday at 4.57 pm in via Cadlolo 15, in Rome.

A consequence of the so-called theory of *petites perceptions* is that when we believe something we do not always know, and, more importantly, *cannot* know, *why* we have come to believe it. For example, my belief that red-haired people are smarter than blonde-haired people could be derived by an accurate academic study on the IQ of blonde- and red-haired people, but it could also be derived from the fact that when I was two years old my red dog ran faster than the “blonde” dog of my neighbor – a fact that I cannot remember. According to Leibniz, we always have reasons to believe what we believe, precisely because believing (i.e., judging that something is true) is caused by perceptions that produce belief.²⁶ As Leibniz writes against the historian of Louis the Great, Paul Pellisson-Fontanier,²⁷ the reasons that underlie our beliefs are explicable or inexplicable.²⁸ The inexplicable reasons

consist only in our consciousness or perception, and in an experience of an inner sentiment in which we cannot let others enter, if we do not find the way for making them feel the same things in the same manner.²⁹

Since every individual experience is unique because it pertains to an unique individual substance,³⁰ in order to grasp the causes of a person's beliefs we would have to have the same perceptions that have caused the belief in them. Furthermore, most such perceptions remain unconscious, and cannot become conscious even for the individual who feels them. Thus, she or he has no power over them. But if we have no power over our perceptions, *a fortiori* we have no power over our beliefs.³¹ For this reason, we cannot, and above all should not, force someone to change their mind or to believe something they do not. As we read in an unpublished writing, *On the obligation to believe*,

1. An *obligation* is a necessity imposed under the fear of a just punishment.
2. *To believe* is to be conscious of the reasons which we find convincing.
3. *Things in our power* are those which happen if we want them to.
4. *Fear* is the desire to avoid something.
5. *Self-knowledge* is the memory of our actions.³²

From these definitions, Leibniz draws the conclusion that we cannot force someone to believe something, but only “to investigate with utmost application”³³ his or her religious beliefs. If at the end of a careful investigation they have not changed their mind, it is then impossible for them to believe something different than before. Does this mean that for Leibniz anyone should be allowed to believe anything, and that, consequently, Leibniz is one of the forerunners of the freedom of conscience? We cannot say that absolutely, because in many places Leibniz criticizes such freedom, as well as those who hold different religious opinions – such as the Socinians.³⁴ On the contrary, in his countless writings in support of the the reunion of the Reformed and the Catholic Churches,³⁵ he seems to view the Christian Church as extremely important for salvation, at least for those who do not have the cultural instruments for understanding the truths required to be saved (i.e., the existence and the principal attributes of God and the immortality of the soul³⁶). What we would like to underline is not a supposed liberalism in Leibniz, but rather that his refusal to admit a self-transparent subjectivity³⁷ leads him to a position very similar to Bayle's doctrine of the erroneous conscience.³⁸ However, as we will see in the next section, in Leibniz the acknowledgement of the essential obscurity of our beliefs and opinions is not a door to scepticism, as in Bayle, but, on the contrary, the first step in constructing a method with which to attain a common truth and, thus, “a union not only of toleration, but also of fraternity.”³⁹

“The Place of Others”: The Positive Ground for Toleration.

If, contrary to Descartes, in Leibniz subjectivity is untrustworthy, how can we be sure that our opinions are true? In the *Meditations on knowledge, truth and ideas* (1684) Leibniz contests Descartes' general rule – “whatever I perceive very clearly and

distinctly is true”⁴⁰ – and proposes several other parameters for determining the truth of ideas:

Since distinguished men are today engaged in controversies about true and false ideas, a matter of great importance for understanding the truth and one to which even Descartes did not entirely do justice, I should like briefly explain what I think may be established about the different kinds and the criteria of ideas and of knowledge. Knowledge is either obscure or *clear*; clear knowledge is either confused or *distinct*; distinct knowledge is either inadequate or *adequate*, and also either symbolic or *intuitive*. The most perfect knowledge is that which is both adequate and intuitive.⁴¹

Thus, the differences between the various kind of knowledge depend on the formal features of the object considered. In this sense, an adequate knowledge occurs “when every ingredient that enters into a distinct concept [i.e., a concept that we are able to describe with “sufficient marks” for distinguishing it from another concept] is itself known distinctly.”⁴² If this knowledge reveals a concept completely consistent – demonstrating, in Leibniz’s words its possibility – then the idea denoted by the concept, the object of my *cognitio*, is true:

An idea is true when the concept is possible; it is false when it implies a contradiction.⁴³

Crucially, in order to know the possibility of a concept, we have, according to Leibniz, two paths: *a priori* or *a posteriori*. Of these alternatives, he writes:

We know [the possibility] *a priori* when we resolve the concept into its necessary elements or into other concepts whose possibility is known, and we know that there is nothing incompatible in them [...]. We know an idea *a posteriori* when we experience the actual existence of the thing, for what actually exists or has existed is in any case possible.⁴⁴

Only with *a priori* knowledge do we have what Leibniz calls adequate knowledge, because the possibility is revealed by the analysis of the idea. Even if an existing thing is *a fortiori* possible and its concept is therefore true, what we know about it is only a truth of fact, which, in Leibniz’s thought, cannot be known with the same degree of certainty of the truths of reason - i.e., truths regarding only essences, which are thus necessary.⁴⁵ As Leibniz writes in *On the nature of truth, contingency, indifference and predetermination* (1685-1686),⁴⁶ the truths of fact, which are *contingent* truths, “cannot be demonstrated with any resolution”⁴⁷ because “all the propositions in which existence and time are implicated involve all the series of things.”⁴⁸ In order to completely know a contingent truth, it is required to have an infinite amount of other knowledge which only God can possess. The consequence of this is that, in regard to the truths of fact, as well as in regard to mathematical limits,⁴⁹ human knowledge can approach exactitude to infinity but cannot attain the same degree of

certainty that it can concerning the truths of reason. We must note that this does not mean that for Leibniz the truths of fact are not real truths, or that we cannot grasp their truth, but only that in regard to this kind of truths we do not have a *complete* knowledge, since they imply the infinity.⁵⁰

Importantly for our purpose, within the truths of fact Leibniz classified the truths concerning politics, the truths concerning history, and the truths concerning religious creeds. As we read in the *Essays on Theodicy* (1710)

[O]ne may compare faith with experience, since faith (in respect of the motives that give it justification) depends upon the experience of those who have seen the miracles whereon revelation is founded, and upon the trustworthy tradition which has handed them down to us, whether through the Scriptures or by the account of those who have preserved them.⁵¹

For Leibniz, this kind of truth can possess only “*a moral certainty*,”⁵² which is sufficient for defending it from objections and is founded on more or less good reasons, but which is not absolute. Such truths therefore are not necessary as are mathematical truths. From this it follows that in the domain of religion there is more place for discussions than in the domain of mathematics, since many truths concerning religion are truths of fact and, unlike the truths of reason, they can be denied without contradiction⁵³. Does this mean, as Bayle thought, that in religious matters it is impossible to reach an universal or at least a common truth? Leibniz’s answers in the negative:

When one declaims against reason like several good people do, it is a clear sign that he is not well educated [...]. The *reason* is nothing but a knowledge of the truth that proceeds by order.⁵⁴

And more specifically in a letter written in 1697 to Thomas Burnett:

We could very well establish the truth of religion and end many of the controversies that divide people and cause so much evil for the human race, if we would meditate with order and proceed in the way we ought to.⁵⁵

In this sense, Leibniz tried all his life to find a method, an *order*,⁵⁶ an *ars disputandi* in which to conduct controversies and achieve discussions with mutual agreement.⁵⁷ As we read in Leibniz’s analysis of Gilbert Burnet *An exposition of the 39 Articles of the Church of England*, a good method could lead to something more than “mere tolerance between the churches,”⁵⁸ since it could help to find the common ground between opponents. This method would be twofold, and consists of the following: 1) a careful exposition of the theses of the principal subjects of the dispute, which places “in front of one’s eyes the weight of both sides’ arguments as if in a balance,”⁵⁹ and 2) a conciliation that occurs “when [it is accepted that] one errs more by rejecting the other’s [position] than by defending one’s own, even though the latter seems easier to do.”⁶⁰ In order to achieve this, we have to “displace” ourselves and, as

the evangelical golden rule teaches us, try to reach “the place of others”:

The place of others is the true point of perspective in politics as well as in morality. [...] Thus once can say that the place of others, in morality as in politics, is a place proper to help us to discover considerations which would not otherwise come to us.⁶¹

Of course, Leibniz acknowledges the difficulty of putting ourselves “in the place of [the] adversary”:

One needs a lot of time for this, and our passions and amusements do not afford it to us. Normally, we have a certain spirit of contradiction, and we are proud not to listen to anything without having some criticism; we make a point of opposing every judgment and desire of ordinary men. In this way, we make everything problematic, and since we enjoy disputes, why are we surprised if everything turns out to be disputable for those who do not go beyond light considerations? Especially since, usually, one does not engage in them for benefit but for amusing oneself.⁶²

But this difficulty does not imply that the aim is impossible. Indeed, according to Leibniz, academic societies, education, and also “good princes”⁶³ have precisely the aim (and the duty) of improving our unselfish attitudes and helping us to quit the “spirit of sect”: a spirit which prevents the real and enduring progress of human society.⁶⁴ What we have to do is begin “working together [*de concert*] for the common good,”⁶⁵ leaving aside particularism:

We must imitate Geometers: between them there are neither Euclideans nor Archimedean. They are all in favor of Euclid and all in favor of Archimedes, because they are all in favor of the common master: the divine truth.⁶⁶

As we have seen, in the domain of the truths of fact - and thus in religion, politics, and morality - the complete demonstration of the truth can only be approached to infinity. Hence, the road to the conclusive resolution of all conflicts seems to be a work in progress (a *regulative ideal* in Kantian terms), which has to be practiced by all the men and women of “good will.”⁶⁷ This ideal of a “most perfect society [*vollkommene Gemeinschaft*],” having the goal of “the general and supreme happiness,”⁶⁸ can be realized only if society is founded on the principle of justice. According to Leibniz, this principle of justice is “the unique remedy for avoiding the public hate”⁶⁹ and is the same in heaven and earth:

To say [...] that God’s justice is different than men’s justice is like to say that men’s arithmetic and geometry is false in heaven.⁷⁰

The principle of justice, “this sublime virtue,”⁷¹ which can be understood better than a horse,⁷² is defined by Leibniz as “the charity of wise,”⁷³ the love of a

woman or a man who finds her or his happiness in the good of others. Therefore, justice consists of both a theoretical aspect, wisdom, and a practical attitude, love, which is seen by Leibniz as a general benevolence towards others.⁷⁴ This means that justice implies the capacity to acknowledge the point of view of others and, consequently, to understand and promote the common good within and beyond the differences. As Leibniz writes in the *Meditations on the Common Concept of Justice* (1702-1703):

One can say, then, that justice, at least among men, is the constant will to act, so far as possible, in a way such that no one can complain of us, if we would not complain of others in a similar case. From which it is evident that, since it is impossible to act so that the whole world is content, one must try to content people as much as possible, and thus that whatever is just, conforms to the charity of the wise. Wisdom, which is the knowledge of our own good, brings us to justice, that is to a reasonable advancement of the good of others.⁷⁵

Even if in this world – and in each life – complete happiness is unattainable, justice requires that we do anything within our power to approach the most perfect society: a society in which that condition will be finally satisfied. This purpose must be individual and political, theoretical and practical, and must involve every rational being since, as Leibniz writes, “No one can easily be happy in the midst of miserable people.”⁷⁶

Conclusions

Voltaire's portrait of Leibniz has deeply influenced the collective imagination. Leibniz was seen as a careless philosopher, who has written “a kind of fantastic fairy tale,”⁷⁷ walking on clouds full of spirits, monads, and mathematical puzzles. We often forget that Leibniz was first of all a jurist and a diplomat, who had travelled across Europe in a critical moment of Western history, trying to achieve complicated affairs for the most important courts of the German Empire. Even if he was a great metaphysician and a rationalist fully convinced of the power of reason, Leibniz had too much knowledge of the real world not to realize that harmony is more a *desideratum* than a reality. In this sense, Leibniz's optimism seems to be, as the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci used to say about himself, “an optimism of the will.”⁷⁸ It is an optimism which leads him to look for every means useful to solve philosophical, theological and political problems. Even if the logic of probability and the art of controversies dreamed of by Leibniz remained incomplete, his writings on these subjects succeed in showing how it is important to find specific methods for conflict resolution. As we have seen, Leibniz tries to combine the existence of a common truth, which can - and should - be known by human beings, on one hand, and the acknowledgement of the mind's limits, on the other. This attempt highlights how the real barriers that impede mutual comprehension are not intellectual, but practical (in the Greek sense of *praxis*), because in regard to the matters of fact, such as religious or political conflicts, the obstacles lie more with the behaviors of people than with

epistemic problems.

Since every individual is a point of view on the universe,⁷⁹ our perception of the world, even when founded, is of necessity limited to our experiences, our culture, our language, our history, and our life. But the goal suggested by Leibniz, which will be carried on by another great German philosopher: Immanuel Kant, is precisely to set us free from these influences by reaching what Leibniz called “the place of the others.” As Tzvetan Todorov writes

What is properly human is not, of course, a certain feature of culture. Human beings are influenced by the context in which they are born, and this context changes in time and space. What every human being has in common with all the others is her or his capacity of refusing all these determinations.⁸⁰

References

¹ See Paganini, G., *Analisi della fede e critica della ragione nella filosofia di Pierre Bayle* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1980).

² One of Descartes’ most famous theses, the doctrine of God’s creation of the eternal truths, means precisely to put a gap between God’s mind and human minds in order to guarantee the autonomy of man’s true knowledge of the world. As we read in a letter written to Mersenne in 1630, “The mathematical truths which you call eternal have been laid down by God and depend on him entirely no less than the rest of his creatures [...] There is no single one that we cannot grasp if our mind turns to consider it. They are all inborn in our mind just as a king would imprint his laws on the hearts of all his subjects if he had enough power to do so.” Descartes to Mersenne, 15th april 1630 in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. C. Adam and P. Tannery (Paris: CNRS, 1964-1974), 11 vols., vol. I, 145 (hereafter AT followed by the number of the volume and the number of the page), translation in Descartes, R., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch, and A. Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) (hereafter CSMK).

³ Descartes’ theory of judgement states that when I am considering something, the intellect presents to me a mental content, an idea, to which, if it is not clear and distinct, I can indifferently give or deny my assent. Since the assent is an operation of the will that, contrary to the intellect, is unlimited, the “source of my mistakes” lies on its shoulders. This is because, when I err, I do not contain my free will “within the same limits” of the intellect and extend it “to matters which I do not understand”: “So what then is the source of my mistakes? It must be simply this: the scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect; but instead of restricting it within the same limits, It extend its use to matters which I do not understand. Since the will is indifferent in such case, it easily turns aside from what is true and good and this is the source of my error and sin” (*Fourth Meditation*, in AT VII, 68, CSMK2, 40-41).

⁴ See Arnauld’s *Logic*: “Comme il ne faut point d’autres marques pour distinguer la lumière des ténèbres, que la lumière même qui se fait sentir, ainsi, il n’en faut point d’autres pour reconnaître la vérité, que la clarté même qui l’environne, et qui se soumet l’esprit et le persuade malgré qu’il en ait; de sorte que toutes les raisons de ces philosophes ne sont pas plus capables d’empêcher l’âme de se rendre à la vérité, lorsqu’elle en est fortement pénétrée, qu’elles sont capable d’empêcher les yeux de voir, lorsqu’étant ouverts, ils sont frappés par la lumière du soleil”, Arnauld, A. and Nicole, P., *La logique ou l’art de penser*, ed. C. Jourdain (Paris: Gallimard: 2001 [1662]), 13. On the influence of Descartes’ theory of knowledge on Arnauld see Nadler, S., *Arnauld and the Cartesian Philosophy of Ideas* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁵ AT VII, 74, CSMK 2, 43, my emphasis.

⁶ See Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, third part, third maxim: “My third maxim was to try always to master myself rather than the fortune, and change my desires rather than the order of the world. In general I would become accustomed to believing that *nothing lies entirely within our power except our thoughts*”, AT VI, 25, CSMK 1, 123, my emphasis.

⁷ Cfr. in particular Bayle, P. *Commentaire philosophique sur ces paroles de Jésus-Christ, “Contrains-les d’entrer”*; *Où l’on prouve par plusieurs raisons démonstratives, qu’il n’y a rien de plus abominable que de faire des Conversion par la Contrainte: Et où l’on réfute tous les sophisme des convertisseurs à contrainte, et l’apologie que St. Augustin a faite des Persécutions* (Canterbury [Amsterdam], 1686).

⁸ See Bayle, P., *Dictionnaire historique-critique*, 4th ed. (Amsterdam, 1730), esp. art. “Manichéens”, transl. in Bayle, P., *Historical and Critical Dictionary. Selections*, ed. R.H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 151. The literature on Bayle’s definition of tolerance is very wide. See at least Mori, G., *Bayle philosophe* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999) also for bibliographical references.

⁹ Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique* (Londres, 1764) transl. in Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, (New York: Carlton House, 19?) 302.

Available via: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18569/18569-h/18569-h.htm>, cited December, 10th, 2013. I use here equivalently “tolerance” and “toleration”, even if, in English, the first usually denotes the individual features of the concept (i.e., its being a virtue or a *habitus*), while the second refers to a political or civil practice, following the suggestions of Rainer Forst (Forst, R., *Toleration in Conflict. Past and Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1). See for a contemporary survey on the concept *Aspects of Toleration*, eds. J. Horton and S. Mendus (London and New York: Methuen, 1985) and Forst, R., (2013).

¹⁰ Also for this reason it is very difficult to accept those interpretations of Enlightenment that see it as the source of 20th century totalitarianism. See for instance Lyotard, J.F., *Heidegger et “les juifs.”* (Paris: Galilée, 1988) and Lacoue-Labarthe, P., *La Fiction du politique: Heidegger, l’art et la politique*, (Paris: Bourgois editeur, 1987).

¹¹ See Brahami, F., “Les sceptiques de la politique: Montaigne et Bayle” in *The Return of Scepticism from Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle*, ed. G. Paganini (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 377-392 and *Etudes sur le Traité sur la tolerance de Voltaire*, ed. N. Cronck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). A similar, but not identical, foundation of toleration can be found in Locke. See Rogers, G.A.J., “Locke and the Latitude-Men: Ignorance as a Ground of Toleration”, in *Locke’s Enlightenment. Aspects of the Origin, Nature and Impact of his Philosophy* (Hildesheim-Zürich-New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1998) 113-132. An account of the relationships between Locke and Leibniz on this subject in Jolley, N., “Leibniz, Locke, and the Epistemology of Toleration”, in *Leibniz and the English-Speaking World*, eds. P. Phemister and S. Brown (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 133-143.

¹² See for instance *Justifying Toleration. Conceptual and Historical Perspectives*, ed. S. Mendus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and Creppell, I., *Toleration and Identity. Foundations in Early Modern Thought* (Routledge: New York, 2003) and Forst, R., (2013).

¹³ On this subject Belaval, Y., *Leibniz critique de Descartes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) is still useful.

¹⁴ Leibniz, G.W., *Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum*, in *Die philosophischen Schriften*, ed. C.I. Gerhardt (Berlin, 1875-1890) (reprint Hildesheim: Olms, 1961-1962), 7 vols, vol. 4, 361, (hereafter GP followed by volume and page), trans. in Leibniz, G.W., *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. L. Loemker (Dordrecht: Kluwer), vol. 2, 637 (hereafter LP).

¹⁵ The equation between memory and consciousness is present in many of his writings. See for instance *De conscientia memoriae* (1683-1685) “Consciousness is memory of our actions. Descartes therefore holds that there can be no trust in a demonstration, because every demonstration requires memory of preceding propositions, in which it could be the case that we were perhaps deceived by the power of some evil genius. But if we prolong the pretext of

doubting to this point, we cannot even trust our consciousness of the present, because memory is always involved, since nothing exists, absolutely speaking, except for the present moment”, in Leibniz, G.W., *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe* (Leipzig-Berlin: Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1923 and ff.), VI 4 1472 (hereafter A, followed by volume, tome and page).

¹⁶ As it has been noted, as many of his contemporaries, Leibniz does not clearly distinguish between object perception and perception of states of affairs. See Simmons, A., “Changing the Cartesian Mind: Leibniz on Sensation, Representation and Consciousness”, *Philosophical Review*, 110/1(2001): 31-75, see p. 53, note 43.

¹⁷ GP 4 356, LP 2 632.

¹⁸ GP 4 362, LP 2 639.

¹⁹ For a general account of Leibniz’s theory of knowledge see McRae, R., “The Theory of Knowledge”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, ed. N. Jolley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 176-198.

²⁰ See *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686): § 8 “the nature of an individual substance or of a complete being, namely, [is] to afford a conception so complete that the concept shall be sufficient for the understanding of it and for the deduction of all the predicates of which the substance is or may become the subject.” A VI 4 1540. On Leibniz’s definition of individual see Di Bella, S., *The Science of the Individual: Leibniz’s Ontology of Individual Substance* (Berlin: Springer, 2005).

²¹ “Pour mieux entendre la nature de la substance, il faut sçavoir que la notion parfaite de chaque substance, quoyque indivisible, enveloppe l’infini et exprime toujours tout son passé et tout son avenir, en sorte que Dieu ou celui qui la connoist exactement, y voit tout cela des à present”, Leibniz, G.W., *Système nouveau pour expliquer la nature des substances et leur communication entre elles, aussi bien que l’union de l’ame et de le corps* (1695), GP 4 475.

²² A VI 6 77 in Leibniz, G.W., *New Essays on Human Understanding*, trans. by P. Remnant and J. Bennet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43 (hereafter RB and page number).

²³ Leibniz, G.W., *New Essays*, A VI 6 198, RB 116.

²⁴ On the different meanings of this doctrine in Leibniz see Woolhouse, R., “Pre-established Harmony between Soul and Body: Union or Unity?” in *Unità e molteplicità nel pensiero filosofico e scientifico di Leibniz*, eds. A Lamarra and R. Palaia (Firenze: Olschki, 2000), 159-170.

²⁵ “toute substance est comme un monde entier et comme un miroir de Dieu ou bien de tout l’univers, qu’elle exprime chacune à sa façon, à peu pres comme une même ville est diversement représentée selon les différentes situations de celui qui la regarde” *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686), § 9, A VI 4 1542.

²⁶ This idea strictly depends on Leibniz’s *Principle of sufficient reason*, which states that there is always a reason for things are what they are. See *Monadology* (1714): “31. Our reasonings are grounded upon two great principles, that of contradiction, in virtue of which we judge false that which involves a contradiction, and true that which is opposed or contradictory to the false; 32. And that of sufficient reason, in virtue of which we hold that there can be no fact real or existing, no statement true, unless there be a sufficient reason, why it should be so and not otherwise, although these reasons usually cannot be known by us.” GP 6 612.

²⁷ On the debate between Leibniz and Pellisson see Antognazza, M.L., “Leibniz and Religious Toleration: The correspondence with Paul Pellisson-Fontanier”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 76/4 (2002): 601-622

²⁸ *De la tolerance des religions, Lettres de M. Leibniz et reponses de M. Pellisson* (Paris, 1692), 4.

²⁹ “les raisons inexplicables consistent uniquement dans nostre conscience ou perception, et dans une experience de sentiment interieur dans lequel on ne sçauroit faire entrer les autres, si

on ne trouve moyen de leur faire sentir les mesmes choses de la mesme façon”, Leibniz, G.W., *De la tolerance des religions*, 4.

³⁰ This is the meaning of Leibniz’s well-known principle of the identity of indiscernibles.

³¹ Here lies an essential difference between Leibniz and Descartes, for according to Descartes every mental state is conscious. This means that I can always, at least in principle, reconstruct the reasons of my beliefs and, then, change them through new information – or by leaving old opinions. On the differences between Descartes and Leibniz on the nature of mind see Simmons, A., (2001), also for further bibliography.

³² 1677?, A VI 4 2153, transl. by L. Strickland [Online]. Available via <http://www.leibniz-translations.com/obligation.htm>, cited December, 13th, 2013.

³³ A VI 4 2154.

³⁴ For instance, letter to Landgraf Ernst, 1st (?) August 1687: “il ya lieu de s’étonner qu’il [the king of England] donne une liberté de conscience tout a fait illimitée dont il n’y a point d’exemple [or sic?] en Europe, sçavoir qui soit autorisée par les loix. Il n’excepte que ceux dont les principes sont contraires au gouvernement. Ainsi les Sociniens et semblables autont toute la liberté de se nicher en Angleterre, et d’y établir des conventicules”, A I 4 441. It has to be noted, however, that Leibniz thinks that neither Socinians shall be sentenced to death: “Le sentiment de V.A.S. [the Langraf von Hessen Rheinfelz] est qu’au commencement on doit bannir les heretiques, cela est tres raisonnable; et de la maniere que le monde est fait ils trouveroient tousjours une retraite, autrement les bannir par tout ce seroit autant que de leur refuser la vie; et ce seroit retomber dans la persecution. [...] M. Lubinezki parlant de cette affaire [the banishment of Socinians from Denmark] à l’archevesque de Roschild, nommé Wandalinus, et ne pouvant rien obtenir, dit en fin en le quittant, ‘si non datur nobis terra ubi vivamus, dabitur ubi moriamur’, à quoy l’archevesque repartit par ces paroles *plus spirituelles que charitables*: ‘sunt etiam qui in aëre putrescunt’. On voit par là que le bannissement, s’il estoit pratiqué par tout seroit equivalent au refus de la vie, et par consequent, qu’il a aussi ses difficultés. Car si les Sociniens n’estoient receus encor en Hollande et en Transilvanie, ils n’auroient aucun lieu de repos [...]. On me dira qu’il leur sera permis de se retirer en Turquie, ou de cultiver quelque isle deserte; mais ces retraites ne sont pas fort aisées et de faire aller si loin quelques personnes âgées ou incommodées c’est les envoyer à une mort certaine. Sans cela je croy qu’on ne feroit pas mal d’envoyer de telles gens dans un lieu, ou ils pourroient vivre à leur maniere, sans *infecter* les autres”, A I 4 433, my emphasis. On Leibniz’s critics on Socinianism see Antognazza, M.R., *Leibniz on the Trinity and the Incarnation: Reason and Revelation in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

³⁵ See for instance the first project written between 1668 and 1670: *Demonstrationum catholicarum conspectus*, in A VI 1 494-500.

³⁶ See letter to Morell, September 1698: “La raison est la voix naturelle de Dieu, et ce n’est que par elle que la voix de Dieu est revelée se doit justifier, à fin que notre imagination ou quelque autre illusion ne nous trompe point. [...] Quand il n’y aura ni revelation publique ny ecriture, les hommes suivant les lumieres internes naturelles (c’est à dire la raison) [...] ne laisseroient pas de parvenir à la vray beatitude. Mais comme les hommes usent mal de leur raison, la revelation publique du Messie a esté necessaire”, in Grua, G., *Textes inédits* (Paris: PUF, 1948), 2 vols., G 1 138-139 (hereafter G).

³⁷ It is possible that this thesis was influenced by Malebranche’s definition of the knowledge of the soul “par sentiment interieur.” See Malebranche, *Recherche de la verité* (1674-75), bk 3, part 2, chap. 7, § 4: “we do not know [the soul] through its idea [...]; we know it only through *consciousness*, and because of this, our knowledge of it is imperfect” in *The Search after Truth*, eds. T.M. Lennon and P.J. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 237.

³⁸ On Bayle’s doctrine see Mori, G., (1999), chap. 6 “Conscience et tolérance”.

³⁹ “une union non seulement de tolerance, mais mêmes de fraternité”, Letter to Ernst von Hessen Rheinfels, half October 1685, A I 4, p. 381.

⁴⁰ See Descartes, *Third Meditation*, AT VII 35.

⁴¹ A VI 4 585-586, LP 2 291.

⁴² A VI 4 587, LP 2 292.

⁴³ A VI 4 589, LP 2 293.

⁴⁴ A VI 4 589, LP 2 293.

⁴⁵ See for instance *Monadology* (1714), § 33: “Il y a aussi deux sortes de *Verités*, celles de *Raisonnement* et celles de *Fait*. Les *Verités* de *Raisonnement* sont nécessaires et leur opposé est impossible, et celles de *Fait* sont contingentes et leur opposé est possible”, GP 6 612. As it is well known, according to Leibniz ‘impossible’ is what contains contradictions, ‘possible’ what does not contain contradictions. See for instance *Definitions: aliquid, nihil, impossibile, possibile* (August 1688-January 1689?), in A VI 4 939.

⁴⁶ In A VI 4 1514-1524.

⁴⁷ “[propositiones] existenciales sive contingentes, quarum veritas a sola Mente ininita a priori intelligitur, nec ulla resolutione demonstrari potest”, A VI 4 1517.

⁴⁸ “omnes propositiones quas ingreditur existentia et tempus, eas ingreditur eo ipso tota series rerum”, A VI 4 1517.

⁴⁹ The comparison is in the same writing quoted above, *De natura veritate etc.*

⁵⁰ In this sense Leibniz seems here approaching Descartes’ distinction between *intelligere* and *comprehendere*: “Itaque imprimis hic dicam infinitum, qua infinitum est, *nullo quidem modo comprehendendi, sed nihilominus tamen intelligi*, quatenus scilicet clare et distincte intelligere aliquam rem talem esse, ut nulli plane in ea limites possint reperiri, est clare intelligere illam esse infinitam”, Descartes, *First replies to the Meditations on first Philosophy*. AT VII 112, my emphasis. Since also the truths of physics are for Leibniz truths of fact, this distinction could suggest that Leibniz thinks of physics as an open field in which our knowledge can always increase.

⁵¹ “Et l’on peut comparer la Foy avec l’Experience, puisque la Foy (quant aux motifs qui la verifient) depend de l’experience de ceux qui ont vû les miracles, sur lesquels la revelation est fondée, et de la Tradition digne de croyance, qui les a fait passer jusqu’à nous, soit par les Ecritures, soit par rapport de ceux qui les ont conservées”, *Discours préliminaire de la conformité de la foy avec la raison* §1, in *Essais de Theodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l’homme et l’origine du mal*, GP 6 49.

⁵² *Discours*, §5, GP 6 52, Leibniz’s emphasis.

⁵³ This is one of the most important difference between the two kinds of truth. See note 45 above.

⁵⁴ “Quand on declame contre la raison comme font plusieurs bonnes gens, c’est une forte marque, qu’on n’en est pas assés bien instruit [...] la *raison* n’est autre chose qu’une connoissance de la verité qui procede avec ordre”, Letter to Morell, September 1698, G 1 138.

⁵⁵ “nous pourrions bien establir la verité de la Religion, et terminer bien des controverses qui partagent les hommes et causent tant de maux au genre humain, si nous voulions mediter avec ordre et proceder comme il faut”, GP 3 192.

⁵⁶ The equivalence between method and order is a Cartesian *topos*: see Gouhier, H., *L’ordre des raisons selon Descartes* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1957).

⁵⁷ See editors’ introduction to Leibniz, G.W., *The Art of Controversies*, trans. and ed., with an introductory essay and notes, by M. Dascal, with Q. Racionero and A. Cardoso, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), (hereafter AC) and *The Practice of Reason. Leibniz and his Controversies*, ed. M. Dascal (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Bejamins Publishing Company, 2010).

⁵⁸ Leibniz, Preface to G. Burnet, *An exposition of the 39 articles of the church of England* (1705), in G 2 460, transl in AC 404.

⁵⁹ G 2 460, AC 404.

⁶⁰ G 2 477, AC 413,

⁶¹ A VI 3 904, Leibniz, *Political Writings*, ed. P. Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 81 (hereafter LR). On the 'golden rule' as a pivot in Leibniz's *ars disputandi*, see Laerke, M., "The Golden Rule. Aspects of Leibniz's Method for Religious Controversy", in M. Dascal, (2010), 297-319.

⁶² *Conversation du Marquis de Pianese et du pere Emery eremite* (1679-1681) A VI 4 2250, AC 173.

⁶³ See *Portrait of the Prince*, in LR pp. 85-102

⁶⁴ According to Leibniz the 'sectarianism' is very dangerous also for the religion: 'je ne me mets pas en peine icy de ces controverses de secte qui distinguent Luther ou Calvin du pape. Je ne veux parler à present que des verités essentielles de la religion et de la pieté, defigurées d'une manière epouvantable par *l'esprit sectaire* <des condennatifs>, jusqu'à pervertir l'idée de Dieu, à qui on donne des qualités indignes de luy, et dignes plustost de son ennemi. On veut que Dieu livre à des flammes eternelles et à des miseres infinies tous ceux qui ne sont pas attachés à une certaine cabale des hommes, et qui ne reconnoissent point pour leur chef le prince Eveque de la ville de Rome; pendant que cet Eveque exige d'eux des choses qui ne sont pas en leur pouvoir, puisqu'il les veut faire croire des opinions qui paroissent entierement insoutenables. Est-il possible qu'on puisse avoir une idée si basse et si mauvaise de Dieu, que de le croire capable du plus ridicule des caprice, et de la plus criante des injustices? [...] Ainsi, à force des religions, on detruit la religion la plus fondamentale, qui est honorer et aimer Dieu [...]. Je l'ay dit et je le dis encor: nous envoyons des Missionaires aux Indes pour precher la religion revelée. Voila qui va bien. Mais il semble que nous aurions besoin que les Chinois nous envoyassent des missionaires à leur tour, pour nous apprendre la religion naturelle que nous avons presque perdue. Car en effet le gouvernement de la Chine seroit incomparablement meilleur que celuy de Dieu, *si Dieu estoit tel que le depeignent les docteur sectaires, qui attachent le salut aux chimeres de leur parti*, Letter to Sophie, 10 september 1697, G I 206-207, my emphasis.

⁶⁵ *Recommendation for instituting a general science* (1686?), in A VI 4 692.

⁶⁶ "il faut quitter l'esprit de secte [...]: il faut imiter les Geometres, où il n'y a point d'Euclidistes, ny d'Archimedistes, ils sont tous pour Euclide, et tous pour Archimede parce qu'ils sont tous pour le maistre commun qui est la divine verité" *Recommendation for instituting a general science* (1686?), in A VI 4 695.

⁶⁷ The verb 'to practice' is not accidental, but underlines an important tenet of Leibniz's thought: the strict connection between theory and practice, *theoria cum praxi*. See on this Basso, L., *Individuo e comunità nella filosofia politica di G.W. Leibniz*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2005), esp. *Introduzione*.

⁶⁸ *Divisio societatum* (1680), A IV 3 908, LR 77. See also *Sur la generosité* (1686-1687?): "Nous devons prendre part au bonheur de ceux qui nous environnent, comme au nostre, ne cherchant pas nos aises ny nos interests, dans ce qui est contraire à la felicité commune, enfin nous devons songer à ce que le public souhaite de nous et que nous souhaitterions nous mêmes si nous nous mettions à la place des autres, car c'est comme la voix de Dieu et la marque de la vocation", A VI 4 2723. Luca Basso has highlighted that Tönnies' and Weber's distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* cannot be applied to Leibniz's definition of society. See Basso, L., (2005), p. 136 and note 2.

⁶⁹ "Vitandi ergo odii publici remedium unicum est Justitiae", *Consilium Aegyptiacum* 1671-72, A IV 1 264.

⁷⁰ "de dire [...] que la justice de Dieu est autre que celles des hommes, c'est justement comme si on disoit que l'arithmetique ou la geometrie des hommes est fausse dans le ciel", Letter to Langraf Hessen-Rheinfels 4/14 September 1690, A I 6 108. A long analysis of the 'univocity'

of justice against Hobbes is present in the *Meditations on the Common Concept of Justice* (1702-1703), in LR pp. 45-63.

⁷¹ “cette vertu sublime”, Letter to M. de Brinon 9/19 May 1691, A I 6 198.

⁷² See *New Essays concerning Human Understanding*, iii, v: “one doesn’t *see* justice as one sees a horse, but one *understands* it as well, or rather one understands it better”, A VI 6 300, Leibniz’s emphasis.

⁷³ See *Prefatio* to the *Codex diplomaticum juris gentium*, A IV 5 61. On the definition of justice as the “charity of wise” see Riley, P., *Leibniz’s Universal Jurisprudence: Justice as the Charity of the Wise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁷⁴ See A IV 5 61.

⁷⁵ In LR, pp. 56-57

⁷⁶ *Elements of natural law* (1670-1671), A VI 1 460, LP 1 132.

⁷⁷ Russell, B., *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), p. Xiii.

⁷⁸ Gramsci’s motto was ‘pessimismo dell’intelligenza, ottimismo della volontà’ (=pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will). See *Quaderni dal carcere*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), 28, III.

⁷⁹ See *Monadology*, § 57: “Et comme une même ville regardée de differens côtés paroist toute autre et est comme multipliée *perspectivement*, il arrive de même, que par la multitude infinie des substances simples, il y a comme autant de differens univers, qui ne sont pourtant que les perspectives d’un seul selon les differens *points de vue* de chaque Monade”, GP 6 616, Leibniz’s emphasis.

⁸⁰ “Ce qui est proprement humain n’est évidemment pas tel ou tel trait de culture. Les êtres humains sont influencés par le contexte dans lequel ils viennent au monde, et ce contexte varie dans le temps et dans l’espace. Ce que chaque être humain a en commun avec tous les autres, c’est la capacité de *refuser* ces determinations”, Todorov, T., *Nous et les autres. La réflexion française sur la diversité humaine* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1989), 513, my transl.