

## Theodicy and Reason

Logic, Metaphysics, and Theology in Leibniz's *Essais de Théodicée* (1710)

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# Justifying Leibniz, or the Infinite Patience of Reasoning

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**Abstract** Leibniz's *Theodicy* can and should be read otherwise than a naive statement of metaphysical optimism. To make this point, the Author revives some suggestions by Deleuze and contrasts them with Heidegger's critical reading of Leibniz's rationalism. Leibniz neither defends God simply by asserting his innocence, nor affirms that bad events are merely an unpleasant, human dream. Just as in Bach's *Art of Fugue* every chord is repeated in multiple tonalities, in Leibniz's universe each event is a moment of an infinite rational web. The best of all possible worlds is not 'perfect', as its harmony and order are not free from dissonances; but each dissonant chord of reality is 'well-tempered' through its infinite relations to all the other chords and tonalities. Two conclusions follow: that Leibniz's view is a powerful antidote for any childish humanistic anthropomorphism; and that his teleology is in no need of progress. The best of all possible worlds is actually the world in which we live.

**Summary** 1 No Arbitrariness. – 2 The Non Correctibility of the Universe as It Is. – 3 *Concordia Discors*.

**Keywords** Evil. Arbitrariness. Counterpoint.

The beginning of *The Book of Job* (1, 6-7) reads as follows:

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

The first one who asks the question 'Where does evil come from if God exists?' is, therefore, God Himself; moreover, He is not speaking to something that is totally alien to Himself. Perhaps, His inquiring into a provenance reveals some sort of surprise or unease, but all the questions of Theodicy originate from here: from the proximity and reciprocal intimacy between God and evil, from their compossibility.

Article translated by Susanna Zinato.

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Among His sons God finds Satan, too, and when He asks the latter 'where do you come from?' they understand each other completely. They speak the same language. It is by starting from that original intimacy, the one shared by a father and his son, by a creator and his creature, that the question about the provenance evokes a distance, a non-total identity. God is not making enquiries about a possible, non-actual world; He is not asking Satan the name of a place unknown to Himself. In point of fact, Satan's answer is of no short or partial range: 'from the earth'. Here, certainly, the distance between the creator's height and His creation's lowness or inferiority is voiced, but the earth's distance does not annihilate its proximity to God, who has created and given life to it: therefore God is interrogating Himself about that material He Himself has planned and generated, as if He were turning towards a son He has not seen for a long time, finding his face is deformed. Satan does not answer by indicating a specific point of the earth and of creation. There is no specific damned place: of it it would be enough to beware. It could be enclosed and avoided. The whole earth is scoured throughout by Satan.<sup>1</sup> The very creation willed and judged by God as 'the best possible' is, at the same time, in its infinity, bed of imperfection, sorrow, injustice.

Struck by a myriad of undeserved blows, Job will raise vehement words to proclaim his clean conscience with complete honesty and, above all, to get an answer from that God to Whom he has been, is and will remain faithful. Job's friends intervene by only worrying about using arguments that may be useful for ingratiating themselves with God, as if addressing a monarch yearning for being ascribed all the most perfect attributes, first of all goodness and, together with it, might.

In the end, God answers the call of that man overwhelmed by an undeserved unhappiness and the latter will keep silent at last, not because he will have acknowledged that God is good anyhow, but, rather, because he will put himself in the hands of His omnipotent, majestic sovereignty. Worthwhile remarking is that God prefers Job to the latter's friends, getting enraged with them and sparing them only because Job has asked Him not to punish them.

In the essay *On the Miscarriage of all Trials on Theodicy* (1791) Kant pays homage to Job's sincerity (*Aufrichtigkeit*) and honesty (*Redlichkeit*), to Job's addressing God directly, showing no servile fear, which lays him open to the risk of pronouncing excessive words, but which demonstrates an authentic and sincere relationship of faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Théodicée*, § 274: «And the great Dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil [...]: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him» (Rev. Xii. 7,8,9).

Job's friends [say that they consider...] all ills in the world [...] as so many punishments for crimes committed; [...] Job [instead] declares himself for the system of *unconditional divine decision*. «He has decided», Job says, «He does as he wills». [...] Job speaks as he thinks, and with the courage with which he, as well as every human being in his position, can well afford; his friends, on the contrary, speak as if [...] gaining his [God's] favor through their judgment were closer to their heart than the truth [...]. God [in answering Job...] allowed him glimpses into the beautiful side of creation, [...] but also, by contrast, into the horrible side, by calling out to him the products of his might, among which also harmful and fearsome things, each of which appears [...] as destructive, counterpurposive, and incompatible with a universal plan established with goodness and wisdom. [...] before any court of dogmatic theologians [...] Job would have likely suffered a sad fate. Hence only sincerity of heart and not distinction of insight [...] are the attributes [appreciated] before God. (Kant 1996, pp. 32-33)

A long and famous passage, here repropounded as a springboard for a few questions. Is the Leibniz of *Theodicy* only the *n*th 'friend of Job', dogmatic and moralistic, who, in proclaiming that God «deserves» our love and that we feel «animated by a zeal such as cannot fail to please Him» (*Théodicée*, § 6, GP VI, p. 106),<sup>2</sup> does not even appear to be exempt from flattering apology?

I also wonder whether the image of Leibniz as of a Christian Pythagoras who stages one of the most cumbersome chapters of metaphysical optimism really is a reading that gives him his due or, anyway, whether it is a fruitful interpretation nowadays. Besides, according to Leibniz himself, «once penetrated into the bottom of things, it is possible to see how almost any theoretical point of view has its own truth» (Tomasi 2002, p. 12, our transl.). Which is, then, Leibniz's truth? I will attempt to use a definitely unrestrained statement, to propose a few first notes for a *Leibnizdicy*. Of course it is difficult to put between brackets the fact that Leibniz introduces himself as, first of all, «God's attorney» (Stewart 2006, chap. 5) - «because it is the cause of God I plead» (*Théodicée*, Préface, GP VI, p. 38) - driven, «in a submissive and zealous spirit», by the «intent to sustain and exalt the glory of God» by defending him from the charge of being unjust (*Théodicée*, Discours, § 81, GP VI, p. 97). Having said that the explicitly apologetic intent is linked with an untenable optimism, still, the easy way in which we wave this reservation should put us on the alert.

2 I follow Huggard's translation (cf. Leibniz 1952).

Leibniz himself denounces as stale and alleged the depth of those who are pessimists by profession, in the ways of old Silenus caught by King Midas and of his «allegedly beautiful statement (*prétendue belle sentence*)», according to which «the first and the greatest of goods was not to be born, and the second, to depart from this life with dispatch» (*Théodicée*, § 260, GP VI, p. 271). Hastingly repeating the same old story of the ills of the world and taking it for granted is self-referential in an unacceptable, somehow puerile, way. That is the mistake of those who figure to themselves that «Nature was made for them only, and that they hold of no account what is separate from their person; whence they infer that when something displeasing to them occurs all goes ill in the universe» (*Théodicée*, § 262, GP VI, p. 273). Put bluntly, Leibniz also helps us to outdistance that *cliché* handed down to us according to which whoever shows a positive appreciation of the world is guilty of foolish or naïve optimism, whereas whoever denounces the ills of the earth, injustice and the imperfection of the human nature, is deep and sensitive. In order to avoid misunderstandings, it must be said that I would actually find it very difficult to sail into the eulogy of the perfections of creation,<sup>3</sup> yet I understand very well the Leibnizian unmasking of the excessive anthropocentric easiness indulged in when one fully poses – not only in philosophy – as suffering and deep accuser of the wickedness and woe in the world. I wonder, then, whether the label ‘metaphysical optimism’ might not turn out to be inappropriate, at least when it coincides with that nice tale for naïve and ever-edifying thinkers mocked by Voltaire’s *Candide*.

Besides, the core of the considerations I am putting forth is the following: according to Leibniz, ‘best’ does not mean ‘perfect’; ‘possible’ (at least with regard to God) does not equal to ‘necessary’; ‘calculable’ does not simply correspond to ‘logistic’; and, above all, ‘harmonic’ is not equivalent to ‘clear of dissonances’, and, when coinciding with ‘ordered’, it does so only in a peculiarly baroque sense, that is, with the meaning of alive, multiform, variously inflected, and vibrant with spiritual active force.

A little acid, sharpness or bitterness is often more pleasing than sugar; shadows enhance colours; and even a dissonance in the right place (*placée où il faut*) gives relief to harmony. We wish to be terrified by rope-dancers on the point of falling and we wish that tragedies shall well-nigh cause us to weep. Do men relish health enough, or thank God enough for it, without having ever been sick? And is it not most often necessary that a little evil render the good more discernible, that is to say, greater? (*Théodicée*, § 12, GP VI, p. 109)

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3 «His [Leibniz’s] *harmonia praestabilita* is miraculous and contradicts the daily experience of all mankind», Newton to Conti, 26th Feb. 1716, in Leibniz, Clarke [1956] 1998, p. 186.

Moreover, in attempting to understand and, so, justify this Leibnizian position, thus also accepting the equation between knowing and justifying – against which Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, will put the distinction between *quid facti* and *quid iuris* –, I do not even mean to ignore the considerations most cherished by the contemporary thought. Explanations and justifications add an annoying, both intellectualistic and moralistic, superstructure to suffering and to moral evil, be it committed or endured. In spite of this, Leibnizian metaphysics appears as a design that, though sidereally distant and untenable, does not seem as simply to be reducible to the charge of being short-sighted or theoretically insensitive. This Leibnizian reason, even as *ratio sufficiens*, certainly is an interweaving of logical and causal relationships of the being in its totality, but it is a beautifully resonant «linking together (*enchaînement*) of truths» (*Théodicée*, Discours, § 1, 62, 64; GP VI, pp. 49, 84, 86), arousing sensible pleasures that join the pleasures of the mind engendered by knowledge of rational connections (cf. *Théodicée*, § 254). According to Leibniz, all this inflames with love rational creatures and their knowing, penetrating as much as patient, intelligence. Well, I would say that the Leibnizian love for the real world is not reduced to a theological reflex, a ‘due’ effect, aprioristically deduced from a faith position or, worse, from a doctrinal hypostasis. That is why, then, all this can be handed down to us, even leaving out of consideration the reference to God or the excessive theoretical enthusiasm for the logical-rational linking that keeps the things of the universe together.

## 1 No Arbitrariness

It is hard to meet a more distant interpreter of Leibniz than Martin Heidegger (cf. Cristin 1998), still the latter’s reflections decisively contribute to effectively focus upon one of the structural features of Leibnizian thought: the exclusion of arbitrariness in whatever happens in the real world. Heidegger shares Leibniz’s target and for this reason his journey necessarily cuts across Leibniz’s onto-theological moves, even while radically questioning them. Of course, the heterogeneity between the sharp philosophical intelligence of a Swabian farmer and the ingenious logical-mathematical intellect of a baroque scientist remains unbridgeable, as much unbridgeable as the gap between the existential sensitivity of the first, whose aprioris are this world and the earth, and the theological sensitivity of the latter, for whom there is no thought or perception that can avoid the lens of the Christian faith in God the good and wise creator.

Certainly, every time Heidegger – as in the *Postscript to ‘What is Me-*

*taphysics?*' (1943-1949) – encloses Leibniz's moves within the label of modern 'calculative thinking', he misses the target. Heidegger does not appear as being either interested in or receptive towards a rationality, like Leibniz's baroque one, that can be simultaneously logical-mathematical computation and harmonic and musical warp, or animated and variegated weaving of the universe. Heidegger and, too often, many of us, in the Baroque can only see the artifice of the mannerist frills or the forced formalism of the mathematical algorithm, almost superstitious in its claiming it is telling us 'the everything' of the world. To the twentieth-century-Heideggerian sensitivity logic is nothing but 'logistics', a merely technical, as much correct as truthless, inflection of thought.

The vivid, concrete and, so, true aspect of Leibnizian logic meant as effective design of God, as infinitely articulated, connective weaving that illuminates, unifies, and disseminates truth among the things of the world<sup>4</sup> remains, to the Heideggerian viewer, a mere episode of the metaphysical oblivion of the truth of being.

As is well known, Martin Heidegger concentrates the whole of his philosophical attention on a Leibnizian passage that occurs in the seventh section of the *Principles of Nature and Grace Based on Reason* (1714):

Why is there something rather than nothing (*Pourquoi il y a plutôt quelque chose que rien*)? After all, nothing is simpler and easier than something. Also, given that things have to exist, we must be able to give a reason why they have to exist as they are and not otherwise.

Heidegger finds exemplarily metaphysical that to Leibniz nothing is only a void of being, a mere nothingness, insignificantly simple. All the philosophical-onto-theological wonder, on the contrary, arises at the presence of something of being that stands out on this nothingness, overcoming and suppressing it.<sup>5</sup> Why is there something in this void? Which substance capable of action has put it there? Referring back to the biblical God as first cause is the great, all-founding principle that explains and makes us understand and admire the infinite chain of things.

Neglecting, here, the reasons that led Heidegger to evoke the role of foundation and groundness, at the same time, of nothing meant as non-

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4 Yet Leibniz would never agree to think of God as of the world soul (cf. *Théodicée*, § 195).

5 In fact, once the act of creation has occurred, the nothing as empty nothingness disappears: «to admit a vacuum in nature, is ascribing to God a very imperfect work: 'tis violating the grand principle of the necessity of a sufficient reason; [...] all is full. [...] matter is more perfect than a vacuum, [...] then there must be no vacuum at all; for the perfection of matter is to that of a vacuum, as something to nothing», *Mr. Leibniz's Fourth Paper*, in Leibniz, Clarke [1956] 1998, p. 44. Cf. Leibniz, *Principles of Nature and Grace Based on Reason*, § 3 (GP VI, pp. 598-599).

being and, so, as 'Being' ('Sein' as no-thing), the point at which his considerations become precious with respect to Leibniz is not where the author of *What is Metaphysics?* and, above all, of *The Principle of Reason* (1957) denounces the pervasive monopoly of the causality principle. Although Heidegger is not a thinker who articulates confutations to correct others' mistakes, his questioning could be summed up in these terms: Leibniz's mistake lies not in thinking that it is always possible to find a reason why; on the contrary, it lies in thinking that, where a sufficient reason is not determinable, only the arbitrariness of being as insignificant casualness would burst open. As above all inferable from the fifth and sixth lectures of *The Principle of Reason*, the Heideggerian lunge is radical: the metaphysical oblivion does not lie in presuming to drive everything back to one reason why, but in maintaining the contingency of the world. In point of fact, Leibniz causalistically embanks arbitrariness but in order to seal the very contingency of being meant as dependent on the divine cause.

Heidegger collides with Leibniz and delivers the latter up to the metaphysical inability to remain faithful to Being's character of event (*Ereignis*), which is neither arbitrary nor contingent; yet, by so doing, he also offers a precious contribution to our understanding of the truth force of the Leibnizian thought. This exceeds the extension of the causality principle and even the reduction to sufficient reason of the foundation. By stating that «there is nothing casual in the world, if not out of our ignorance, since deep causes remain hidden to us» (*Provisional Thoughts Concerning the Use and Improvement of the German Language*, § 50, 1697, published 1714), Leibniz is not simply subsuming Being within the causalistic pigeon-holes,<sup>6</sup> neither is he only engaged in rejecting the idea of a tyrant God whose will is whimsical and despotic (cf. *Théodicée*, Préface; Discours, § 2, 6). The truth force of Leibniz's philosophy reaches down to us as it anyway rejects the arbitrariness of evil, by considering it as integral part of life, co-essential to it.

Leibniz does assimilate evil to darkness and to ignorance, that is, to «a certain kind of privation», the cause of which is, so, *deficiens* (*Théodicée*, § 32-33; GP VI, pp. 121-122), but he appears to keep far from the definitely more abstract and metaphysical attempts of those who, Augustine-like, only worry about depriving evil of any ontological reality so as to be able, in this way, to absolve God.<sup>7</sup>

6 In quoting the beautiful lines by Giuseppe Scaligero, «Ne curiosus quaere causas omnium», Leibniz himself allows that the obsessive rational asking for a reason why can favour the adversary's game: when our inadequacy will prevent us from determining the cause, the adversary will exult as he will infer from it the blindness of God's will (*Théodicée*, Discours, § 56, GP VI, p. 81).

7 «For to say that God is not the author of sin, because he is not the author of a privation, although he can be called the author of everything that is real and positive in the sin - that

According to Leibniz the world is contingent but bad things are inscribed in the necessary plot of life. In Leibniz's view evil is no mere collateral effect of the creation of good. He does not say: God has deemed a good thing to create light and, so, human beings have to suffer shadows, too, 'cold' and 'unpleasant' consequences (by inertial necessity) of the presence of light (cf. *Théodicée*, § 209). His perspective, on the contrary, is more pregnant: imperfection, suffering and criminal deeds are integral part, if only as species of privations, of the web of relationships that forms the truth of the whole creation. Evil is no exception, nor arbitrary or casual suspension of the ordinary goodness of the universe, but is an essential part of this unique actual world without which the latter would not be 'the best possible'. However much this may trouble our contemporary philosophers' hypersensitivity with respect to disharmony, Leibniz tells us about a composite universe that is not viable only starting from above (God, faith, eternal truths), analytically and aprioristically, downwards (the world, knowledge, perception, pleasure, suffering). Evil is everywhere and yet, in being wisely sewn together with the other parts, it helps make this world lovable and worthwhile living, to the extent that, if one does not halt at those tesserae of the mosaic that are badly-made, he/she rejoices with intelligence and passion at the whole weaving of this actual universe, acknowledging the prevailing in it of the harmonic result. Let's be clear, Leibniz's is a theodicy, not a cosmodycy, as Nietzsche would have it, still what in his reasonings turns out to be philosophically strong and original to us is his vision not of the creator but of the existing reality, the actual world with respect to which reason and experience, cognitive love and patience, beauty and harmony are, marvellously, one.

## 2 The Non Correctibility of the Universe as It Is

The hyper-articulated Leibnizian labyrinth appears to make itself valuable exactly by virtue of its revisiting, in fully modern times, medieval legacies that, with no solution of continuity, are nonetheless merged with the new sense of nature acquired through physics as a science. These are years in which European philosophy is elaborating the idea of progress, around which the modern project of improvement and correction of the world can be developed, yet Leibniz puts himself outside of the principle of the world's perfectibility, especially the one of anthropocentric-humanistic orientation.

is a manifest illusion. It is a leftover from the visionary philosophy of the past; it is a subterfuge (*un faux-fuyant*) with which a reasonable person will never be satisfied» (*The Author of Sin* [1673?], in Leibniz 2005, pp. 150, 110-111).

No more am I able to approve of the opinion of certain modern writers who boldly maintain that which God has made is not perfect in the highest degree, and that he might have done better. [...] To show that an architect could have done better is to find fault with his work. [...]

Their [*sc.* modern thinkers'] opinion is, in my judgment, unknown to the writers of antiquity and is a deduction based upon the too slight acquaintance which we have with the general harmony of the universe and with the hidden reasons for God's conduct. In our ignorance, therefore, we are tempted to decide audaciously that many things might have been done better. (Leibniz [1686] 1924, § 3)

The glorification of God's supreme wisdom is not only the key for defending «the objective goodness of the world» from those modern conceptions that reduce good and evil to «human needs and preferences» (Wilson 2011). Leibniz attacks those who hold that God «could have done better» (*Théodicée*, § 168, GP VI, p. 211).<sup>8</sup> In point of fact, this equals to «setting bounds to the goodness and the perfection of God» (§ 193-194, p. 231). Here one can see the resurfacing of the weighty Thomistic paradigm to which Leibniz is indebted for the claimed and indissoluble conjunction in God of might, will, and wisdom.<sup>9</sup> Aquinas, as a medieval thinker, does exclude any proportion between the finite creatural and the infinite divine, whereas, on the contrary, Leibniz is modern in his thinking that the divine choice finds sufficient reasons by taking into account the created world (cf. *Théodicée*, § 79) and, so, exactly like Malebranche, is walking the way of the commensurability to God of the finite world, in contrast with the Thomistic theology (cf. Scribano 2003, p. 179). Saint Thomas, however, lays the foundations for Leibniz's teleological thinking without admitting, as the modern do, of the correctability of the universe. Thomistically, the universe as it is cannot be better, in that God has always done everything in the best way, but as all-mighty He could make things better, things which, therefore, would constitute a better universe. Leibniz keeps close to Saint Thomas with regard to many aspects,<sup>10</sup> though he does not worry, as the latter does, about pointing out

8 Emanuela Scribano has shown how, here, Leibniz's adversary is not Malebranche, as is usually maintained, but Suarez, who, in his *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, is anxious about safeguarding, first of all, divine omnipotence and freedom of indifference (cf. *Théodicée*, § 199): God can therefore improve even the most perfect thing (cf. Scribano 2003, pp. 166, 169, 173).

9 Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Prima pars, Question 25, art. 5, Reply to Objection 1: «In God, power and essence, will and intellect, wisdom and justice, are one and the same».

10 Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Prima pars, Question 25, art. 3: «I answer that [...] «God can do all things» is rightly understood to mean that God can do all things that are possible; and for this reason He is said to be omnipotent. [...] whatever implies

the unfolding of the divine might much beyond the created nature but, rather, takes care to show the reciprocal interpenetration of God's wisdom, His excellent choices, and the physical order of nature.

Multiform and inclusive of infinite variety to the extent of risking dispersiveness, the Leibnizian mirror takes possession of the most advanced feature of modern physical-mathematical scientificness. However, this is done without falling prey to the dawning progressive philosophies of history obsessed with the now violent now morally edifying task of improving the world. Perhaps it was a question of consistency with the theological faith in an omnipotent wise and good creator, who cannot but have created a world that already is the possible best and, therefore, is in no need of corrections. Perhaps it was a peculiar and untimely medieval legacy, but the point is that Leibniz has got the strength of being of value nowadays, provided we leave out the reference to God, and of reaching us, who are now disenchanted as to any hypothesis of progress or any naïve anthropocentrism. An unrelinquishable Leibnizian refrain that we cannot abandon underlines the defectiveness, confusion, and partiality of our representations of the world. «The lazy ones are always in a hurry».<sup>11</sup> Those who are suffering from mental laziness come too soon to a halt in their reasonings and knowledge, and, so, are inclined to make rash judgments. In tackling events that bring suffering or moral indignation they advance judgments formed on their own perspective, often on their own ignorance, too, moreover presuming that they can measure the whole by starting from their personal negative experience.

You have known the world only since the day before yesterday, you see scarce farther than your nose, and you carp at the world. Wait until you know more of the world and consider therein especially the parts which present a complete whole (as do organic bodies); and you will find there a contrivance and a beauty transcending all imagination. [...] We find in the universe some things which are not pleasing to us; but let us be aware that it is not made for us alone. It is nevertheless made for us if we are wise. (*Théodicée*, § 194, GP VI, p. 232)

Those who are patient in reasoning and cognitively penetrating the things of the world get a wider, more articulate, that is, truer, vision than the one hastily obtained through self-referential, partial, and ignorant judgments. The man of knowledge receives joy from his patient and wise investigat-

contradiction does not come within the scope of divine omnipotence, because it cannot have the aspect of possibility». See, for instance, *Théodicée*, § 226-227.

<sup>11</sup> «Pigros semper festinare» (*De scientia universali seu calculo philosophico*, in Leibniz 1860, XI, p. 84).

ing – and, perhaps, the present contribution could have been entitled: An «overmastering joy founded on reason» and knowledge (§ 257, p. 269; cf. § 254),<sup>12</sup> rather than: The infinite patience of reasoning.

If Leibniz keeps on entralling philosophers that is because he is proposing a radical questioning of any banally humanistic progression. His moves are certainly soaked with faith and Christian theology, but their logical-mathematical, scientific, and physical approach keeps on addressing those who relate themselves to the universe without establishing as unit of measurement their own small perspective and, at the same time, take care not to deny evil or, worse, not to make of it an irrelevant occurrence in a perfect universe. All this goes well together with an idea of universe that becomes experience of it as a network of links and laws of nature, with no holes or weak meshes. From this point of view quite significant is Leibniz's position with respect to miracles and mysteries, in that it effectively exemplifies, thus helping us understand it, how the physical-scientific approach not 'in spite of' but exactly 'owing to' its being soaked with Christian theology excludes the correctibility of the existing world.

According to Leibniz, God has pre-formed and pre-established the order of things in a supernatural way, foreseeing and choosing the best and the most convenient one. Once the «original constitution» of things has been set out in this way all the others, even the new organisms, follow, as «a mechanical consequence of a preceding organic constitution», that is, according to the laws of nature (*Théodicée*, Préface, GP VI, p. 41). In one move Leibniz succeeds in setting up a scientific-rational and physical view of nature and, at the same time, in rendering superfluous human appeals to God's perpetual miracles.<sup>13</sup> Of course the Creator's omnipotence entails that He may perform miracles as acts of grace, but the decisive point is the following: the world created by God is a clock in no need of being mended. The harmony of the universe is not the effect of a perpetual miracle through which God would providentially come to mend the series of things. Conceding that would mean making of God an awkward and improvident architect always ready to intervene in order to fix the building poorly planned and defectively carried out by Himself (cf. *Théodicée*,

12 In Leibniz's view the best way to know God is by scientifically knowing the created world, that is nature, and, when man knows it, he will love God. Though Leibniz sees only a difference of degree between the theological-religious moment and the cognitive-experiential moment, the wealth of indications articulated in the second is such that his philosophizing nourishes his love for the world even independently of his relationship of faith with its creator.

13 Besides, miracles and mysteries are not 'against reason', but 'above reason', that is incomprehensible to the human reason, which is limited and partial (cf. Antognazza 2011, pp. 233-235).

§ 53).<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the question that might be put forth is: those who think or hope – praying to this end<sup>15</sup> – that God may intervene with providential miracles are not disparaging the creation and its creator? If, then, as already pointed out, the Leibnizian directions are able to go beyond the horizon of faith, one can reformulate the question: are those who are hopefully waiting for exceptional happenings to suspend the laws of natural reality, by bringing improvements and corrections in human life, only the most unhappy of men or, also, are they the most incapable of loving and understanding this world they do necessarily belong to?<sup>16</sup> It is here – it won't escape my readers' attention – that an unexpected convergence between reciprocally remote thinkers such as Leibniz and Heidegger can emerge.

On attempting a rereading of the phrase proposed by Heidegger in *Identity and Difference* (1957) one could say that more than an onto-theo-logy Leibniz's is an 'onto-teleo-logy' where, however, 'teleology' rhymes with 'Entelechy' (*Théodicée*, § 87, GP VI, p. 150) and 'harmonic development', and not with 'progress of the perfectible'. Leibniz, in fact, admits of the gradual transformation of things which can, therefore, improve, thus teleologically unfolding and completing their essence. And since every single part is linked with all the others, the progress of a single substance will entail a progress of the whole universe (cf. § 202). Still, the infinite weaving of the universe or, better, the infinite weavings (in the plural) of the universe constitute a harmony that, even when bringing better futures, does not pave the way to any progressive proto-philosophy of history. Suffered evil does not improve anything, nor make it progress. Simply, it is part of the best world; the imperfect or painful parts combine in the best way, first in God's intellect and then in the actual creatural realization. The best of all possible systems «is precisely the plan of the universe as it

14 «I maintain it [the creation] to be a watch, that goes without wanting to be mended by him: otherwise we must say, that God bethinks himself again. No; God has foreseen every thing; he has provided a remedy for every thing before-hand; there is in his works a harmony, a beauty, already pre-established» (*Mr. Leibiz's Second Paper*, § 8, in Leibniz, Clarke [1956] 1998, p. 18). «The harmony [...] is not a perpetual miracle; but the effect or consequence of an original miracle, worked at the creation of things; as all natural things are. Though indeed it is a perpetual wonder, as many natural things are» (*Mr. Leibniz's Fifth Paper*, § 89, in *The Leibniz-Clarke correspondence*, 85).

15 «[Bayle says] that those who pray to God hope for some change in the order of nature; but it seems as though, according to his opinion, they are mistaken. [...] Indeed, if they receive succour from good angels there will be no change in the general order of things» (*Théodicée*, Remarques sur le Livre de l'origine du mal, § 27, GP VI, p. 433).

16 «It is only people of a malicious disposition (*gens d'un naturel malin*) or those who have become somewhat misanthropic through misfortunes, like Lucian's Timon, who find wickedness everywhere, and who poison the best actions by the interpretations they give to them» (*Théodicée*, § 220, GP VI, p. 249).

is» (§ 225, p. 252). There is nothing to be corrected or mended.<sup>17</sup> Leibniz's is a teleological in-motion photography of the world. The best is here and now, and it is exactly this very world that we are given to live.<sup>18</sup>

### 3 *Concordia Discors*

God is not harmonic. He is the sum of all perfections, the reason of universal harmony, but He Himself is not harmonic. Harmony only springs from the unifying relation among opposites, harmony is of the real world and is the result of the reciprocal joining together of good and bad things, of consonances and dissonances.

God has willed a world in which evil had to be not because He wished for evil but because He has judged that ills, included in the interconnection of the whole, contribute to make the latter the best possible (cf. *Théodicée*, § 204, 225, 350). «All is connected (*lié*) in God's great design» (§ 118, p. 168) and each single part acquires sense, value, and truth only within that infinite connective weaving that in the divine intellect is completely distinct idea. Even the most beautiful thing, however, if we detach and isolate a part of it, this, reduced to a disconnected 'piece', will quite possibly appear to us both ugly and devoid of any sense (cf. § 213). In the same way, if we are not patient enough to outdistance our own perspective from evil, as when we get too close to a painting, our eyes are invaded by blots of colour and by the imperfections of the canvas, and we become unable to grasp and, even less, to appreciate that painting in its entirety.<sup>19</sup>

Leibniz resumes the word of Greek origin 'Harmony',<sup>20</sup> to testify how the whole is a mathematically-ordered composition (cf. *Théodicée*, § 242), made of contrasts and, also, constitutively beautiful.

Order, fundamentally logical and rational, can, in fact, arouse both intellectual pleasure in those who are able to know it (cf. § 254), and aesthetic-

17 «God cannot do the impossible». A project for a better world? Impossible. Had it been possible, «God would have preferred it» (*Théodicée*, § 226, GP VI, p. 253).

18 I am well aware that this is in keeping with some Thomistic positions that are dear to that part of the Catholic tradition that tries to contain, if not to exclude, any active, autonomous, and responsible intervention on man's part, for example in the bioethical field. While definitely not sharing this approach, I find, anyway, that it is philosophically necessary to come to grips with the challenge coming from this non progressive paradigm which, in point of fact, is tenable independently of positions of faith or ethical-naturalistic hypostases.

19 Cf. *Théodicée*, § 147, GP VI, p. 198: «The apparent deformities of our little worlds combine to become beauties in the great world».

20 Cf. Heraclitus, Diels-Kranz Fragment 8 (from Aristoteles, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155b): «it is what opposes that helps and from different tones comes the fairest tune (ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἀρμονίαν)» (Plato, *Timaeus*, 31c-36b, 80a-b).

sensible pleasure in those who rely on perception and imagination. Reality is structured according to hierarchies and priorities in which mathematics plays a supporting role, still it is a labyrinth that we cross, however incompletely, also through the perceptive and aesthetic representations which, therefore, are not reducible to a merely subjective question, nor to illusions or falsities. Though beauty entails a subjective reception, it is, at the same time, objective manifestation of the good order of the universe (cf. § 146). The Leibnizian Baroque – *ante litteram* – tries to avoid any ‘aestheticistic’ reduction of the aesthetic dimension and, by embracing motifs that are not exclusively Platonic, keeps the objective anchoring of beauty safe (cf. Tomasi 2002, pp. 61-63, 99, 176).

In *Confessio philosophy* Leibniz had resumed a very traditional meaning of harmony as unitary composing of the opposites as «Similarity in variety, that is, diversity compensated by identity».<sup>21</sup> One gets intellectual pleasure from the order that unifies opposed and contrary things, but it is a harmonizing involving the aesthetic dimension, too. This meaning of ‘harmony’, on the other hand, is destined to become wondrously complicated, fed by paradigms that are still philosophical-theological and, in particular, baroque.

Leibniz often proposes, at least at neuralgic points, in his long reflection on the ills of the world, musical references and examples. We would miss the point if we took them as simply explicative similes of aesthetic type.

In point of fact, Leibniz throws a bridge between the medieval meaning of music and the one characterizing baroque theology and aesthetics. In the Middle Ages ‘*musica*’ stands for ‘*musica theoricæ*’ and it is science and doctrine of the *ratios* and proportions, a wider domain than music, placed anyway among the mathematical sciences and subordinated to metaphysical philosophy (cf. Hentschel 1999, pp. 53-54). The Baroque injects active strength and infinite differentiation in it.

The harmony of the Leibnizian universe is articulated, first of all, according to numerical relations but, at the same time, it is order resonating like music (and here ‘like’ is obtrusively used), displaying the beauty, as well as the goodness, of divine choices in an aesthetic, perceptive and physical-acoustic manner. As said above, no matter how pervasive, the Leibnizian evocation of God does not succeed in replacing the joy of the world as it is or in rendering it a mere appendix. It is by following this clue that the references to musical harmony, especially in a baroque frame, reveal a significant qualitative import, in spite of their unobtrusive frequency. One should not be surprised at the fact that, for example, Leibniz inserts *Instituzioni harmoniche* (1588), the work by Gioseffo Zarlino, among the necessary

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21 «Similitudo in varietate, seu diversitas identitate compensata» (G.W. Leibniz, *The Confession of a Philosopher*, [1673?], 116, in Leibniz 2005, pp. 28-29).

sources – within the class *Mathematics* – of his project for a *Bibliotheca Universalis*. Zarlino, *Maestro* of the Saint Mark Chapel in Venice, was a supreme authority in the field of musical harmony; Leibniz shows he has a direct notion of it and it is plausible to assume that Zarlino's definition of consonance as «dynamic balance», «proportion of movements», «relation among opposites: the low- and the high-pitched sounds», has influenced the philosopher's thought. The idea that true harmony must be experienced through the modulation of diversity and be made of the coexistence of consonances and dissonances<sup>22</sup> is shared in common by this conception of music and the Leibnizian reflection on the ills of the world seen as dissonances contributing to the harmony of the universe.<sup>23</sup> Harmony is not interrupted by dissonances but springs exactly from their combining with consonances. This has nothing to do with whatsoever aestheticizing of evil, nor is the musical example to be meant as a mere metaphorical illustration. Evil is not facing us as something that can be isolated and taken to Court as material evidence in order to charge God with being unjust. Evil has to be known and judged in a larger combinatory network that is not immediately perceivable but that makes of it an unavoidable ingredient of universal harmony. Dilthey narrates that Leibniz, endowed with a robust appetite but having no inclination for physical exercise, became a sufferer from gout. In order to put up with pain and be able to walk, he had supporting wooden vice fitted on his legs. This was a logistic device that made his health worse, fatally shortening his life (cf. Dilthey 1969, p. 30). Well, the harmony thought through and philosophically experienced by Leibniz is the very opposite of this artificial and extrinsic overlapping of reasoning, physical nature and subjective perceptions. Organ music, for example, is a wind – physical nature – «blown into properly adjusted pipes» (*Théodicée*, Discours, § 7, GP VI, p. 54), wind harmonized with technical sagacity and mathematical congruence.

The Leibnizian musical harmony is made of variations and contrasts. The slavish repetition of the same chords, or an excess of regularity and uniformity of sounds stifles and fades it away,<sup>24</sup> preventing it from being

22 Cf. Erle 2005, pp. 15-16, 22-26. In Leibniz's times the court of Hannover cultivated a keen interest in music and entertained intense relationships with Venice, a city that, like few others, was open to the artistic culture of whole Europe. A significant figure, working at the German court, was that of the Venetian Agostino Steffani whose musical talent was second only to diplomatic expertise (cf. de' Grandis 1966, pp. 118, 121-123).

23 «Vices and crimes do not detract from the beauty of the universe, but rather add to it, just as certain dissonances would offend the ear by their harshness if they were heard quite alone, and yet in combination they render the harmony more pleasing» (*Théodicée*, Remarques sur le Livre de l'origine du mal, § 27, GP VI, p. 434).

24 In *Théodicée*, § 211 (GP VI, p. 244), Leibniz quotes Horace, *Ars poetica*, vv. 355-356: «Ut citharoedus ridetur chorda qui semper oberrat eadem (in the same way as the citharoedus always touching on the same string is laughed at)».

mirror and staging of the complex truth of the real world.

The sense pleasures that get closest to the pleasures of the mind (*de l'esprit*) [...] are those of music and of symmetry (*symmetrie*), the first ones being pleasures for the ears, the latter for the eyes, and it is easy to understand the reasons of harmony or of this perfection that gives us pleasure. The only thing that can be feared, here, is using it for too long. (Grua, 580)

Leibniz's aversion for the prolonged and monotonous repetition of the same is not confined to a wish for novelty or variation, at least whenever he can be seen to welcome the complexity of the relations of contrast and opposition. The characterization of evil as 'a dissonance' is no aestheticizing digression: it is a philosophical call to the truth of the world made of a mobile coexistence and connection of ills and goods, of clashing and soft sounds whose contrast is able to metamorphosize itself into a beautiful unity begetter of pleasures for the intellect, as well as for the senses. In *Théodicée*, § 124, the airs of Lully's *Cadmus and Hermione* are mentioned:

wisdom must vary. To multiply one and the same thing only would be superfluity, and poverty too. To have a thousand well-bound Vergils in one's library, always to sing the airs from the opera of *Cadmus and Hermione*, to break all the china in order only to have cups of gold, to have only diamond buttons, to eat nothing but partridges, to drink only Hungarian or Shiraz wine - would one call that reason? (GP VI, p. 179)

Advancing a critical remark about Jean-Baptiste Lully meant objecting against the composer of Tuscan descent consecrated by Louis XIV as an authentic art celebrity whose airs were 'radiant' just like the court of Roi Soleil. In Lully dissonance is not, actually, absent but, nevertheless, it is definitely mitigated. In the air 'La peine d'aimer', for example, in *Cadmus and Hermione*, he «builds up an idyllic situation» in which falling prey to love passion is devoid of any cruelty and danger, deprived as it is of divergences capable of acting as really «dissonant forces» (Erle 2005, pp. 59-81, 95-99).<sup>25</sup> Thus, the truth of Baroque becomes a fable, in the same way as Leibniz's perspective would end up and, finally, ends up appearing like the optimistic philosophical tale of those who can see only what they have chosen to think. However, a definitely 'other' dramatic intensity permeates Leibniz's philosophical vision, one that evokes another great Lutheran, almost contemporary Bach.

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<sup>25</sup> Erle 2005, pp. 69-72 underlines how the aesthetics of baroque rhetoric, centered on a harmony animated by real contrasts, is, instead, on the other hand, realized in Monteverdi's Madrigals.

Nowadays we are tempted to 'receive' the Leibnizian representation of the universe as a self-referential, logical-theological construction of modern and Christian metaphysics. Similarly, we tend to conceive Bach's art of counterpoint as «a closed musical system without reference beyond itself», exempt from «'extra-musical' assumptions and attitudes». Yet, witness above all some of Bach's amazing chorales, in the first half of the eighteenth century «double counterpoint and canon were concrete manifestations of the 'order of God'» and, more specifically, «a way of contemplating death and of investigating the hidden connections governing the universe» (Yearsley 2002, p. XIII, 24). Brought up in the Lutheran *schola mortis*, Bach makes of the canon, or fugue, the sound-unfolding of the infinite interweaving and reciprocal passing of the living into the dying, of the dying into the living. An interweaving and overlapping that does not act through points but through numerical relations and intervals. This contrapuntal web is not, therefore, ornament or construction ending in themselves, but, on the contrary, is a way of contemplating death, of moving towards it along a path paved with musical harmony.

The art of dying did not find in the counterpoint of the chorals an aesthetic illustration or a celebratory moment, but the logical-aesthetic articulation of the mobile compresence of life and death, of their connecting themselves to the whole, of the infinite scale in which, through an infinite counterpoint, consonances and dissonances, pleasure and suffering, overlap. Playing, more than composing, this music was a concrete way of harmonically thinking and, at the same time, perceiving the destiny assigned to men - obviously conceived by a Christian as creatures of God called to test their faith in point of death - a way of putting themselves to the test of having to die.

The canon exhibited a type of infinity that made of it much more than a mere scholastic exercise or a display of musical samplings. Infinite articulation - according to eternal ideal rules<sup>26</sup> - of the differentiating of unity, the canon imposed itself as sacred music, as «church music» (Yearsley 2002, p. 52). In the years 1723-24 an exemplary dispute arose between Heinrich Bokemeyer and Johann Mattheson. To the latter the canon was only an anatomical dissection of the musical rules and only a magic and obscurantist approach could pass off this *music-to-be-seen* on the score (*Augenmusik* or *Papiermusik*) as authentic music involving the senses and

26 «Virtues are virtues [...] by their nature and by the nature of rational creatures, before God decrees to create them. To hold a different opinion would be as if someone were to say that the rules of proportion and harmony are arbitrary with regard to musicians because they occur in music only when one has resolved to sing or to play some instrument. But that is exactly what is meant by being essential to good music: for those rules belong to it already in the ideal state, even when none yet thinks of singing, since it is known that they must of necessity belong to it as soon as one shall sing» (*Théodicée*, § 181, GP VI, pp. 222-223).

manifesting true harmony. On the other hand, Bokemeyer defended «the honor of counterpoint», holding that the technical framework of the canon is no mere artifice, but, on the contrary, is a logical-musical weaving that is really harmonic. In the canon – Bokemeyer insisted – one could contemplate «the ‘true essence’ of all other musical forms». Well, Bach is certainly in agreement with the latter. Harmony results from following the rules and not from the free power of being indifferent to them. *Concordia discors*, the title of canon BWV 1086 (cf. Yearsley 2002, pp. 52-55, 59-60, 68-69, 73, 97), consists of a mobile and holistic interpenetration of consonances and dissonances the logic of which is not at all an empty formal skeleton. Leibniz, too,<sup>27</sup> would have been on the side of Bokemeyer and Bach. With Bach, besides, he also shares the fact of giving the impression of referring musical harmony back to an occult invisible filigree, like the most oscurantist of alchemists. As pointed out before, however, Leibniz is no philosopher of the magic or secret causes, but only of the complex reasons that, in order for them to be calculated, require patience, capacity to outdistance and to penetrate. Similarly, Bach, in entrusting the score of a canon – for instance «the so-called Hudemann canon, BWV 1074» – to «an enigmatic, cryptic notation» (Yearsley 2002, pp. 42-44), is not being driven by obscurantist or superstitious inclinations, but, instead, by the intent of effectively referring to the stratified complexity of cosmic harmony which is rational without being immediately and completely exhibited on the surface.

In § 17 of *Principles of Nature and Grace* Leibniz writes:

Music that we hear can charm us, even though its beauty consists only in relations among numbers, and in the way the beats or vibrations of the sounding body return to the same frequency at certain intervals. (We are not aware of the numbers of these beats, but the soul counts them all the same!) Our pleasure in the proportions of things we see are of the same kind; and those that the other senses produce will come down to something similar, even though we couldn't explain them so straightforwardly. (GP VI, pp. 605-606)

The beauty of music lies in the congruity of numerical relations, and aesthetic pleasure derives from the pleasure for the proportions among things. As is remarked in the famous Letter of 17th April 1712 to Christian Goldbach,

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27 The canon was held as a natural matrix from which every musical art derives. Now, it would be opportune to wonder which Leibniz's position is concerning the temperate scale, which artificially harmonizes the natural scale by introducing semitones that express irrational numbers. Was Leibniz distrustful of whatever moved away from nature, conceived and chosen by God? Or, mathematics and nature being insurmountable, therefore *assisted music*, too, cannot but have been thought, foreseen and chosen by the creator of the universe? Notwithstanding what I have been maintaining, with respect to the non correctibility of the universe, I would lean towards the second hypothesis.

in perceiving the beauty of chords our soul is not aware of being counting, music is an occult arithmetic exercise: «*musica est exercitium arithmeticae occultum nescientis se numerare animi*». <sup>28</sup> When a painful event appears to us as an insurmountable objection against the harmony of the world, it means that in us the unaware counting of the convenient proportions of the whole (within which dissonances are essential) stops resounding.

May we say that Leibniz's thought is a musical thought? We could not definitely ask the same question with respect to Heidegger. Well, although neither the rhythm nor the sound of *Essays on Theodicy* can be said to make them musical, still, it remains plausible to hold that the adjective 'musical' is not here applied at a merely metaphorical level (cf. Bockholdt 1999, pp. 163-174).

Music is listened to, enjoyed, thought, (unawarely) counted by us. These are not levels extrinsically overlapped, though. The pre-established harmony is no paratactic juxtaposition based on contiguity. A few years later, Kant will propose the image of the concentric circles in order to explain the relationship between morality and religion. One may venture to say that it could help us understand the coexistence between mathematical framework, causal and cognitive weft, physical phenomenicity and subjective perceptive dimension. These are concentric circles that are differentiated 'only' by diverse grades of distinction but that are compresent. Diverse infinities, variously and endlessly intertwined. Of course, to Leibniz numerical relations are more decisive than perceptive representations but anyway all concur in forming the harmony of the whole. According to Leibniz music, as artistic and physical-acoustic articulation offered to subjective perceptions and taste, is the clothing of mathematics, not its disguise. Counterpoint is arithmetic, even though we perceive of it only the sounding *mise-en-scène*.

Mathematical rules and arithmetic computation do not deny, nor replace our perceptions or aesthetic pleasure. There is a simultaneous unity of the components of the universe, which unfolds diachronically, too. Leibniz infinitely varies and animates the presence and unity of the real world. Baroque music offers exemplary manifestations of it. This is what Deleuze has understood earlier and better than others: in Leibniz the diverse does not simply divide the 'cake' of the universe in slices: here logic and mathematics, there aesthetics, there the physical reality objectively known, here the subjective representations, where everybody occupies a part of it. In Leibniz's view the harmony of the universe is no mere role-play, on the contrary, it is coexistence, actual compossibility of the diverse, even of the opposite, where each fabric has got the other within itself. «The manifold,

28 «Does the pleasure of music arise *because* we are unaware of calculating, or *in spite* of this unawareness? The correct answer is undoubtedly the second one» (Martinelli 2012, 2, § 2, p. 72; our transl.).

then, is not only what has got many parts» (Deleuze 1988, p. 5). The unifying tension animating it engenders the network of diverse orders of the infinite. In Leibniz more than one single infinite, rather, infinite infinities interweave, cohabiting harmoniously (cf. pp. 5, 23, 40, 61-3, 78). Not only are there no fissures, nor discontinuities, but the folds and the curves it is made up of allow for that very elasticity and flexibility (cf. pp. 8, 169) that preserve unity even in the highest opposing tension. The universe unfolds as an interwoven series of labyrinths, the intelligibility of which shirks being within easy grasp.

Though seemingly redundant and whimsical, the spirals of the façade of a baroque church or the puffs of a baroque dress hide but do not cover. They are full of spiritual energy and, so, contribute, in their way, to display the vibrant complexity of the real, at the same time also pointing to its infinite, invisible and multidimensional stratification. Baroque music becomes architectural, even urbanistic, like painting (cf. p. 168). The world is an immense city in which it is difficult to orient ourselves. It is like a contemporary metropolis: a few single areas or a few particular circles of people may be well familiar to us, and, however, it appears we are allowed to lead 'our own lives' autonomously. Still, if we believe that even the most proven familiarity can reduce to itself the complexity and undisposability of the world, we are done for. We will end up interpreting failures and sufferings as ill-fated exceptions devoid of any sense, out of the score of life,<sup>29</sup> or, narcissistically, believing that we are victims of unjust shortcomings.

The whole is this very world: its complexity is humanly insatiable.

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<sup>29</sup> Dissonant chords, as much as sorrow, are prepared, and do not come unexpectedly. «The whole Leibnizian theory of evil is a method to prepare and solve the dissonances of a universal harmony» (Deleuze 1988, pp. 179-180; our transl.).

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