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PANTHEISM, HARMONY, UNITY AND MULTIPLICITY:
A RADICAL SUGGESTION OF LEIBNIZ'S *DE SUMMA RERUM*

Over the past decades there has been an accumulation of a fine body of scholarly work indicating that by as early as 1675-1676, the years of writing of the collection of essays now generally referred to as the *De Summa Rerum*, Leibniz was in possession of many or even most of the central doctrines of his later philosophy. One scholar has gone so far as to say that "all the principle themes" of Leibniz's later philosophy were already in place by the end of 1676.¹ Among those who have contributed much to our understanding in this regard are Georges Friedmann, G. H. R. Parkinson, Christia Mercer and Konrad Moll.² Here are some samples of statements by such scholars about Leibniz at the time of the *De Summa Rerum*:

The works presented [in the *De Summa Rerum*] are of great importance to the student of Leibniz's philosophy. In effect, they constitute a series of sketches of a metaphysical system – a system, far from immature, which contains many of the doctrines for which Leibniz is best known. ... [I]n the *De Summa Rerum* we find Leibniz's first major attempt at presenting his philosophy in a systematic form.³

[A]s his stay in Paris comes to an end [in October, 1676], he [Leibniz] ... has already conceived and conjoined, in a first sketch of his system, all the principal themes of his own doctrine.⁴

¹ Georges Friedmann, *Leibniz et Spinoza*, rev. ed., Paris, 1962, p. 105. (When not otherwise noted, translations in this paper are my own.)

² Konrad Moll, *Der junge Leibniz*, 3 vols., Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1978-1996. (For references to works of the other scholars, v. below.)

³ G. H. R. Parkinson, "Introduction", *G. W. Leibniz. De Summa Rerum. Metaphysical Papers, 1675-1676*, translated with an Introduction and Notes by G. H. R. Parkinson, New Haven and London, 1992, p. xii (hereinafter abbreviated as P, followed by the relevant page number).

⁴ Friedmann, *Leibniz et Spinoza*, op. cit., p. 105. Friedmann seems to believe that the "first major attempt" comes even before 1675. That would not contradict the main hypothesis that we

For decades, core features of the philosophy of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* have baffled scholars. Despite extensive analysis and study, its deep motivations and the precise relations among some of its central doctrines have remained largely mysterious. We will argue in this section that most of the fundamental tenets of Leibniz's mature thought are already in place in 1676 and that they grew naturally out of Leibniz's early metaphysics.⁵

While there is no denying the importance of the work of these scholars, there is some danger that such statements may have an unfortunate side-effect. They may conceivably lead to scholars overlooking or discounting some radical differences, on central points, between many of the essays of the *De Summa Rerum* and Leibniz's later, more familiar philosophy. This in turn could contribute to the missing of what I believe may be a dramatic moment in Leibniz's philosophical development, a moment when although much of his philosophical future was opening itself up to him, much that was radically inconsistent with that future was vividly alive in his mind as well.

I emphasize this last point since I think there may arise the easy assumption that, since, as we are granting, many of the main themes of Leibniz's later philosophy were already in his possession at the time of the *De Summa Rerum* (1675-1676), the central battles within Leibniz's mind with regard to which philosophical path to choose for himself were already largely over also.⁶ Indeed, we find the suggestion of precisely this kind of assumption in the works of at least some of those, considered above, who have contributed so much to our understanding of this period.

For instance, Friedmann says, immediately after the statement quoted above, and with special reference to Spinoza, that, "therefore, one can say that Leibniz discovered his master thoughts before the influence of Spinoza was able to exercise itself upon him".⁷ The suggestion is that once Leibniz

are working with here, namely, that by as early as 1675-76 many of the main doctrines of Leibniz's later philosophy were already in place.

⁵ Christia Mercer and R. C. Sleight, Jr., "Metaphysics: The early period to the *Discourse on Metaphysics*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*, ed. by Nicholas Jolley, p. 84. (Mercer alone is credited above with this statement, which begins section 3 of the Mercer and Sleight article, in accordance with the two authors' note that "Mercer is the author of sections 1-3; Sleight of section 4". [See n. 1 to p. 67]).

⁶ For many, including Parkinson on the one hand (P, p. LII) and Mercer and Sleight on the other ("Metaphysics: The early period", *op. cit.*, p. 107), the complete concept theory of substance constitutes an important exception to the general principle that Leibniz's important metaphysical principles were in place by 1676. I do not mean to minimize this point.

⁷ *Leibniz et Spinoza*, *op. cit.*, p. 105. Friedmann contends that Leibniz knew Spinoza's philosophy only "very superficially" before leaving Paris (*ibid.*).

had come upon the ideas that turned out to be his "master thoughts", there was little or no possibility that he would be diverted from a path dominated by these. Now we will grant that Leibniz had discovered some of the thoughts that *turned out* to be the master thoughts of his later philosophy; what we are questioning is that these had already taken on the *role* of master thoughts at the time of the *De Summa Rerum*, that is, ideas powerful enough in Leibniz's mind to rule out the development by Leibniz of any thoughts inconsistent with them. Our countersuggestion is that these thoughts were only some among the larger set of seriously competing thoughts in Leibniz's mind at this critical juncture in his development.

One of Parkinson's statements seems also to assume more from the presence of certain later doctrines in the writings of this period than might be warranted. He says, "The Paris writings do not present a 'secret philosophy' of a Spinozist kind, opposed to what some might call the 'official philosophy' of such works as the *Theodicy*; on the contrary, they present that philosophy in an undeveloped, but still clearly recognisable form".⁸ Let me put the point here another way: one assumption, reasonable enough in connection with a single work prepared for publication, is that if the Paris writings present the philosophy of the *Theodicy* in recognizable form, then they do not also present philosophical ideas opposed to this philosophy. But on the view that the *De Summa Rerum* papers are separate essays, exploratory, not prepared for publication and often containing competing lines of thought, this assumption becomes much less obvious. We would need to look to the totality of the texts themselves to settle questions about what is *not* present in the *De Summa Rerum*, without simply drawing conclusions about the collection on the basis of finding in some of them clear evidence for a certain key set of views.⁹

What I would like to offer in this paper, then, is a sampling of evidence that a radical Leibniz also existed in about 1676, a Leibniz who, I submit, must be understood if we are to claim to understand the philosophical de-

⁸ "Leibniz's Paris Writings in Relation to Spinoza", *Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa*, v. 18, t. 2, p. 89.

⁹ Parkinson, to his credit, in fact repeatedly discusses passages more or less opposed to parts of the overall interpretation he presents of the *De Summa Rerum*, that is, he does look to the totality of the texts themselves, as well as presenting his more general conclusions. Although I disagree with some of the conclusions he reaches on the basis of this sort of textual work (see, for example, my "Did Leibniz Incline towards Monistic Pantheism in 1676?" *Leibniz und Europa: VI. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress*, part I, Hanover, 1994, p. 424-428), I agree entirely with this more thorough textual approach. My reason for focusing on the statement of his at the beginning of this paragraph is that I am concerned that others will be too ready to take those words as licensing a disregard for the genuinely radical philosophical suggestions of the *De Summa Rerum*, without remembering the qualifications implicit in Parkinson's more thorough textual approach.

velopment of this European genius of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. It is a sampling of evidence that may help to make comprehensible Tschirnhaus's message to a key member of Spinoza's circle, late in 1675, that he had found Leibniz, "free from the usual prejudices of theology".¹⁰ Many readers of such later works as the *Theodicy* have viewed Leibniz in a rather different light, as a philosopher who in fact put rather too much emphasis on received theological views. If Leibniz were capable of much more radical views as a young man than as a philosopher in the final decade of his life, Tschirnhaus's statement would not be so surprising.

To put the issue another way: if it is true that there are radically competing philosophical visions alive in Leibniz's mind at the time of the *De Summa Rerum*, then the explanation of how Leibniz dealt philosophically with this intellectual cauldron of differing philosophical tendencies would be one of the most interesting tasks involved in the matter of gaining a deeper understanding of the development of the philosophy of Leibniz. Although that is not a project that will be attempted in this paper, the prior project of documenting the existence of radical suggestions in the *De Summa Rerum* will be.

Before beginning the examination of the radical suggestions, a few words of clarification about the nature of this project are in order. First, given my attempts to be brief and to adapt one part of the present project¹¹ to the themes of this conference on unity and multiplicity, I will emphasize only one main radical suggestion (mentioning two others merely in passing), the one with the most interesting connections to harmony, unity and multiplicity.

Secondly, having used the word 'radical' in my title, I need to say a bit more about how I am using this term here. My usage, while based on typical notions, goes a bit beyond them. I put primary emphasis on two criteria in calling a suggested view of Leibniz's radical. One that the view in question should clash markedly with received opinions (*sententiis receptis pugnare*, to borrow a phrase from Leibniz which we shall encounter in a moment) of Leibniz's age. The other is that the view should be one which

¹⁰ *Spinoza Opera*, II 235, ed. C. Gebhardt, Heidelberg, 1925; letter from G. Schuller to Spinoza, November 14, 1675, quoted in the translated form given above by C. Wilson, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: A Historical and Comparative Study*, Princeton, 1989, p. 116. Schuller was apparently transmitting what Tschirnhaus had conveyed to him.

¹¹ A fuller version of the project is presented – although without the connection to unity and multiplicity, and without the emphasis on the "all is one" formulations to be found in Leibniz in this period – in my "Roads Not Taken: Radical Suggestions of Leibniz's *De Summa Rerum*", in G. W. Leibniz: *Perspectives and Actuality*, edited by Concha Roldán, a special issue of the journal, *Synthesis Philosophica*, vol. 12, fasc. 2, 1977, pp. 403-413.

clashes markedly with views taken to be characteristic of Leibniz's writings from the *Discourse on Metaphysics* onward.

Finally, although most but not all of the radical ideas I shall treat in these pages have some relation to Spinoza, I shall not make too much of this point, mostly simply because of space. To treat with any care the question to what extent the radical views I find suggested in the *De Summa Rerum* are related to similar-sounding views in the philosophy of Spinoza – let alone the question whether Leibniz might have been influenced by Spinoza in these suggestions – would be impossible in the confines of the present study.

In an essay of the *De Summa Rerum* of late 1676 (tentatively dated in November of that year), Leibniz wrote the following:

A metaphysics should be written with accurate definitions and demonstrations, but nothing should be demonstrated in it apart from that which does not clash too much with received opinions. For in that way this metaphysics can be accepted; and once it has been approved then, if people examine it more deeply later, they themselves will draw the necessary consequences.¹²

Some might see in this passage, even taken without any addition, the suggestion of someone with ideas clashing with received opinions. But it is not this passage itself, but this passage taken with the addition of its context that I want to use as the first sample of radical strains in the *De Summa Rerum*: for Leibniz has just presented a striking one-paragraph argument for monistic pantheism, beginning with the statement, "It can easily be demonstrated that all things are distinguished, not as substances (i.e., radically) but as modes", and concluding, "Therefore the essence of all things is the same, and things differ only modally. ... [I]t follows that no thing really differs from another, but that all things are one".¹³ His demonstration turns on, among other things, definitions of real or radical distinction, essence, and requisites. The suggestion of the argument, together with the passage quoted above on the appropriate way to write metaphysics, is that if Leibniz were writing his metaphysics for public consumption, instead of for his private notes of late 1676, he might provide the definitions of the terms just mentioned, and perhaps some demonstrations based on them, but he would not himself draw out the radical monistic conclusion of the private notes. In short, monistic pantheism is the first radical suggestion that we present in

¹² A vi III 573; P, pp. 95.

¹³ A vi III 573; P, pp. 93-95.

this paper. And Leibniz's statement on definition and demonstration is evidence that he saw it as radical according to the first criterion set out above. (Given that monistic pantheism is not a view characteristic of the later Leibniz, the second criterion is obviously met also.).

Since I have treated the theme of Leibniz's monistic tendencies in this period on another occasion,¹⁴ and since Robert M. Adams' recent book, published shortly thereafter, has confirmed and greatly developed the discussion of that theme,¹⁵ I shall not simply repeat what has already been said. Rather, I shall limit myself to mentioning this strong suggestion, or perhaps simply statement, of monistic pantheism as our first example of radical tendencies in the *De Summa Rerum*.¹⁶

For the purposes of the present short paper, the other two suggestions of radical views will be mentioned only briefly, since it is this first example that has the greatest relevance for the theme of unity and multiplicity. Among the other radical positions suggested in the *De Summa Rerum* are, first, necessitarianism and, secondly, the idea that one of the attributes of God is the attribute of extension. Neither of these, of course, is taken as a part of the views of the mature Leibniz. But each of these strikingly unconventional views seems present in at least some of the papers of the *De Summa Rerum*.

We turn then to the pantheistic strain in the young Leibniz in its possible relation to unity and multiplicity. Although both Adams and I have highlighted the passage quoted above as perhaps the single clearest state-

¹⁴ "Did Leibniz Incline towards Monistic Pantheism in 1676?" *Leibniz und Europa: VI. Internationaler Leibniz-Kongress*, part I, Hanover, 1994, p. 424 ff.

¹⁵ See *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*, Oxford, 1994, esp. the section entitled, "Is Leibniz's Conception of God Spinozistic?", pp. 123-134.

¹⁶ To fill in the scholarly context a bit on this question, it appears that those most prominent in the long-standing debate about whether Leibniz ever followed Spinoza in pantheism (monism of a Spinozistic sort is typically taken as a form of pantheism) have not specially discussed the passage stressed by Adams and myself. Some, most notably Ludwig Stein, have, however, held that Leibniz did adopt a pantheistic position around 1676 (v. *Leibniz und Spinoza*, Berlin, 1890, p. 51, citing GP I 129, n. 2). Others have disputed this claim. Georges Friedmann's work, *Leibniz et Spinoza*, rev. ed., Paris, 1962, is best known. G. H. R. Parkinson's insightful article, "Leibniz's Paris Writings in Relation to Spinoza" (*Studia Leibnitiana, Supplementa*, v. 18, t. 2, pp. 73-89), is more recent, qualifying Friedmann's claims that Leibniz knew relatively little about Spinoza's philosophy in Paris (pp. 79-83) and treating with care some pantheistic-sounding passages (pp. 88-89), but coming to the conclusion nonetheless that Leibniz was "opposed to pantheism" (p. 89) in the Paris writings. Werner Schneiders' work should also be mentioned, "Deus Subjectum: Zur Entwicklung der Leibnizschen Metaphysik", *Studia Leibnitiana, Supplementa*, v. 18, t. 2, pp. 21-31. It is especially good on connecting the sometimes pantheistic-sounding ideas of the Paris years with Leibniz's concept of harmony, arising out of the pre-Paris period. But he resists the idea that Leibniz ever gave up the idea of a "supramundane" God, a God distinct from the world (v. esp. pp. 28-31).

ment of Leibniz's Paris years indicating at least a monistic pantheistic moment in Leibniz's development, there are also other passages – perhaps less decisive taken individually – that are, in my view, of most interest in connection with the issue of unity and multiplicity. They are more clearly connected with pantheism in its more etymological meaning, that of God being all things, than they are with Spinoza's monistic pantheistic thesis that there is but one substance of which all finite things are modes. Here is a listing of some such statements, all ascribed to the period of 1675 to 1676:

1. Deo, qui est omnia ... Deus Unus.¹⁷ (A vi III 512)
2. Tertius infiniti, isque summus gradus est ipsum, *omnia*, quale infinitum est in Deo, is enim est unus omnia.¹⁸ (A vi III 385)
3. omnia est unum.¹⁹ (A vi III 573)
4. omnia unum esse, omnia in Deo esse, quemadmodum effectus in causa sua plena continetur, et proprietates alicujus subjecti in ejusdem subjecti essentia. (GP I 129, n. 2)²⁰
5. Deum de Deo. Totum infinitum esse unum.²¹ (A vi III 474)

There is much to be said about all of these: about their contexts, their exact dates, their precise interpretation, and the extent to which Leibniz can be said to have fully endorsed them at the time he wrote them. But given the present limitations, I can do no more than sketch out, in broad strokes, a single line of thought that might be based on these intriguing lines, without, unfortunately, full elaboration or defense. We can focus on

¹⁷ "God, who is all things. ... God [is] One". Parkinson has "there is one God" for the second part of this citation. He gives the first part just as it is given here (P, p. 67).

¹⁸ "The third grade of infinity, and this is the highest grade itself, is *all things*, which type of infinity is in God, for he is one [and] all".

¹⁹ "All things are one" (P, p. 95).

²⁰ "All things are one, all things are in God, just as an effect is contained in its full cause, and also a property of any subject is contained in the essence of the same subject". This is part of an annotation made by Leibniz on the text of a letter from Spinoza to Oldenburg, one of three such letters Leibniz annotated. Gerhardt says that Schuller, who oversaw Spinoza's correspondence, or perhaps Spinoza himself, gave Leibniz the relevant material. He also indicates that Leibniz's annotations were made in Amsterdam, in November of 1676 (GP I 118).

²¹ "God is derived from God. The infinite whole is one" (P, p. 25). In section 195 of the *Theodicy*, Leibniz says that an accumulation of an infinite number of substances is not a whole (GP VI 232). So the mature Leibniz presumably would not say that all substances (including God) constitute a whole that is one. (I am indebted to Laurence Carlin of Rice University for this reference.) One thinks here also of Spinoza's *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*: conceivably when Leibniz says in his Paris years that God is derived from God he is thinking of God as one giving rise to God as the infinite whole, all things, the third sense of infinity (A vi III 385). So one might say that God as the ultimate reason of things, the ultimate cause, is one, and God as derived from God, as *natura naturata*, is multiple, and is all things constituting an infinite whole.

the statement of A vi III 385, that God is one and all, as the most comprehensive of these statements. It brings together all three of the critical elements, God, one, and all, that are discussed in these passages. The passage, as I read it, says that God is one, yet God is all. God is, to follow the Latin perhaps too closely, the One-All. He is both a unity and a multiplicity, a multiplicity encompassing absolutely all things. Both the etymological sense of pantheism (not, to be sure, developed in any detail) and the relation to the major theme of unity and multiplicity are clearly on display here.

It cannot have been far from Leibniz's thoughts, filled from an early stage with the idea of Harmony (as Friedmann,²² Mugnai,²³ and Mondadori²⁴ have pointed out), that such theological thoughts provide the groundwork for a truly majestic harmony, one perhaps more majestic than anything to be found in the writings of the mature Leibniz, despite his reputation for harmonious constructions. The groundwork would be laid, in the mid-1670's, for the conception that God and all things together constitute a single Harmony: God, being the one which is all things, would himself be the Harmony of all things. For, according to Leibniz in roughly the same time period, "Harmonia ... est unitas in multitudine", (Harmony is unity in multiplicity) (GP I 232) or "harmoniam diversitatem identitate compensatam". (Harmony is diversity compensated by identity) (GP I 73) God, we may assume, was always for Leibniz a unity. If God is also all things, or, if one prefers, the "multitude" or multiplicity of all things, then the multitude is unified, or there is unity in this multitude, and a universal harmony, by Leibniz's own definition, would reign. (Note that this would not be a harmony of merely finite things, a harmony of the universe of finite creatures, separate from God; this harmony would be the harmony of all things, an absolutely universal harmony). To approach this idea from the direction of Leibniz's second definition of harmony, that of diversity compensated by identity, we would be presented with the diversity of *Omnia*, or all things, being compensated by the identity or oneness, or unity of God, the "unus omnia"; the one and all. So there would be a harmony in the cosmos, and this harmony would be the all-inclusive harmony of God.

But we do not need to proceed so speculatively here. Leibniz himself brought together the ideas of God and the harmony of all things. In the

²² Friedmann, *Leibniz et Spinoza*, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

²³ Massimo Mugnai, "Der Begriff der Harmonie als metaphysische Grundlage der Logik und Kombinatorik bei Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld und Leibniz", *Studia Leibnitiana*, v. 5 (1973), pp. 43-73.

²⁴ Fabrizio Mondadori, "A Harmony of One's Own and Universal Harmony in Leibniz's Paris Writings", *Studia Leibnitiana, Supplementa*, v. 18, t. 2, pp. 151-168.

Confessio philosophi of the early Paris period, he speaks of the "harmonia rerum, sive Existentia Dei" (A vi III 128). And only a bit before, towards the end of 1671, he had written to Duke Johann Friedrich about the "Harmonia universalis, id est DEUS" (Aii I 162). These words are given a concrete sense in conjunction with the pantheistic statements of the latter years of the same Paris period that gave rise to the *Confessio philosophi*.

Perhaps we can think of this pantheistic harmony as at one extreme of the spectrum of theological views which may have had an attraction for Leibniz at one time or another as a systematic thinker. It would provide, in one sense at least, a most comprehensive solution to one of the major philosophical versions of the problem of unity and multiplicity, while providing an especially prominent position for one of his most cherished philosophical ideas, the idea of harmony. But it is, for all its comprehensiveness, a dangerous and radical philosophical solution, one that will find little if any expression in Leibniz's mature philosophy. To be sure, some might even question whether the position truly finds expression in Leibniz's philosophical writings of the 1670's. It has not been my purpose here to demonstrate this, only to suggest it and to lay out in broad strokes what the position might amount to. Be that as it may, the radical position here outlined, including both pantheism and an associated interpretation of universal harmony, warrants the attention of any student of Leibniz, if only because it allows one to pose more clearly the following question about unity, multiplicity, God and harmony: what, exactly, is the *unity* in multiplicity, and the *identity* compensating diversity, in the universal harmony of Leibniz's mature years, where God and the world are said to be distinct, not identical, and the world is only an aggregate, not a unity, of finite substances?