



Leibniz's Doctrine of Reincarnation as Metamorphosis

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Abstract

The Russian philosopher Nikolai Onufrievich Lossky (1870–1965) considered himself a Leibnizian of sorts. He accepted parts of Leibniz's doctrine of monads, although he preferred to call them 'substantial agents' and rejected the thesis that they have neither doors nor windows. In Lossky's own doctrine, monads have existed since the beginning of time, they are immortal, and can evolve or devolve depending on the goodness or badness of their behavior. Such evolution requires the possibility for monads to reincarnate into the bodies of creatures of a higher level on the *scala perfectionis*. According to this theory, a monad can evolve by being progressively reincarnated multiple times through a sort of process of metamorphosis from the level of the most elementary particles all the way up to the level of human beings or even higher. Lossky argues that the works of Leibniz contain scattered elements of such a systematic doctrine of reincarnation. He attempts to reconstitute this doctrine in an article that appeared both in Russian and German in 1931. The Russian version, 'Учение Лейбница о перевоплощении какъ метаморфозѣ' ('Uchenie Lejbnica o perevoploshhenii kak metamorfoze'), was published in the *Сборникъ Русскаго института въ Прагѣ* (*Sbornik Russkago instituta v Pragě*), vol. 2, 1931, pp. 77–88. The German version appeared under the title 'Leibniz' Lehre von der Reinkarnation als Metamorphose,' in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 40, n. 2, 1931, pp. 214–226. The content of the Russian and German versions is roughly the same, except for the omission, in the German version, of a mention of David Hume in the second sentence and of one paragraph and a half at the end of the article. The following is a translation of this article. I translated the text from the Russian version, which was in all appearances written first, but I also took the German version into account. The original pagination is added in angle brackets. Angle brackets are used wherever the additions are mine. — Frédéric Tremblay

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<77> The doctrine of reincarnation is widespread in philosophy, in the religious beliefs of various peoples, and in the worldviews of individuals. Among its supporters were thinkers such as Plato, Plotinus, Origen, Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont, <Gotthold Ephraim> Lessing, <Johann Gottfried> Herder, D. Hume, <Arthur> Schopenhauer, <Charles> Renouvier, <Ralph Waldo> Emerson, <August> Cieszkowski, <Wincenty> Lutosławski, <Alexei> Kozlov and many others. Nevertheless, it does not enjoy a good reputation; it seems naive, coarse, and contrary to Christianity. No wonder! It is usually expressed in a fragmentary, sketchy form, often in combination with an admixture of fantastic ideas. Yet it could be developed in the form of a seriously grounded system of valuable and fertile doctrines. The foundations for such a development are already contained in Leibniz's philosophy, even though, strangely, this aspect of Leibniz's system usually remains unnoticed both in general surveys of the history of philosophy and in monographs.

The purpose of this article is to show that the fundamental principles of Leibniz's monadology commit him to a doctrine of reincarnation and that such a doctrine is in fact already contained in his philosophy. For the sake of brevity, I will not examine the history of the development of Leibniz's thought, but, steering clear of controversial issues, I will mainly focus on the final stage of his monadology.

According to Leibniz, the world is constituted of substances that he calls monads. Every monad is an inextended, individual, i.e., an unrepeatable singular agent, the life of which consists of a purposeful change of representations. Every monad represents the world from a specific individual point of view. So, every monad is a *microcosm*, a mirror of the universe. This does not mean, however, that they are all equally perfect. The representations, of which their lives consist, can either be clear or confused; they can either be apperceptions, i.e., conscious representations, or mere perceptions, i.e., unconscious representations. <78> All monads can be ordered in a series according to their level of perfection, i.e., according to their level of consciousness, depending on the degree of clarity of their representations and the number of clear representations that they have. At the very bottom of this series are monads in which there is not a single conscious representation. These are *sleeping* monads. Applying Leibniz's monadology to modern theories, we can say that those monads lying at the basis of inorganic matter are, for instance, monads whose activities are known in the form of electrons, atoms, and molecules of inorganic matter. Above are monads capable, in conjunction with other monads subordinate to them, of having clear and distinct percipience, sensations accompanied by memories. 'Such a living being is called an *animal*, and his monad is called a *soul*.'¹ Above animals are rational souls or spirits. But, even in spirits, e.g., in the monad of a human being, not all representations are given in a clear, conscious form. The highest level of perfection, where clarity of representation is complete, is unique to God, the highest of monads.

¹ *Principes de la nature et de la grâce, fondés en raison*, § 4, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 599

Insofar as their life consists in changes of strivings and representations, monads are souls, or at least analogues of souls. But, at the same time, they are also *bodies*, or, more accurately, they also actualize bodily processes. Leibniz, as is well known, denies the *substantiality* of matter and admits only the existence of material *processes*. The body of each monad is the manifestation of its limitations, which is expressed in the 'passive force of resistance' ('which involves impenetrability and something more').² This aspect of the monad Leibniz calls 'materia prima' (primary matter).³ In this sense of the word, the body is an integral appurtenance of every monad; it is expressed in <the form of> an impenetrable extension and in the processes of motion that are subordinate to the laws of mechanics. Insofar as the monads are souls, a purposeful change of representations occurs in them, which is explainable *teleologically*, according to the law 'of the *final causes of good and evil*.'⁴ But, insofar as monads are bodies, their changes are explainable by mechanical causes, since 'the changes of the bodies and the external phenomena originate from one another by the laws of efficient causes, i.e., of movements.'⁵ As Leibniz says, '[i]t is as if there were two realms, one of efficient causes, the other of final ones, each of which alone is sufficient to account for everything in detail, as if the other did not exist.'⁶ In fact, the processes of these two realms run parallel to each <79> other, without entering in interaction and being coordinated with each other only through *pre-established harmony*.⁷

In addition to <the word> 'corporeality' in the sense of a series of mechanical processes, Leibniz uses the word 'corps' (body) in yet another sense, which is particularly important from the point of view of the topic of my article. Every monad is, in accordance with its degree of perfection, connected (according to the pre-established harmony) to a greater or lesser number of other, less perfect monads subordinate to it, which serve it as if they were its organs. This relation of subordination, this *vinculum substantiale*, makes out of many simple substances, as it were, a new, *composite* substance.⁸ In such a composite substance, the aggregate of monads that are subordinate to the central dominant monad may be called the *body* of the central monad.⁹ Leibniz calls this <kind of> body 'materia secunda' (secondary matter).

The secondary matter differs radically from the primary, as can be seen from the following explanations from Leibniz: 'The primary matter is essential (*essentialis*) for every entelechy' (i.e., monads)¹⁰ and 'can never be separated from it,'¹¹ so it is the 'passive potency'¹² of a limited substance; 'but the

² *De ipsa natura*, § 11, Gerhardt, vol. IV, p. 510

³ *De ipsa natura*, § 11, Gerhardt, vol. IV, p. 510

⁴ *Principes de la nature et de la grâce, fondés en raison*, § 3, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 599

⁵ *Principes de la nature et de la grâce, fondés en raison*, § 3, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 599

⁶ *Considérations sur les principes de vie, et sur les natures plastiques*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 542

⁷ Interesting for an accurate interpretation of Leibniz's system is the question of whether the series of mechanical processes should be understood in the spirit of psychological idealism or in the sense of dynamic realism. I will leave this question aside, since it is not important for my topic. On this question, see: Eduard von Hartmann, *Geschichte der Metaphysik*.

⁸ 'Leibniz an des Bosses,' Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 483; 'Leibniz an des Bosses,' 23, vol. III, 1713, II, p. 482

⁹ *Principes de la nature et de la grâce, fondés en raison*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, § 3

¹⁰ <In the German version, Lossky writes 'the soul of the monad' instead of 'monads.'>

¹¹ 'Leibniz an des Bosses,' 16, X, 1706, Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 324

¹² 'Leibniz an des Bosses,' 16, X, 1706, Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 324

secondary matter, which forms the organic body (*corpus organicum*), is the result of innumerable complete substances, each of which has its own entelechy and its primary matter.’¹³ ‘Entelechies change their own organic bodies, i.e., their secondary matter; but their primary matter does not change.’¹⁴

Death is nothing but the separation of the central monad from all or most of the monads subordinate to it. In fact, the central monad itself, and in general every monad, cannot, as such, be annihilated; it cannot pass away into the realm of nonbeing. Every monad is immortal, because, having a true unity, it can neither have a beginning nor an end, except by means of a ‘miracle.’ It follows from this ‘that the constituent forms of substances have been created with the world, and that they subsist permanently.’¹⁵ The immortality of the monad is assured by its very God-created nature; it is not ‘merely a miracle of divine grace.’¹⁶ On the contrary, <80> the annihilation of a monad can only be a miraculous act of divine omnipotence.

Existing from the beginning of the universe to its end, every monad is always active; it is *ἄτομον αὐτοπληροῦν* (a self-fulfilling atom), an *atomon vitale* (a living atom).¹⁷ Its tireless activity is not a pointless monotonous trampling in the same place; by realizing purposeful acts, it is always perfecting itself. As Leibniz says, ‘[t]hroughout the universe there is an uninterrupted and free progress, through which the state of the world is always improved.’¹⁸ And, ‘although we sometimes step back, like the lines with reversal points, in the end advancement does not fail to prevail and to succeed.’¹⁹ ‘And as for the objection that might be raised that, if this were the case, the world would have become a paradise a long time ago, the ready answer is: even if the majority of the substances were perfected, there would still be, due to the infinite divisibility of the continuum, some parts remaining dormant in the infinite abyss of things, which should awake and rise to a higher and better and, so to speak, improved culture.’²⁰

Since every monad that has ascended from the bottom and has reached a certain degree of perfection subordinates at least some monads, which serve it as organs and with which it forms an organism, we find, looking over nature from top to bottom, according to the stages of the perfection of the monads, that nature is infinitely

¹³ ‘Leibniz an des Bosses,’ 16, X, 1706, Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 324

¹⁴ ‘Leibniz an des Bosses,’ 16, X, 1706, Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 324; see also ‘Leibniz an de Volder,’ 20, VI, 1703, Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 252. <The following note was added in the German version: ‘The expressions “primary and secondary matter” have a different meaning in other writings of Leibniz, but this question need not be addressed for the purpose of this essay.’>

¹⁵ *Système nouveau de la nature et de la communication des substances, aussi bien que de l’union qu’il y a entre l’âme et le corps*, Gerhardt, vol. IV, p. 479

¹⁶ *Nouveaux essais sur l’entendement humain*, Préface, Gerhardt, vol. V. <Note from the translator: Lossky does not provide the page number here, but this is apparently from pages 60–61, where Leibniz writes: ‘en vertu d’une grace miraculeuse fondée dans la seule promesse de Dieu qu’elles ne meurent point.’>

¹⁷ ‘Leibniz an de Volder,’ XVI, July 6, 1701, Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 224

¹⁸ *De rerum originatione radicali*, Gerhardt, vol. VII, p. 308. <Note from the translator: This seems to be a very loose translation of: ‘In cumulum etiam pulchritudinis perfectionisque universalis operum divinatorum, progressus quidam perpetuus liberrimusque totius Universi est agnoscendus, ita it ad majorem semper cultum procedat.’>

¹⁹ ‘Leibniz an die Königin Sophie Charlotte von Preußen. Lettre touchant ce qui est independant des Sens et de la Matière,’ Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 508

²⁰ *De rerum originatione radicali*, Gerhardt, vol. VII, p. 308. ‘Leibniz an die Khurfürstin Sophie,’ vol. VII, p. 543 ff.; ‘Leibniz an des Bosses,’ vol. II, p. 300

organized and that this organization has its ultimate ground in God, that is to say, in the harmony that he has pre-established. 'Matter,' Leibniz says, 'arranged by a divine wisdom must everywhere be essentially organized.'²¹ There are 'so many envelopes and so many organic bodies that are enveloped into one another that one could never produce an organic body completely anew and without any preformation, and that one could as little entirely destroy an already subsisting animal.'²² 'Death, just as much as generation, is nothing else than the transformation of one and the same animated creature (*animal*), which at one time is increased, and at another time diminished.'²³

During the entire period from the birth of an animal to its death, its body undergoes gradual changes; some subordinate monads break away from the composition of the body and new ones enter it, subordinating themselves to the central monad, the soul of the living being. These are the changes that <81> are nowadays studied by physiology as the metabolisms of organisms. Death and birth are, according to Leibniz, nothing but accelerated metabolisms that have an abrupt leapy character. In the case of death, Leibniz says, 'not only the soul, but also the animal itself and its organic machine are preserved, even though the destruction of the coarse parts has reduced it to a smallness that escapes our senses no less than it did before its birth.'²⁴

Even if a living being is burnt, there still remains in its ashes a microscopic organized being²⁵; an embryo from which a new living being could emerge over time, because 'apparent generation is only a development and a kind of increase.'²⁶

An animal (or a plant),²⁷ reduced through death to the level of a microscopic being, develops a new visible body through the process of birth. Is this body of the same species as the previous one, or of a new species? Leibniz says that Frans Mercurius van Helmont claims that, when an animal dies, it is reborn in the body of a newborn of the same species, so that the number of humans, dogs, cats, etc., neither decreases nor increases.²⁸ Leibniz concedes that a living being can develop the body of the same species several times, but he does not at all consider monads to be doomed to everlastingly repeat one and the same kind of life at every birth. The following considerations and statements by Leibniz himself can ascertain that he admitted the ascension of monads from lower kinds of life to higher ones:

1. According to Leibniz, every monad is continuously perfecting itself and the outcome of this perfectionment is entrance into the Kingdom of God.²⁹
2. He designates his doctrine by the terms *metamorphosis*, *transformation*,³⁰ and *metaschematism*, and illustrates it by means of the example of the metamorphosis

²¹ *Considérations sur les principes de vie, et sur les natures plastiques*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 544

²² *Considérations sur les principes de vie, et sur les natures plastiques*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 544

²³ *Considérations sur les principes de vie, et sur les natures plastiques*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 543

²⁴ *Système nouveau de la nature*, Gerhardt, vol. IV, p. 480; *Principes de la nature et de la grâce, fondés en raison*, § 6, Gerhardt, vol. VI; *Monadologie*, §§ 72, 73, Gerhardt, vol. VI

²⁵ 'Leibniz an Arnauld,' September 1687, Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 124

²⁶ *Système nouveau de la nature*, Gerhardt, vol. IV, p. 480

²⁷ *Considérations sur les principes de vie, et sur les natures plastiques*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 543; 'Leibniz an des Maiseaux,' vol. VII, p. 535

²⁸ 'Leibniz an Th. Burnett,' January 20, 1699; Gerhardt, vol. III, p. 252 ff.

²⁹ *De rerum originatione radicali*, Gerhardt, vol. VII, p. 308

³⁰ <Note from the translator: In the German version, Lossky added the following footnote: 'The expression "transformatio" occurs in *Système nouveau*, Gerhardt vol. IV, pp. 474 and 480–481.'>

- of caterpillars and other insects, obviously to show that the new body can sharply differ from the former, while the central monad remains the same.
3. Even about spermatic animalcules, he claims ‘that they themselves stem from other even smaller spermatic animalcules.’³¹
 4. Such a profound transformation as the transition from the kingdom of slumber to the kingdom of awakened monads, according to Leibniz, necessarily arises through a process of development.³² <82>
 5. Moreover, he even considers possible the transition of monads from the animal kingdom to the kingdom of rational beings (such as a monad, which is destined to become a human being, migrates from the stage of a merely sensitive soul into that of a rational spirit—this will be discussed later).³³
 6. Finally, in the *Monadology* Leibniz definitively says that the organic body of an animal that exists before conception is not created anew by conception, but ‘was only disposed to undergo a great transformation so that it may become an animal of another species.’³⁴ In a letter to <Rudolf Christian> Wagner, he says: ‘*species animalis non manet*.’³⁵

If Leibniz had resolutely and definitively emphasized these doctrines, he would thereby have laid the foundation, long before Darwin, for a theory of evolution much more profound than Darwinism.

The transition from animal nature to human nature, as the nature of a rational being, and, furthermore, the destiny of human beings, are subordinate to laws other <than those of the animal kingdom>.³⁶ The immortality of pre-human beings is, because of their lack of self-consciousness, merely the preservation of the metaphysical identity of the monad. As for the human, rational soul capable of saying ‘I,’ it does not only ‘subsist metaphysically, although it does so to a greater extent than the others, but it also remains morally the same and constitutes the same personality.’³⁷ It is memory and self-consciousness that ‘render it capable of punishment and reward.’³⁸ These are souls created in the image and likeness of God. This is why Leibniz says that he does not dare ‘to affirm anything with regards to either the preexistence or the details of the future state of human souls, since God could use in this respect extraordinary means in the kingdom of grace. Nevertheless, one must prefer what is favored by natural reason, unless revelation teaches us the contrary — a problem that I do not intend to solve here.’³⁹

For our topic, it is important to know what Leibniz thinks, on the basis of natural reason, about the state of the human monad before the birth of a human person. In the developed system of monadology, consequential intellectual development necessarily leads to the doctrine of the preexistence of souls. And, in fact, Leibniz himself says that,

³¹ *Considérations sur la doctrine d'un Esprit Universel Unique*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 534

³² *De rerum originatione radicali*, Gerhardt, vol. VII, p. 308

³³ *Principes de la nature et de la grâce, fondés en raison*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, § 4, pp. 599 ff.

³⁴ *Monadologie*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, § 74, p. 619 ff.

³⁵ ‘Leibniz an R. Ch. Wagner,’ April 4, 1710, Gerhardt, vol. VII, p. 530

³⁶ <Note from the translator: the words in angle brackets are present only in the German version.>

³⁷ *Discours de métaphysique*, Gerhardt, vol. IV, pp. 459–460

³⁸ *Discours de métaphysique*, Gerhardt, vol. IV, p. 460 ff., §§ 34, 36

³⁹ *Considérations sur les principes de vie, et sur les natures plastiques*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 545. ‘Leibniz an Arnaud,’ September 1687, Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 125

during a period when his philosophy was still immature (*cum nondum satis matura esset philosophia mea*), he adhered to the doctrine of the multiplication of souls through traduction.⁴⁰ <83>

Afterwards he began to affirm the preexistence of the human monad. In *Theodicy*, after having expounded the above-mentioned doctrines on animals, he further argued as follows: 'After having established such a beautiful order, and such general rules with regards to animals, it does not seem reasonable that man be completely excluded from this and that everything that occurs in him with regards to his soul is done by <means of> miracle.'⁴¹ 'Therefore, I believe that the souls that will one day become human souls, as well as those of other species, were in the seeds (*dans les semences*), and in the ancestors back to Adam, and have thus always existed since the beginning of things in some sort of organized body.'⁴² 'But it also seems to me for many reasons acceptable that they then existed only as sensitive (*sensitives*) or animal souls that were endowed with perception and sensation, but destitute of reason, and that they remained in this state until the time of the generation of man, to which they should belong, but that then they received reason. Now, either there is a natural means to elevate a sensitive soul to the degree of reasonable soul (which I have difficulty to conceive), or God gave reason to this soul by a particular operation, or (if you wish) by a species of *transcreation*'⁴³ (i.e., supplementary creation). 'This explanation seems to remove the embarrassments that arise here in philosophy and in theology, because it entirely dissipates the difficulty of the origin of forms (i.e., the monads or substances), and because it is far more appropriate to divine justice to give to the soul, already *physically* or *animally* corrupted by Adam's sin, the new perfection of reason, than to put a rational soul, through creation or otherwise, into a body, where it must get *morally* corrupted.'⁴⁴

In the third part of *Theodicy*, Leibniz says that the preexisting sensitive soul receives reason at the moment of the conception of a human being by virtue of a special act of God and by virtue of a predisposition that exists from the beginning, and that up to that moment its organic body undergoes multiple changes.⁴⁵

It should not be thought that the elevation of a soul by God up to the level of rationality amounts to the creation of a new monad by Him; it is rather the same monad, which existed since the beginning of the world, that acquires a new faculty. In this regard, Leibniz remarks that '[i]t is agreed among the philosophers that the faculties of

⁴⁰ 'Leibniz an des Bosses,' April 24, 1709; Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 372. <Note from the translator: Here the word 'traduction' translates the Russian 'традукция' and the German 'Traduktion,' which Lossky uses to translate Leibniz's Latin word 'traducem.' This refers to the theological doctrine of traducianism, according to which the human souls of newborn babies are generated, not by God, but by the souls of their parents at the moment of conception much in the same manner as human bodies are generated. See: Rudolph Goclenius, *Lexicon Philosophicum*, Frankfurt am Main: typis viduae Matthiae Beckeri, impensis Petri Musculi & Ruperti Pistorij, 1613, p. 1136.>

⁴¹ *Essais de théodicée*, part I, § 91, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 152

⁴² *Essais de théodicée*, part I, § 91, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 152

⁴³ *Essais de théodicée*, part I, § 91, Gerhardt, vol. VI, pp. 152–153

⁴⁴ *Essais de théodicée*, part I, § 91, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 153

⁴⁵ *Essais de théodicée*, part III, § 397, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 352; see also 'Leibniz an Amaud,' November 28, 1686; Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 75; 'Leibniz an des Bosses,' September 8, 1709, Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 390; *Causa Dei asserta per justiniam ejus*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, § 81, § 82. *Principes de la nature et de la grâce*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 601; *Monadologie*, § 82, Gerhardt, vol. VI

sensation and of reason do not form separate souls within us, but rather inhere in one and the same soul.⁴⁶ <84>

Everything that has been expounded so far seems to me to clearly show that Leibniz was a supporter of the doctrine of reincarnation, with the reservations required by a Christian worldview and by natural reason, taking into account the significance of the transition from animalistic nature to reason. It is noteworthy, however, that Leibniz, in presenting his theory, carefully dissociates it from the doctrine of the transmigration of souls (metempsychosis) and does not fail to mention this in numerous places in his works and letters.⁴⁷ He points out that animals, even in death, do not completely lose their bodies, but rather only transition to a new development and transformation of the body. Consequently, one cannot speak of the *transmigration* of a soul from one body to another; one can only speak of the *metamorphosis* of the animal, of its transformation. He rejects such doctrines as, for instance, that of Fr. M. van Helmont, according to which the soul of a moribund, having separated from the body, enters another body, namely, the body of a newborn.⁴⁸

He himself recognizes the kinship of his views with the ancient doctrine of the transmigration of souls, which in his opinion is ‘nothing other than the doctrine of transformation poorly understood.’⁴⁹ Bayle also considers that ‘this hypothesis of Leibniz is more or less similar to an opinion of the philosophers of Indostan.’⁵⁰

The doctrine of reincarnation as a means of perfectionment leading to the heights of being, is usually associated with the recognition of a plurality of stages of life leading from the human being, not only downwards but also upwards. We also find this idea in Leibniz: ‘It is reasonable also that there be substances capable of perception below us, as there are such above us, and that our soul, far from being the last of all, finds itself in a middle place whence we can descend and ascend. Otherwise, there would be a deficiency of order, which some philosophers call *vacuum formarum*.’⁵¹ ‘[T]here is an innumerable number of globes, as big or bigger than ours, that have just as much the right to have rational inhabitants, even though these need not be human beings.’⁵²

How diverse are the forms of life that Leibniz admitted is obvious from the following examples: ‘Nothing prevents that there be animals (*des animaux*) in the universe like the one that Cyrano de Bergerac found in the sun. The body of this animal <85> consisted of a kind of fluid composed of an infinity of animalcules capable of organizing themselves according to the desires of the grand animal, who thereby instantaneously transformed itself, as it saw fit, and for whom

⁴⁶ ‘Leibniz an des Bosses,’ July 31, 1709, Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 378

⁴⁷ See, e.g., ‘Leibniz an Arnauld,’ Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 99; vol. IV, pp. 474, 480; vol. VI, pp. 543, 601, 619.

⁴⁸ ‘Leibniz an die Churfürstin Sophie von Hannover und an Sophie Charlotte, Churfürstin von Brandenburg und Königin von Preußen,’ Gerhardt, vol. VII, p. 539 ff.

⁴⁹ ‘Leibniz an Arnauld,’ September 1687, Gerhardt, vol. II, p. 124

⁵⁰ Leibniz, *Éclaircissement des difficultés que Monsieur Bayle a trouvées dans le système nouveau de l’union de l’âme et du corps*, Gerhardt, vol. IV, p. 528

⁵¹ *Considérations sur les principes de vie, et sur les natures plastiques*, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 543; ‘Leibniz an des Maizeaux,’ July 8, 1711, Gerhardt, vol. VII, p. 535

⁵² *Essais de theodicée*, part I, § 19, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 114; *Causa Dei*, § 57, 58, Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 447

dissolution of continuity was as little harmful as the stroke of a paddle could harm the sea.⁵³

We often come across the doctrine of reincarnation among the philosophers who followed Leibniz in developing a system of monadology, and this circumstance can also be considered a confirmation of the fact that this doctrine is contained in Leibniz's philosophy, or at least consistently follows from its foundations. I will only mention the names of such supporters of the doctrine of reincarnation, as <Johann Gottfried> Herder, <Maximilian> Drossbach, <Charles> Renouvier, <Alexei> Kozlov, and <Wincenty> Lutosławski. Unfortunately, the details of this doctrine are poorly developed by Leibniz's successors. Nevertheless, in the form in which it is given by Leibniz, it is of great value, both in relation to the universal character that it bestows upon a whole worldview and in its application to the solution of a number of particular problems. I will make some remarks about this without going into the details, since developing the details of this doctrine would require a separate book in connection with contemporary philosophy and science, and not with the history of Leibniz's thought. In the following considerations, I will have in mind the variation of the monadology that I have developed in my own writings.

Every individual, as a substantial agent, is immortal. Each of their lives, which take the form of a series of metamorphoses, lasts throughout the entire world-process, so that world-history is an organic unity of histories or, one might say, of biographies of immortal individuals. When these individuals combine into an integral unity, such as an animal organism or a plant, an anthill, a beehive, a state, church, etc., a central monad stands at the head of such a unity, and the life of the whole has a personal individual character.

In such a conception of the historical process, this personal, individual character is asserted to the maximum extent possible. Materialistic, mechanical atomism also considers every atom to be eternal and views the world-process (not as an organic unity, but) as a sum of processes, each of which is the unbroken series of movements of an eternal atom. However, in a mechanistic atomism, there can be no talk of the *life* <86> of an atom, of its *biography*: atoms are uniform, bereft of any individual characteristics; the series of changes in the movements and positions of each atom are devoid of any meaning and purpose. There is here neither perfectionment nor decadence in them. According to the monadological doctrine, in contrast, substantial agents are individual, i.e., ontologically unrepeatable and axiologically irreplaceable. Each one of them accomplishes purposeful actions, not only physically but also psychically and spiritually. Each one of them is a potential personality capable of becoming an actual personality, i.e., a rational and morally responsible being. The life of such a being is a historical process, it deserves a biography. Such a metaphysical system can be called a *personalism*, since its fundamental ontological element is personality, or potential personality.

⁵³ *Essais de theodicée*, part III, § 343; Gerhardt, vol. VI, p. 318. On the journey of a man on the moon (while discussing a book of the Bishop of Chester Wilkins), Leibniz remarks that it is not possible in the present state of humans, because of the properties of the air. 'Leibniz an Basnage,' June 15, 1708; Gerhardt, vol. III, p. 147. On the possibility of celestial bodies on which the geniuses have a greater right than us to participate in affairs of rational beings, 'Leibniz an Coste,' from December 19, 1707; Gerhardt, vol. III, p. 403. On the destruction and reconstruction of the terrestrial globe, i.e., on a kind of death and rebirth of the earth, see: *Monadologie*, § 88.

Even those thinkers who, in contrast to the materialist-mechanists, recognize the activity of a personality irreducible to a mechanical process, if they deny the immortality of the 'I' and the personal character of organic unity (e.g., the people, the state, the church), they relegate the personal principle to a subordinate position in the historical process. A series of mortal personalities that relay each other in time and that are enclosed in an impersonal whole are subordinate to impersonal relations and forces to such an extent that one cannot speak of the personal character of the historical process.

Concerning the question of what confers special value to the personal character of the historical process, I answer the following. Personalist philosophy, combined with the doctrine of the freedom of the will, asserts that each individual creates its own destiny and is responsible for all the details of its own behavior: it has no right and no reason to lay the blame on the milieu for its own shortcomings, to lay the blame on the historical circumstances that were shaped before its birth, on the family in which it was born, on heredity, etc.

This applies not only to the history of humanity but also to the evolution of the animal and vegetal kingdoms, and to pre-human nature in general. According to this doctrine, this is not a process of leaping from one mortal individual to another; it is a unified history of the development of immortal individuals, who move forward, perfecting themselves in the good or cultivating evil, partly by virtue of their own creative ingenuity, partly by imitation and assimilation of other people's creative acts.

Many entangled and paradoxical features of heredity could be explained with the help of the doctrine of reincarnation as metamorphosis. Some character traits and corporeal structures of the individual are inherited, not from the parents but from themselves, precisely on the basis of their own experiences in previous lives. Maybe this could explain, for instance, those characteristics whereby the individual is different from its parents and is closer to remote ancestors. Other characteristics of the body can be inherited from the <87> parents, insofar as the bodies of the parents participate in the formation of the body of the embryo. Besides, the influence of the parents may be much more profound; as the substantial agent (monad) dwells in the bodies of the parents, in close organic connection with them, it learns about the way of life of the parents, absorbing their innovations, which are the products of the rank and developmental stage to which they belong.

In psychology, the doctrine of reincarnation as metamorphosis could be applied to understand the nature of instincts, atavisms, and archaisms that Freud traces back to intrauterine life, but that actually stretch back much farther.

This list of valuable applications of the doctrine of the metamorphoses of the immortal individual is far from complete, but the completion and elaboration of the details of this doctrine should be the subject of a separate work.⁵⁴

The Catholic and Orthodox Church have traditionally adopted an unfavorable attitude towards the doctrine of reincarnation. It is even possible that this doctrine, in the form in which Origen developed it, was condemned during the Fifth Ecumenical Council. In his *History of the Councils of the Church*,

⁵⁴ I already hinted at the aforementioned doctrines in the following books: *The World as an Organic Whole*, transl. by Natalie Duddington, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928; *L'intuition, la matière et la vie*, transl. by M. Exempliarsky, Paris: Félix Alcan, 1928; *Freedom of Will*, transl. by Natalie Duddington, London: Williams & Norgate, 1932; *Value and Existence*, transl. by Sergei Vinokooroff, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935.

<Carl Josef von> Hefele says that the doctrine of Origen was condemned by an edict of the Emperor Justinian, that the fifteen theses of Origen were anathemized at the Constantinopolitan Synod in 543, and that, at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, Origen's doctrine has probably been subjected to anathematizing without a detailed discussion and without the establishment of the fifteen theses against it.⁵⁵ However, it has never been condemned by the church in the form developed by Leibniz, namely, in connection with the doctrine of transcreation (of God's supplementary act of creation). Such a distinguished scholar and hierarch of the Catholic Church as Cardinal <Désiré-Joseph> Mercier recognizes this in a letter to <Wincenty> Lutosławski, which has been published by Lutosławski.^{56,57} It is true that Cardinal Mercier apparently wrote his statement only reluctantly. Yet, all three fundamental theories about the origin of the soul proposed in the Christian literature—creationism, traducianism, and the doctrine of preexistence—cannot be considered satisfactory⁵⁸: they do not provide an answer to the question of hereditary sin and of the fair conditions for the entrance of a nascent human being into earthly life (birth from vicious or sickly parents, in an internally decomposed family, or afflicted by poverty or the corrupting temptations of lubberly spent wealth, etc.).

Only a more complex theory, including the doctrine of the preexistence of the soul and of supplementary transcreation (a kind of <88> synthesis of the theory of preexistence and the theory of creationism), gives an answer to these questions while satisfying the requirements of fairness. For this, it is sufficient to assume that all substantial agents were created by God at the <moment of the> creation of the world as free beings endowed with creative activity and all the faculties necessary for the realization of the absolute good. Those of them who freely chose the path of love for God and for all His creatures, i.e., the path of love for the absolute good, are awarded deification and belong to the Kingdom of God. Those among them who embark on the path of self-love constitute the kingdom of earthly (psycho-material) being; in this kingdom, owing to the struggle of its members against each other, are unavoidable countless imperfections, mental and physical suffering, death, etc., i.e., kinds of evil that arise as a fair and natural consequence of the original sinful act.

⁵⁵ Hefele, Carl Joseph von, *Conciliengeschichte: Nach den Quellen bearbeitet*, Zweiter Band, Zweite, verbesserte Auflage, Freiburg: Herder'sche Verlagshandlung, 1875, p. 791

⁵⁶ <Note from the translator: The correspondence that Lossky is referring to is a letter from Cardinal Mercier, written on December 15, 1924, that Wincenty Lutosławski quoted from in *The Knowledge of Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930, p. 173), where the Cardinal writes: 'La question que vous me soumettez est bien délicate. Je crois que l'opinion de la pré-existence et de la réincarnation, telle que vous la présentez et dont vous vous dites subjectivement persuadé, n'est pas formellement condamnée comme hérétique. Mais il est certain qu'elle va à l'encontre du sens chrétien et catholique. J'ai eu, j'ai encore égard, à votre bonne foi personnelle et ne voudrai donc pas vous accuser d'hétérodoxie pour tenir à votre opinion; mais présentée *objectivement*, je crois que la doctrine de la pré-existence et des réincarnations serait sujette à condamnation, et je ne pourrais vous autoriser à la couvrir de mon patronage, d'aucune façon.' Lutosławski also discusses Mercier's opinion in *Pre-existence and Reincarnation*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1928, pp. 71–72.>

⁵⁷ <Note from the translator: Everything that follows henceforth has been omitted in the German version.>

⁵⁸ On this, see the work of Bishop <Kanevsky> Sylvester, *Opyt pravoslavnago dogmaticheskago bogosloviya* (*Essay on Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*), vol. III, 2nd ed., pp. 337–339

Such agents condemned themselves to a long and difficult path of development, in which every position they occupy corresponds to their relative meritoriousness or shortcomings, and is therefore morally justified.

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