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LEIBNIZ: PERSONAL IDENTITY AND SAMENESS OF SUBSTANCE

Leibniz's view on personal identity has been the object of numerous discussions and various interpretations.¹ Among others, the controversies revolve around the following questions: (1) What is the relation of Leibniz's conception to the Cartesian view on personal identity? Is it a completely new idea or some modification of Descartes'? (2) To what extent did Locke's ideas lay the basis for Leibniz's conception of personal identity, especially Locke's distinction between being the same substance, organism, and person? (3) What role did psychological continuity play in Leibniz's conception of personal identity? Did he indeed claim that a person's identity cannot solely arise out of sameness of substance? (4) Is Leibniz's solution to the problem of personal identity compatible with his deepest metaphysical commitments? Can it be seen as a conclusive solution to the problem? (5) Is Leibniz's effort to offer an account of personal identity by combining the substance-oriented view with the psychological view a coherent solution?²

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¹ The abbreviations I use are: Erdmann = Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, *Opera philosophica omnia*, ed. Johann Eduard Erdmann (Berlin: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1840); GP = *Die philosophischen Schriften von G.W. Leibniz*, Bd. I-VII, ed. Carl Immanuel Gerhardt (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875–1890); NE = Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, trans. and ed. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); L = Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. and ed. Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969); Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ, *Theodicy = Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, trans. Eveleen M. Huggard, ed. Austin Farrer (Oxford: Biblio Bazaar, 2007); AG = *G.W. Leibniz Philosophical Essays*, trans. and ed. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1989).

² See Ben Lazari MIJUSKOVIC, "Locke and Leibniz on Personal Identity." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 13 (1975), 2: 205–2144; Samuel SCHEFFLER, "Leibniz on Personal Identity and

Before I specify which of the above problems come into focus in my work, let me refer to three opinions formulated by Samuel Scheffler, Margaret Wilson, and Ezio Vailati. A presentation of their views will allow me to, first of all, highlight why Leibniz's view on this issue leads to so many controversies, and second of all, indicate the points where my interpretation departs from those of other researchers, especially from the ones offered by Wilson and Scheffler.

1.

In Samuel Scheffler's opinion—whose text opened the debate on the subject—Leibniz did not manage to demonstrate why memory and other psychological phenomena are insufficient to establish the identity of persons over time. Scheffler suggest that Leibniz limits himself solely to the statement that only the so-called *a priori* reasons which result from the continued existence of the same substance are a sufficient basis for being *the same* person over time. According to Scheffler, Leibniz's writings fail to provide any substantial arguments for accepting this claim. Scheffler claims Leibniz's only argument consists of a fairly vague conviction that accepting memory or other psychological phenomena as a condition of personal identity is at variance with our natural intuitions. If one agreed that personal identity is based on the continuity of memory, one has to acknowledge that the complete loss of memory (e.g. as a result of an unfortunate accident) would result in the loss of personal identity. And this is exactly what—according to Leibniz—is supposed to be at odds with our natural intuitions. According to Scheffler, this argumentation is not convincing since the proponent of me-

Moral Personality," *Studia Leibnitiana* 8 (1976), 2: 219–240; Edwin M. Curley, "Leibniz on Locke on Personal Identity," in *Leibniz: Critical and Interpretative Essays*, ed. Michael Hooker (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 302–26; Margaret WILSON, "Leibniz: Self-Consciousness and Immortality in the Paris Notes and After," in Margaret WILSON, *Ideas and Mechanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 373–387; Nicholas JOLLEY, *Leibniz and Locke: A Study of New Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), ch. VII; Ezio VAILATI, "Leibniz's Theory of Personal Identity in the New Essays," *Studia Leibnitiana* 17 (1985), 1: 36–43; Benson MATES, *The Philosophy of Leibniz: Metaphysics and Language* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Udo THIEL, "Personal Identity," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 868–913; Harold W. NOONAN, *Personal Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989), ch. 3; Marc Elliott BOBRO, *Self and Substance in Leibniz* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2004).

mory as a necessary condition of personal identity, while investigating cases of memory loss or gaps, could claim that in such case our natural intentions are not a credible judgement when it comes to personal identity. It is not memory as a condition of identity that must be rejected but our intuitive convictions in this respect. Leibniz failed to provide any argument against this line of thought. As Scheffler suggests, Leibniz seems not to have had a clear picture of his own understanding of personal identity.³

Equally severe criticism of Leibniz's position was levelled by Margaret Wilson. As she states, Leibniz failed to formulate a coherent and uniform theory of personal identity. His stance—interesting and important as it might be—contains so many inconsistencies that it cannot be adopted as a satisfactory solution to this problem. Especially in *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, it is difficult to state unambiguously what Leibniz believed to be the basis of being the same person over time. After Descartes, he holds that the continued existence of substance—i.e. the existence of a soul or “I”—is what ultimately determines identity. Simultaneously, contrary to Descartes, he emphasizes that the preservation of psychological continuity based on self-consciousness and memory seems to be indispensable due to the moral and religious significance of personal identity. This, in turn, reduces the distance between Leibniz and Locke. The latter believed that psychological continuity (i.e. memory and consciousness) is crucial for being the same person. It is because of an attempt to combine these two positions that Leibniz runs up against difficulties.

According to Wilson, the most serious difficulty, which the reader encounters in Leibniz's texts, especially in *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, lies in that, while identifying the notion of a person with spiritual substance, Leibniz does not exclude, at least logically, the possibility of altering spiritual substance, while preserving personal identity based on the continuity of one's psychological life. As a result, the continuity of spiritual substance's existence turns out to be an unnecessary basis of personal identity, even though it is the ontic core of a being, which seems to be a glaring inconsistency.⁴ Moreover, as Wilson continues to explain, the knowledge about substance, which we gain through our internal experience of ourselves, is characterized by Leibniz differently in various places. Some of his texts suggest that this knowledge gives incontrovertible proof of the

³ S. SCHEFFLER, “Leibniz on Personal Identity and Moral Personality,” 224–5.

⁴ M. WILSON, “Leibniz: Self-Consciousness and Immortality,” 380–81. See also N. JOLLEY, *Leibniz and Locke*, 135–8.

substantiality of one's "I", but also of one's authentic individuality. Others, in turn, promote the view that the knowledge we gain through our internal experience—important as it might be—does not constitute the whole content contained in the idea of individual substance, identical with an individual concept. As a result, it cannot be regarded as a sufficient condition constituting personal identity.⁵

A different point of view in the discussion was outlined by Ezio Vailati. As Vailati explains, such severe criticism of the results of Leibniz's studies of personal identity is ill-founded. Contrary to Margaret Wilson, he believes that Leibniz's statements in this respect are not ambiguous at all and that the theory of personal identity which emerges from them is not incoherent. Vailati demonstrates this with the following three points. In the first place, it is not true that Leibniz defines a person in *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding* only on the basis of their substantial principle, i.e. soul and mind. A person for Leibniz is also a moral and religious being. This is where the requirement to combine substantial continuity and psychological continuity (consciousness and memory) as the condition of personal identity comes from. Secondly Leibniz clearly explains that potential separation of somebody's consciousness and memory from their substantial principle is possible only logically. It is at odds, though, with "the order of nature". From the point of view of nature, such a situation is ruled out and cannot occur without conflicting with nature. Thirdly, it is necessary to bear in mind that for Leibniz consciousness establishes personal identity insofar as it is "accompanied by truth", that is when consciousness is correct.⁶ When these three points are taken into account, the lack of clarity of Leibniz's conception of personal identity disappears.⁷

2.

Broadly speaking, the previous statements are the presentation of views on Leibniz's conception of personal identity. Clearly, the first two are very critical. Both Scheffler and Wilson believe that they managed to reveal some essential difficulties and mistakes present in Leibniz's theory thus disquali-

⁵ M. WILSON, "Leibniz: Self-Consciousness and Immortality," 381.

⁶ "As regard self, it will be as well to distinguish it from the appearance of self and from consciousness. The self makes real physical identity, and the appearance of self, when accompanied by truth, adds to it personal identity." NE II,27, § 9.

⁷ E. VAILATI, "Leibniz's Theory of Personal Identity," 43.

fyng it. The real question is whether the above criticism pertains to what can be found in Leibniz's texts. It seems that Leibniz's theory combining the substantial basis of personal identity with the demand of psychological continuity is not burdened with any particular inconsistency. Considering what Vailati presented, there is a possibility of interpreting Leibniz's statements which dismisses Margaret Wilson's accusation against Leibniz's reported inconsistency. What needs to be observed, though, is that Leibniz does not limit the notion of personal identity to a substantial principle, i.e. the soul or "I", which comes to pass in Descartes's doctrine. Apart from this, Leibniz's view on the logical possibility of altering a spiritual substance with the simultaneous preservation of psychological continuity should not be interpreted without the reference to his other theses, especially those concerned with the differentiation between various senses of the term "possibility."

If Vailati is right, and there are a number of reasons to believe so, there emerges a basis on which the consistency of Leibniz's position can be defended. This leads to another question: can Leibniz offer arguments powerful enough to support his two theses whose truthfulness he was trying to prove? What I mean here are arguments which support the claim that, on the one hand, personal identity should be treated as a structure which consists of two layers, i.e. substantial and psychological, and; on the other hand, that the ultimate basis of personal identity consists in the continuity of substance, even if substantiality fails to exhaust the concept of "personal identity." In my opinion, Leibniz did present such arguments. That is why I believe that it is inapt on Scheffler's part to claim that, apart from a vaguely characterised intuition, Leibniz does not advance arguments which support his hypothesis that substantial continuity is of fundamental importance for the preservation of personal identity. It is my conviction that a more inquisitive analysis of Leibniz's texts leads to the conclusion that the so-called intuition is not his only argument which proves that the continuity of psychological phenomena alone does not guarantee the preservation of personal identity.⁸

I also think that Wilson's belief is groundless when the critic claims that if Leibniz uses both Descartes's and Locke's ideas in *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, his position on personal identity is only a compilation of what these two authors assert. I find this opinion invalid. It fails to recognize the fact that, already between 1680 and 1690, i.e. long before he became acquainted with Locke's theory, Leibniz pointed out that

⁸ A similar opinion is expressed by other authors: H.W. NOONAN, *Personal Identity*, 46; N. JOLLEY, *Leibniz and Locke*, 143-4.

personal identity should be approached from two points of view: metaphysical and psychological. Most importantly, Wilson's opinion ignores the fact that Leibniz differed from Locke in his understanding of the continuity of consciousness of past experiences as a condition of personal identity. First of all, Leibniz was not as rigid as Locke in his view on the continuity between consciousness and memory. Referring to cases of memory gaps when a person loses consciousness or goes into a deep sleep, Leibniz observed that such cases do not destroy somebody's identity. Because of this, as he believed, it is sufficient if there is a connection based on consciousness between two neighbouring states—even if there is a gap between them caused by memory loss—in order to preserve psychological continuity.⁹ Additionally, and contrary to Locke, Leibniz held that one can refer to accounts of other people to preserve personal identity. Here, he pointed to cases of long-term amnesia, when memory gaps are filled with false or accidental content, which are accompanied, however, with the conviction of accuracy (confabulation) and cases of distorted memory (paramnesia). The fact that such situations are actually the case must make one believe that not only direct consciousness but also other people's accounts can be of importance for the preservation of personal identity.¹⁰

It is worth emphasising here that bearing in mind accounts of third parties assumes that, according to Leibniz, the body can also have some importance for the preservation of personal identity. As Leibniz explained, even though the human body is not the essence of a person, it is one way of fulfilling the relation of one human being to other beings in the world. It is through bodies that the coexistence (mutual subordination) of all individual beings in the world is possible.¹¹ What is more, the beginnings of a body are,

⁹ NE, II,27, § 9.

¹⁰ "Thus, if an illness had interrupted the continuity of my bond of consciousness, so that I didn't know how I had arrived at my present state even though I could remember things further back, the testimony of others could fill in the gap in my recollection. I could even be punished on this testimony if I had done some deliberate wrong during an interval which this illness had made me forget a short time later. And if I forgot my whole past, and needed to have myself taught all over again, even my name and how to read and write, I could still learn from others about my life during my preceding state; and I would have retained my rights without having to be divided into two persons and made to inherit from myself! All this is enough to preserve the moral identity that makes the same person." NE, II,27, § 9.

¹¹ „For although monads are not extended, they nevertheless have a certain kind of situation [*situs*] in extension, that is, they have a certain ordered relation of coexistence with others, namely, through the machine which they control. I do not think that any finite substances exist apart from a body and that they therefore lack a position or an order in relation to the other things coexisting in the universe. Extended things involve a plurality of things endowed with position, but

so to say, predetermined and permanently connected with particular human beings.¹² That is why neither complete birth nor complete bodily death exist and what we describe as „*generation* is a development and an increase, just as what we call death is an envelopment and a diminution”.¹³ Furthermore, the soul expresses its own body directly and more visibly than other bodies. It expresses other bodies indirectly—through its own body.¹⁴ All this, as Leibniz believed, enables us to take into account the role of the body in cases we discussed above

Taking the above considerations into account, I would like to address two issues in the remaining part of the essay. First, I will try to discuss the reasons which Leibniz listed to support his thesis that personal identity requires both the continuity of substance and the continuity of some psychological phenomena. Then, I will turn to identifying Leibniz’s arguments which support the thesis that what ultimately provides a person with identity is their substantial principle, i.e. the soul or “I”.

things which are simple, though they do not have extension, must yet have a position in extension, though it is impossible to designate these positions precisely as in the case of incomplete phenomena.” *Correspondence with de Volder, June 20 1703*, in L, 532.

¹² Erdmann, 653–663.

¹³ *The Monadology*, § 73, in: L, 650. Here, Leibniz supported his claim with the theory called “perforation,” which dominated in the science of the 17th and 18th centuries. According to this theory, the embryonic development consists in the growth of a fully-developed, miniature being which is located either in an egg or in a spermatozoon. It was replaced with the theory of epigenesis—documented by Christian F. Wolff in 1759—which is currently adopted in embryology. As the theory goes, the development consists in gradual differentiation of cells that are created after the zygote is divided. The next stages involve the creation of tissues, organs and systems.

¹⁴ “Thus, although each created monad represents the whole universe, it represents more distinctly the body which is particularly affected by it and of which it is the entelechy. And as this body expresses the whole universe by the connection between all matter in the plenum, the soul also represents the whole universe in representing the body which belongs to it in a particular way.” *The Monadology*, § 62, in L, 649). This view presented by Leibniz was criticized by Arnauld. According to Arnauld, if our soul expressed its own body directly and more clearly than other bodies, it should be aware of numerous bodily processes such as digesting, nourishing. Yet it does not have this knowledge (see *Arnauld’s letter to Leibniz*, dated on 4 March 1687). In response to this accusation, Leibniz asserted that his position does not require the awareness of all bodily processes. The point, Leibniz continued to explain, is that changes happening in our body are perceived faster by our soul than by external changes (see *Leibniz’s letter to Arnauld*, dated on 9 October 1687).

3.

Leibniz presented his position on personal identity mainly in *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686), *Correspondence with Arnauld*, (1686-87), and, most importantly, in *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (Book II, Chapter 27). Important comments related to the notion of personal identity are also included in *Monadology* (1714) and *The Principles of Nature and of Grace, based on Reason* (1714). In both texts, Leibniz points out that the theory of personal identity must fulfil two fundamental tasks. Firstly, it must identify a factor which guarantees permanence, coherence, internal cohesion and order of individual changes which a person experiences over time. Secondly, the theory of personal identity must identify a factor which can lay down the principles behind both the moral understanding of a human being and the religious sense of their immortality. Only in this way does the theory of personal identity stand a chance of providing a correct and precise answer to the question ‘what makes a given person the same person regardless of changes over time’. According to Leibniz, the first task can only be fulfilled by referring to the continuity of substance (the soul or “I”). In order to fulfill the second task, one must resort to psychological continuity.¹⁵

Leibniz’s theory of a person is founded on the conviction that a person is an entity composed of two aspects: the metaphysical one, rooted in the world of nature, and the moral and religious one, rooted in the world of grace. In the case of a person, these two aspects are mutually adjusted, even though they cannot be reduced to one another. That is why, each of them requires the application of different principles that guarantee being the same person.¹⁶

In this context, it is clear why Leibniz distances himself both from Descartes’s and Locke’s solutions to the problem of personal identity. It can be argued that his main reservation against these conceptions did not concern what they claim but what they omit. As far as Descartes is concerned, Leibniz agreed undoubtedly that personal identity relies on the continuity of

¹⁵ “I also hold this opinion that consciousness or the sense of I proves moral or personal identity. And that is how I distinguish the unendingness of a beast’s soul from the immortality of the soul of a man: both of them preserve real, physical identity; but it is consonant with the rules of God’s providence that in man’s case the soul should also retain a moral identity that is apparent to us ourselves, so as to constitute the same person, which is therefore sensitive to punishments and rewards.” NE, II,27, § 9.

¹⁶ “But in order to support by natural reasons the view that God will preserve for all time not merely our substance but also our person, that is to say, the memory and knowledge of what we are (though the distinct knowledge is sometimes suspended in sleep and in fainting fits), we must add morals to metaphysics.” *Discourse on Metaphysics*, § 35, in L, 326.

somebody's substance, i.e. the soul ("I"). However, he believed that, focusing on substantiality, Descartes disregarded the impact of psychological continuity. In the meantime, without consciousness and the memory of what a person was, the sensitivity to punishment and reward—which is a necessary condition of the existence of moral qualities—is impossible. What is more, the conception according to which a person is constituted only by their substance is at odds with the doctrine of immortality since it strips the idea of immortality of content which is important for the idea from the point of view of ethics and religion. It thwarts the legitimacy of any compensation, any punishment, and any progress towards higher excellence. It even seems that immortality without the consciousness of past experiences would not make any sense.¹⁷ Immortality is not the same as the continuous existence of the same soul, but it assumes the continuity of the same personality.¹⁸ For these reasons, Leibniz maintained, psychological continuity must become a necessary condition of the preservation of personal identity.

As for Locke, Leibniz agreed with him on the point that if a person did not preserve the consciousness of past experiences, they would not be able to

¹⁷ "I therefore assert that the immortality of soul, as established by Descartes, is useless and could not console us in any way. For let us suppose that soul *is a* substance and that no substance perishes; given that, the soul would not perish and, in fact, nothing would perish in nature. But just as matter, the soul will change in its way, and just as the matter that composes a man has at other times composed other plants and animals, similarly, this soul might be immortal in fact, but it might pass through a thousand changes without remembering what it once was. But this immortality without memory is completely useless to morality, for it upsets all reward and punishment." *Letter to Molanus*, in AG, 243.

¹⁸ "Hence, though animals may pass through a thousand transformations like that which we see when a caterpillar changes into a butterfly, yet from the moral or practical point of view the result is just as if they had perished; indeed, one may even say that they have perished in a physical sense, that is, in the sense in which we say that bodies perish through their corruption. But the intelligent soul, knowing what it is and being able to say this little word 'I' which means so much, not merely remains and subsists metaphysically (which it does in a fuller sense than the others) but also remains the same morally and constitutes the same character. For it is memory or the knowledge of this 'I' which makes it capable of punishment and reward. Likewise, the immortality which is demanded in morals and religion does not consist merely in this perpetual subsistence which is common to all substances, for without a memory of what one has been, there would be nothing desirable about it." *Discourse on Metaphysics*, § 34, in L, 235. "But the fact is that they confused indestructibility with immortality, whereby is understood in the case of man that not only the soul but also the personality subsists. In saying that the soul of man is immortal one implies the subsistence of what makes the identity of the person, something which retains its moral qualities, conserving the *consciousness*, or the reflective inward feeling, of what it is: thus it is rendered susceptible to chastisement or reward. But this conservation of personality does not occur in the souls of beasts: that is why I prefer to say that they are imperishable rather than to call them immortal." *Theodicy*, § 89, 175.

be the same person from the moral and religious point of view.¹⁹ However, the conclusion is not, as Leibniz believed, that personal identity can be preserved without the reference to substantial continuity. According to Leibniz, for numerous reasons (which I present below), one should persist in thinking that only due to one substance, various emanations of a person over time can constitute one, authentic whole, and it is neither the continuity of self-consciousness nor the continuity of the memory of past experiences.²⁰

Bearing in mind the above reservations, Leibniz concluded that, instead of looking for one foundation of personal identity, it is significantly more reasonable to assume that, in the case of a person, two dimensions of identity are equally important: the continuity of substance (the soul or “I”) and the continuity of consciousness and memory.²¹ The continuity of substance is the so-called real or metaphysical identity, while the continuity of consciousness and memory is the so-called moral identity or identity “that is apparent to the person”. Real identity and moral identity—as Leibniz further explains—are, in a logical sense, two separate structures of personal identity. Each of them is rooted in different foundations. The foundation of the former is the continuity of individual substance, while the latter is rooted in the continuity of consciousness and memory.²²

According to Leibniz, this is not the basis for surmising that the continuity of the same substance is unimportant for the moral identity of a person since it originates in the continuity of consciousness and memory, that is

¹⁹ According to Noonan, the fundamental affinity between Leibniz and Locke lies in the fact that both Leibniz and Locke regarded ‘the person’ as a ‘forensic term’ and both were “vividly aware of the need to give an account of personal identity which makes comprehensible why it matters.” H.W. NOONAN, *Personal Identity*, 46. See also N. JOLLEY, *Leibniz and Locke*, 141.

²⁰ See U. THIEL, *Personal Identity*, 899.

²¹ “As regards [to the] self, it will be as well to distinguish it from the appearance of self and from consciousness. The self makes real physical identity, and the appearance of self, when accompanied by truth, adds to it personal identity. So, not wishing to say that personal identity extends no further than memory, I want even less to say that the self, or physical identity, depends on it.” NE, II,27, § 9.

²² This shows that moral identity cannot be seen merely as an epistemic condition of real identity, which is based on identity of substance. Although some of Leibniz’s formulations may suggest such interpretation, considering his whole discussion of personal identity, it becomes evident that he rather saw consciousness and memory as constitutive of identity. See U. THIEL, *Personal Identity*, 900. See also *Discourse on Metaphysics*, § 34 in L, 325: “But the intelligent soul, knowing what it is and being able to say this little word ‘I’ which means so much, not merely remains and subsists metaphysically (which it does in a fuller sense than the others) but also remains the same morally and constitutes the same character. For it is memory or the knowledge of this ‘I’ which makes it capable of punishment and reward”.

in the source which is independent of the substance. As Leibniz explains, a logical possibility (i.e. something that is not internally contradictory) must be differentiated from a natural possibility—i.e. something that can be accepted by the order of nature. While changing the spiritual substance without modifying personal identity based on the psychological life of a person is feasible according to a logical possibility or from the point of view of the absolute power of God, it is unacceptable under a natural possibility. From the point of view of the order of nature, it is impossible for the continuity of consciousness and memory to be preserved no matter if it belongs only to one substance or to a number of consecutive substances, as is the case in Locke's doctrine.²³

In Leibniz's view, arguments that prove the existence of such interdependence are provided already by our internal experience, in the light of which we learn about a close and strong connection between our psychological life what is referred to as "I." Even if this experience, as Wilson observes, is not a decisive argument in Leibniz's system, still he regards it as a vital piece of data.²⁴ Whatever it makes us realize undermines the view that the

²³ According to U. Thiel, in this lies, "the most fundamental difference between Leibniz and Locke: for Locke it is a real possibility that there be personal identity without substantial identity [...]. To Leibniz, however, this is a mere logical possibility. It 'would be a miracle': it would 'disrupt the order of things for no reason, and would divorce what can become before our awareness from the truth — the truth which is preserved by insensible perceptions. NE, 27, § 18. According to the 'order of things,' Leibniz argues, real identity must be presupposed by apparent identity. Thus, although he does not equate personal with substantial identity, he holds that the former depends on the latter. Whereas Locke argued for keeping personal and substantial identity separate, Leibniz maintained what was assumed by the Cartesians, namely, that the (personal) identity required for morality can be preserved only by the metaphysical identity of the self as immaterial soul." U. THIEL, *Personal Identity*, 902.

²⁴ "That we are not substances is at variance with experience since we actually gain the knowledge about substances only on the basis of the most internal experience of ourselves, when we get to know our own 'I' and—using this equation—we ascribe the name of a substance to God and other monads." (Gr, II, 557–8). See also GP VI, 499–508. This argument plays a prominent role in the doctrine. One's own "I" is the paradigm of the general idea of a substance. A soul (mind) is precisely the point—according to many historians—which contains the source of the idea of a substance (monad) as a non-spatial, complete and substantial being; the idea which is the generalization of criticism levelled at Spinoza's monism. The psychological origin of this thought is visible in Leibniz's writings clearly enough, but its metaphysical dimension is equally visible. On numerous occasions, Leibniz writes that mind is not only a psychological but also a metaphysical concept. The discovery of "I" is the idea we need to ponder in order to finally reach the real objective sphere, thoughts about other ideas, whose discovery cannot be guaranteed by external (sensual) cognition or operational skills. Leibniz comments: "It is also by the knowledge of necessary truths and by their abstractions that we rise to *reflective acts*, which enable us to think of what is called *I* and to consider this or that to be in us; it is thus, as we think of

consciousness of past experiences alone, irrespective of a substantial principle, guarantees being the same person sufficiently. What is more, according to Leibniz, personal identity can be based on consciousness alone only if a man could be a mere machine and still possess consciousness.²⁵ In the meantime, the hypothesis about a machine possessing consciousness is, in fact, at variance with the natural order of things. The self-consciousness of a person embraces both the direct self-consciousness of individual experiences of a person and the direct self-consciousness of one's own "I" as a subject. A person knows oneself (one's "I") directly. The consciousness of "I" accompanies all perceptible experiences of a person who goes through them. In each of these experiences, "I" is given as a whole without any conception of its parts. Direct consciousness shows "I" as a singular, simple, not complex, immaterial being. A machine is essentially an aggregate, something complex, bodily. As a result, it is not possible for an aggregate to perceive itself as a singular "I."²⁶ In Leibniz's view, the reflection itself is possible only if the subject of this activity is an entity capable of being over time. "I" perceives its thought *p* only after it happens, i.e. thought *p* is previous in terms of time to the consciousness of it, even though the interval between a thought and its consciousness can be so short that we are not aware of it. This fact does not pose any problems if "I" is a substance, i.e. *unum per se*, since a substance is the kind of being which preserves its identity over time. If "I" is not a substance but a machine which cannot be identical outside some moment, then "I"—as a machine—cannot practically refer to its thoughts in its reflections since its identity does not go beyond the identity it has in this particular moment.

4.

Let us now give a more detailed description of reasons why Leibniz saw that the identity of substance must be accorded primacy in constituting personal identity despite the considerable significance of consciousness for being the same person.

ourselves, that we think of being, of substance, of the simple and the compound, of the immaterial, and of God himself, conceiving of that which is limited in us as being without limits in him. These reflective acts provide us with the principal objects of our reasonings." *Monadology*, § 30, in L, 646.

²⁵ NE,II, 27, § 9.

²⁶ E. VAILATI, "Leibniz's Theory of Personal Identity," 38.

In *Discourse on Metaphysics*, in *Correspondence with Arnauld*, and in *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, Leibniz maintains that the conception of identity can be essentially referred to as something that is simple. As for what is complex, identity is apparent or, at most, it is the matter of degree.²⁷ That is why, if we do not refer to a spiritually simple substance, the same person will never exist in the strict meaning of the word.²⁸ What is more, only by accepting the assumption of substantial continuity—the so-called *a priori* reason—an internal connection between different experiences of a person can be explained. This is how Leibniz elaborates on this thought in his letter to Arnauld:

Let there be a straight line ABC representing a certain time. And let there be an individual substance, for example, I, enduring or subsisting during that time. Let us first take me subsisting during time AB, and then me subsisting during time BC. Then, since the assumption is that it is the same individual substance that endures throughout, or rather that it is I who subsists in time AB, being then in Paris, and that it is still I who subsists in time BC, being then in Germany, there must necessarily be a reason allowing us truly to say that we endure, that is to say that I, who was in Paris, am now in Germany. For if there were no such reason, we would have as much right to say that it is someone else. It is true that my internal experience convinces me *a posteriori* of this identity; but there must also be an *a priori* reason. Now, it is not possible to find any reason but the fact that both my attributes in the preceding time and state and my attributes in the succeeding time and state are predicates of the same subject—they are in the same subject.²⁹

As can be seen in an excerpt above, the preservation of the unity and permanence of a person over time depends on the sameness of one subject (substance). A person preserves one's unity and permanence so long as all of one's properties are the properties of the same subject. It means that a person O2 existing at time t2 is the same person as a person O1 existing at time t1

²⁷ "So we must acknowledge that organic bodies as well as inorganic ones remain 'the same' only in appearance, and not strictly speaking. It is rather like a river whose water is continually changing, or like Theseus's ship that the Athenians were constantly repairing. But as for substances that possess in themselves a genuine, real substantial unity, substances that are capable of actions that can properly be called 'vital', substantial beings [...] that are animated by a certain indivisible spirit, one can rightly say that they remain perfectly the same individual in virtue of this soul or spirit that constitutes the I in substances that think." NE, II,27, § 4, 108-9.

²⁸ "If plants and brutes have no souls, then their identity is only apparent, but if they do have souls their identity is strictly genuine, although their organic bodies don't retain such an identity." NE, II,27, § 5, 109.

²⁹ *Remarks on Arnauld's Letter* in AG, 73.

as long as the properties of a person O2 existing at time t2 are the properties of the same subject as the properties of a person O1 existing at time t1. That is why, if one did not assume a permanent substantial subject, in which all properties are rooted, there would be no reason either for their interconnections or the authentic principle of unity between them. The unity and permanence of a person—from the beginning to the end of one's existence—can constitute themselves only thanks to the fact that consecutive properties belong to the same substantial subject.

Apart from this, Leibniz proves that all experiences of a person—both perceptible for consciousness (sensible perceptions, awarenesses) and non-perceptible for consciousness (insensible perceptions)—are included in the individual substance of each person, which is one's permanent subject: "I". While a person can lose consciousness—i.e. apperception of some of one's experiences—one cannot be entirely stripped of one's perceptions. In the end, it is the continuity of perceptions and interconnections between them that decide on the sameness of a person.

An immaterial being or spirit can't be stripped of all perception of its past existence. It retains impressions of everything that has previously happened to it, and it even has presentiments of everything that will happen to it; but these states of mind are mostly too tiny to be distinguishable and for one to be aware of them, although they may perhaps grow some day. It is this continuity and interconnection of perceptions that make someone really the same individual; but our awarenesses—i.e. when we are aware of past states of mind—prove a moral identity as well, and make the real identity appear.³⁰

Advancing the thesis about the necessity to accept the substantial foundation of personal identity, Leibniz did not focus only on metaphysical considerations. He believed that there were also other reasons for thinking about personal identity from the perspective of substantial continuity.³¹ As he claimed, the assumption that it is possible to stop being the same person only by virtue of not having a direct consciousness of one's experiences leads to absurd consequences and it is at odds with the natural conviction for several reasons. Firstly, if personal identity was based only on consciousness, its complete loss by a given person (e.g. as a result of an unfortunate accident) would mean the loss of personal identity. A person before and after an accident would be a completely different person. Secondly, if consciousness and

³⁰ NE, II,27, § 14.

³¹ Leibniz formulates these arguments mainly in his discussion with Locke.

memory were the only way personal identity can constitute itself, they would actually be all that constitutes a given person. It would lead to absurdity in the case when memory gaps were filled with false content.³²

Then, he accused the theory of personal identity without a substantial foundation of internal contradictoriness. Let us assume, Leibniz elaborated in *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, that, in some other part of the universe, there is a globe which does not differ sensibly from the earthly globe, which is inhabited by us, and that every person who lives there does not differ sensibly from any person on Earth who corresponds to him. This is how there are around four billion pairs of people with the same experiences and consciousness. Is each of these pairs one person or two people? It is not clear how to prevent the absurdity of the claim that two persons who live on two similar but infinitely remote globes are one and the same person based on the hypothesis that personal identity shall be decided solely by memory and consciousness without the need to refer to identity, or the diversity of the substance, or even without what appears to others.³³

Apart from this, Leibniz accused the above theory of misinterpreting certain practical situations. According to Locke, the theory of personal identity as the continuity of self-consciousness and consciousness of person's past experiences is universally in agreement with the practice adopted by legislators and judges. This is exactly why human law does not punish a madman—as Locke believes—for the deeds of a sane person and *vice versa* since it treats them as two separate persons. For Leibniz, this conception was totally erroneous. The essence of law is to threaten to punish any wrongdoing in order to prevent it. But an insane person is unable to recognize the significance of the rigour of punishment, which is why in that situation the law refrains from punishing a person for what he or she did when being sane. What legislators do in such circumstances, then, does not result from the fact that a given human being is regarded as two persons, but from the fact that the same person is now unable to accept (understand) the rigour of punishment.³⁴

According to Leibniz, all of these arguments establish a sufficient basis to recognize the continuity of substance as a necessary condition of personal identity. Only the claim that the substance of a person is the condition of personal identity saves the conception of a person from the above mentioned

³² Cf. NE, II,27, § 9.

³³ Cf. NE, II,27, § 23.

³⁴ Cf. NE, II,27, § 20.

problems. Obviously, it must not be concluded that a person is entirely limited to their substance. The continuity of substance is only the necessary condition pertaining to a personal being. One additional condition of personal identity is moral continuity, which, in contrast to real identity, is based on the continuity of self-consciousness (reflection) and consciousness of past experiences (memory). Here is how Leibniz himself summed up his analysis in *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*:

I have shown you the basis of true physical identity, and have shown that it doesn't [sic!] clash with moral identity or with memory either. And I have also shown that although moral identity and memory cannot always indicate a person's physical identity, to the person in question or to his acquaintances, they never run counter to physical identity and are never totally divorced from it. Finally, I have shown that there are always created spirits who do or can know the truth of the matter, and that there is reason to think that things that make no difference from the point of view of the persons themselves will do so only temporarily.³⁵

*

This is a comprehensive presentation of Leibniz's explanations which he advances in his doctrine. The construction of this line of argumentation, even though it is not without tensions, is coherent in its main strand. One unquestionable advantage of Leibniz's theory is the balance between metaphysical and psychological dimensions of personal identity. In this way, personal identity over time gains a strong metaphysical basis, which, however, does not undermine the prominent role that is played by self-consciousness and memory in the structure of a human being. The belief that personal identity is based, on the one hand, on the continuity of substance (substantial "I") and, on the other hand, on the continuity of self-consciousness and memory opens—so it seems—the way to a more comprehensive insight into the conditions of personal identity.

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³⁵ NE, II,27, § 29.

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LEIBNIZ — OSOBOWA IDENTYCZNOŚĆ I TOŻSAMOŚĆ SUBSTANCJI

Streszczenie

Teoria Leibniza na temat osobowej identyczności jest od dawna przedmiotem licznych sporów i rozbieżności interpretacyjnych. W niniejszym artykule zestawiam mój pogląd na temat tego, co faktycznie uważał Leibniz za podstawę bycia tą samą osobą z poglądem, który został sformułowany przez Margaret Wilson i Samuela Schefflera. Ich zdaniem Leibniz nie przedstawiał spójnej, jednolitej i przekonującej teorii osobowej identyczności. Jego stanowisko — jak utrzymują ci autorzy — zawiera w sobie zbyt wiele niekonsekwencji, aby można je było uznać za satysfakcjonujące rozwiązanie tego zagadnienia. Nie zgadzam się z tą opinią. W moim przekonaniu bardziej wnikliwy ogląd tekstów Leibniza pozwala stwierdzić, że nie ma podstaw do tak krytycznej oceny wyników Leibniza w kwestii osobowej identyczności. Artykuł składa się z dwóch części. W części pierwszej

— korzystając z sugestii podanych przez Vailatigo, Thiela, Noonana i Bobro — staram się przedstawić główne argumenty przeciwko interpretacji Wilson i Schefflera. W części drugiej poruszam dwie kwestie. Najpierw omawiam powody, które Leibniz wymieniał celem uzasadnienia tezy, że osobowa identyczność wymaga zarówno ciągłości substancji, jak i ciągłości pewnych fenomenów psychologicznych. Następnie przedstawiam argumenty Leibniza na rzecz tezy, że tym, co ostatecznie nadaje identyczność osobie, jest jej substancjalna zasada, czyli dusza lub „ja”.

LEIBNIZ: PERSONAL IDENTITY AND SAMENESS OF SUBSTANCE

Summary

Leibniz's theory of personal identity has been the object of numerous discussions and various interpretations. In the paper I contrast my view on Leibniz's solution to the problem of personal identity with the view of Margaret Wilson and Samuel Scheffler. They both claimed that Leibniz failed to formulate a coherent, uniform and tenable theory of personal identity. His stance – as they state – contains so many inconsistencies that it cannot be adopted as a satisfactory solution to this problem. I disagree with this opinion. It is my conviction that a more inquisitive analysis of Leibniz's texts leads to the conclusion that such severe criticism of the results of Leibniz's studies of personal identity is ill-founded. My paper consists of two parts. In the first part—drawing on suggestions made by Vailati, Thiel, Noonan, and Bobro—I attempt to present the essential arguments against the interpretation offered by M. Wilson and S. Scheffler. In the second part I address two issues. First, I try to discuss the reasons which Leibniz listed to support his thesis that personal identity requires both the continuity of substance and the continuity of some psychological phenomena. Then, I turn to identifying Leibniz's arguments which support the thesis that what ultimately provides a person with identity is their substantial principle, i.e. the soul or “I.”

Słowa kluczowe: Leibniz; osobowa identyczność; substancja; tożsamość; samoświadomość; pamięć.

Key words: Leibniz; personal identity; person; substance; sameness; self-consciousness; memory.

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