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## LINGUISTIC FOUNDATION OF LEIBNIZIAN PROJECT OF MODERNISATION OF THE COUNTRY

On September 26<sup>th</sup> 2005 in the German media started a social patriotic campaign. In best air time TV stations broadcasted first advertising spot with the slogan 'Germany is you'. The campaign was to make citizens of this country, tormented by depression and medicine and the fear about the future, regain the sense of identity and believe in their possibilities building new quality of patriotism and national pride. Disputes over the campaign revealed that in Germany it is still difficult to administer pride of own country and it is hard to talk about that openly, even though organizers of the campaign while summing up the enterprise<sup>1</sup> in February 2006 proved its spectacular success.

This is not the first time that the issue of reconstruction of confidence in power and creative potential of the nation occurs in the long German history. Contemporary crisis of identity, lack of trust in the elites in power is, as underlined by commentators, a result of stagnation of economy and also the demons of the past still present in collective memory, makes it difficult to speak at the top of one's voice about the glory and power and give in to the wave of optimistic propaganda of success. It is worth mentioning that the memory of inglorious past cannot shade bright cards of German history and that pride of certain achievements cannot always be understood as nationalism. Germans are only just learning internal balance and great media machine succours them reminding 'You are Beethoven!', 'You are Einstein!' 'You are Porsche!'. This is a pity that any of the slogans reminds 'You are Leibniz!', which would pay off a debt that the organisers of the campaign owe Wilhelm Gottfried Leibniz, the originator of a similar enterprise who at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries using incomparably

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<sup>1</sup> "Gazeta Wyborcza", No. 225, 4928, September 27<sup>th</sup> 2005, "Polityka", No. 6 (2541), February 11<sup>th</sup> 2006.

more modest means engaged in struggle for cultural rebirth of the nation by presenting a program of repair of the country in his treatise *Unvorgreifliche Gedancken, betreffend di Ausübung und Verbesserung der Teutschen Sprache* – which might mislead an unprepared reader.

The treatise is, similarly to many other texts about the German language, situated in philological and etymological trend of research undertaken by Leibniz, and by tradition it became mainly a subject of interest of the representatives of German philology. First Leibniz's publisher, Johann Georg Eckhart contributed to this by including the treatise into a book entitled *Leibnitii Collectanea Etymologica*, published after Leibniz's death in 1717<sup>2</sup>. It is worth mentioning that this collection of works comprises, apart from the above mentioned treatise, only few texts by Leibniz himself, even though it might be assumed that the remaining texts were inspired by his ideas. A detailed editorial and philological analysis of the *Unvorgreifliche Gedancken* text is presented by Paul Pietsch in the introduction to and conclusion of a canonical edition of the treatise in *Wissenschaftliche Beihefte zur Zeitschrift des Allgemeinen Deutschen Sprachvereins*<sup>3</sup>, which is slightly different from the text published by Eckhart, not only because it was transcribed but mainly because it contains 5 more points ending the treatise which were not included in its first edition. This is not entirely clear as far as the circumstances of creation of this text are concerned, researchers assume that it was written at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, after 1697.<sup>4</sup>

The work appreciated by philologists did not live to see recognition in the circles of researchers engaged in Leibnizian language philosophy. Certain reference to its content might be found in the works of Marcello Dascal<sup>5</sup> and Hans Aarsleff, the authors of contemporary and most frequently cited monographs; Hide Ishiguro and Benson Mates pass over it in silence. Moreover, the treatise has never become the subject of critical analysis of researchers interested in Leibniz's political philosophy although it might be treated as sort of a political manifest of the philosopher who throughout his life was above all a professional diplomat. It is not mentioned either in an extremely

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<sup>2</sup> G. W. Leibnitii, *Collectanea Etymologica, illustrationi linguarum, veteri celticae, germanicae, gallicae, aliarum inservientia, cum praefatione Hohannis Georgii Eccardi, Hannoverae 1717*.

<sup>3</sup> Heft 30, April 1908, pp. 313–356.

<sup>4</sup> See H. Aarsleff, *The Study and Use of Etymology in Leibniz*, in: H. Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, Athlone, London 1982, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup> This is a book, among others mentioned in the above footnote, by Aarsleff and also a book by M. Dascal, *Leibniz, Language, Signs and Thought*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam–Philadelphia 1987.

detailed biography of the philosopher by E. J. Aiton, British researcher and expert in Leibnitz.

It is sure that *Unvorgreifliche Gedancken* is a text which reflects comprehensiveness of research interests of the author and is also the expression of his philosophical convictions in the field of theoretical reflection on language, expression of his etymological passion, great methodological awareness in the domain of arrangement of material data and above all his political attitude, which is brought to light through concern for intellectual and cultural condition of the German nation.

The treatise similarly to *Monadologie* and *Principles of Nature and Grace* was formulated in points during few days as Leibniz writes in the last 114 point. Written hurriedly under the influence of a moment the treatise is however, characterised by maturity of thought and great condensation of content not free of emotional, persuasive arguments.

It might be speculated that the inspiration for this project was awareness of participation in a crisis period in history of the nation. The history of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Germany is the history of a struggle for survival. It was both survival in the political sense and also, or maybe above all, cultural survival and rebirth. It seems that the assertion that people living in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Europe treated war rather than peace as a normal state, is not false. However, all wars were inferior in their reach and consequences to a phenomenon known as the 'Thirty Years' War'. This war in which all the Great European Powers were involved was waged on the lands of the great German Empire. It resulted in enormous material losses, loss of population, collapse of crafts and commerce, it also impressed its stamp on cultural life of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Germany.

The period of war and the following years tend to be called, with a certain exaggeration, a time of deepest cultural crisis of this nation.<sup>6</sup>

The Peace of Westfalia which ended the Thirty years' War signed in Munster in 1648 was – according to historians – the beginning of disintegration of the Reich and opened to France the way to 40 years domination in Europe manifested not only by political but also cultural supremacy.

Latin which remained the language of university circles was the official language of German science, whereas French became the language of enlightened intellectual elites, courtly circles and influential art milieus. Germans alike other European nations succumbed to French replacing the Latin, which created a bond connecting the European community, with the langu-

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<sup>6</sup> See A. Mączak (ed.), *Europa i świat w początkach nauki epoki nowożytnej*, part II, Publisher cited, pp. 98–135.

age of their enemy. 'If our ancestors returned to this world, – wrote Christian Thomasius in his dissertation *Von Nachahmung der Franzosen* (*Dissertation on the Imitation of the French*, 1667) – they would no longer recognize us. We have become degenerates and bastards. Today everything here must be French. French clothes, dishes, language; French customs and French vices'.<sup>7</sup>

Leibniz's text meets halfway the general feeling of depression and decadence and is a carefully thought out project of restoration of the country which starts with repair and improvement of the German language.

First come the arguments of political character. According to Leibniz, the German nation as the German Empire is at the head of all Christian nations and its dignity and privileges rest with its leader. Protection of the true faith, jurisdiction of the Catholic Church and propagation of the good of the whole Christianity is the responsibility of Habsburg Emperor. That is why he is the unquestionable leader of other great nations.<sup>8</sup> He stated also that since science became a power and military discipline was instituted in Germany, German courage in great victories over the Eastern and Western enemies, given by the God was noticed. The majority of these victories were won by Germans.<sup>9</sup> Leibniz refers here to great tradition created by heroic heroes present in historical memory of the nation, he says openly: we were great, we are great and we will be great, we are obliged to be as such by historic secular mission of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. He also adds that it would be shameful and scandalous if German, the language of heroes, died as a consequence of omission. Acceptance of a foreign language carries with it inevitable shackles and loss of freedom.<sup>10</sup>

However, it is worth noticing that Leibniz's arguments, even though highly emotional, are built on a rational foundation and only seemingly sound with a note of nationalist demagogy. One of the most important assumptions of Leibnizian argumentation is the first sentence of the treatise in which appears a metaphor of a language as a mirror of the mind. Leibniz uses this metaphor repeatedly in his works, and one that is most frequently quoted is present in *New Essays on Human Understanding* written a few years later. Probably for the first time Leibniz had expressed his conviction that language is the clearest mirror of understanding, in his work entitled *Ermahnung an die Teutsche ihren Verstand und Sprache besser zu üben*, of the early eighties of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>7</sup> Ch. Thomasius, *Von Nachahmung der Francosen, Nach den Ausgaben von 1687 und 1701*, Stuttgart 1894.

<sup>8</sup> *Unförgreifliche Gedanken*, point 3, from now on cited as UG and the point.

<sup>9</sup> UG, 4.

<sup>10</sup> UG, 21.

It is a fact that Leibnizian attitude towards language is most accurately described by this metaphor on which Leibnizian language philosophy is built, and it might be without hesitation assumed, his cognition theory. If language is the best mirror of the mind it means that analysis of language matter should lead to recognizing the mechanisms of thinking. Language skill just as skill of thinking are functions of the same powers, the same tendency (endeavor, appetite, conatus), which distinguishes humans from other creatures. Such an assumption permits to think that any natural language system might be the subject of analysis. This results from the fact that every language may 'reflect' the natural order of ideas which potentially belong to intellectual equipment of all substance which is able to call oneself 'Me'.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed this conclusion is confirmed in several Leibniz's statements which concern the relation between language and thinking and knowledge accumulated in the language. Let us quote here an excerpt of *Analysis linguarum* of September 11<sup>th</sup> 1678 where Leibniz writes that since there are many languages and each is suitable for transmitting knowledge, it suffices to consider one language: each nation in reality is able to discover and cultivate sciences.<sup>12</sup> Thus, independently from on which level of development is a given language community it is able to make discoveries and to record the intellectual process in the language. Such a thesis actually constitutes the basis of classical social anthropology.<sup>13</sup> Admittedly, language when analysed from historical perspective, records – as Leibniz admits – the history of our discoveries, the evidence of which is the example of people opting for Copernicus who keep on saying that the sun rises and sets, it does not, however weaken his conviction that languages are the best mirror of human mind and that precise analysis of the meaning of words would allow, more than anything else, to know the activity of the reason.<sup>14</sup>

The role which Leibniz attributes to linguistic signs in the process of cognition is absolutely fundamental. In fact, the summary of Leibnizian semiotics is found in points 5, 6, 7, and 8 of the treatise. Firstly, he assumes

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<sup>11</sup> See H. Świączkowska, *Harmonia Linguarum. Język i jego funkcje w filozofii Leibniza*, Białystok 1998, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> Leibniz, *Opuscules et Fragments Inédits de Leibniz*, extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque royale de Hanovre par Louis Couturat, Paris 1903 (repr. Hildesheim 1961, p. 352).

<sup>13</sup> Compare B. Malinowski, "Kultura", in: A. Paluch, *Malinowski*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1981, pp. 153–154.

<sup>14</sup> G. W. Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, trans. P Remnant, J. Bennet, 1969, Cambridge University Press, BK III, § 5. UG, § 1.

that words are not only symbols of thoughts but also of objects, thus we need symbols not only to transmit our opinions to others but also to improve our own thinking. Secondly, he notices that we frequently use words as if they were tokens instead of using images or objects, we gradually approach the result through deduction to get to the heart of the matter. Thus, word as a model or a promissory note of the mind should be well designed, well isolated, sufficient, frequent, fluent and acceptable. Thirdly, he proves that these well designed signs become the basis for exclusively symbolic process of thinking, similar to mathematical calculation. Application of signs gives new possibilities to cognition and what is more they become the characteristic trait of the ability to understand. It might be said, with no hesitation, that Leibniz, more than his contemporaries, perceived a human as *animal symbolicum* and even though he never defined human as such it might be assumed that, despite disagreement, Leibniz shared, to a certain extent, Hobbes's opinion that without language (speech) something which is purely a human attribute, namely intellect, does not exist.

In point 59 of Leibniz's treatise returns the motif present in *Analysis linguarum*, where he writes that every language no matter how poor is able to express everything; even though there existed barbarian people to which it was not possible to explain the Word of God. Even though everything might be expressed through periphrasis or description, all pleasure and significance escape when an utterance is lengthened. He compares it to showing around a palace and discussing every corner or to counting, like people which according to Weigelian treatise, could only count to three and did not have the words and symbols to express 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, etc.

It might be therefore assumed that Leibniz, the author of genealogical classification of languages, aware of differences between languages especially on historical grounds attributed to them identical cognitive functions not dividing them into 'better' or 'worse'. This view is at variance with other statements of the philosopher, for it is easy to prove that he was not different from Goropius Becantus whom he criticized repeatedly when propagating the superiority of the German language over other languages both as far as it concerned their cognitive and historical-cultural aspects and proving that German was the closest to the primary language in its perfect form, and that it was particularly adapted to philosophy.<sup>15</sup> It seems that this inconsistency is most revealed between the general language theory which origins are especially present in the text related to cognition and representation theory,

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<sup>15</sup> See. G. W. Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften von G. W. Leibniz*, vol. VII, ed. C. I. Gerhardt, Halle 1849–1863 (repr. Hildesheim 1960), vol. IV, p. 144.

and his views related to language, formulated on the basis of his historical and comparative research. Historians of language claim that Leibniz in his hypothesis about the beginnings of the German language was under the same illusion which deluded researchers he used to criticise. It is worth emphasizing that the argument of ‘superiority’ does not appear in any of the points of the discussed text. Moreover, while presenting the program of repairing and rebuilding of the language, first of all the philosopher highlights the insufficiency and defects which should be eliminated from the German language. He points out the lack of adequate terminology in many specialistic disciplines. Latin, the official language of science, is to blame in this case. However, Leibniz notices that it is not the lack of abilities of Germans but the lack of their goodwill that prevents them from perfecting the language. For if, as he writes, “everything that a plain man does can be expressed in German, undoubtedly, the things that are more suitable for remarkable and educated people, if they only wanted, could be expressed very well or even better in the pure German.”<sup>16</sup>

Perfecting the nomenclature and the process of enrichment of a language, apart from already mentioned disciplines, concerns also morality, psychology, manners, management, service, and state and internal politics as well as the law. Leibniz notices the need for protecting and rebuilding German being not only the language of everyday communication (he draws attention of his fellow-citizens to avoid indecent words and expressions<sup>17</sup>), but above all as state language, official language of power and administration.

Leibniz treats language as a sick living organism. He gives the causes of the illness, he diagnoses and prescribes a treatment. Institutional activities are an important element of the therapy, they engage influential and educated representatives of the superior social strata. Leibniz appreciates the contribution of German language associations in the protection and rebuilding of the German language. He reminds that elementary slogans of their activity were richness, purity and clarity of language. However, even though he agrees with the general idea of work of associations, he criticises the methods, claiming that their members went too far in their zeal to clean the language from every foreign influence.

Program of repairing should include all applications of a language. Leibniz, ardent partisan of common education, appealed to scholars to present their research in their native language and to translate the texts of prominent authors. The nation, according to his opinion, was kept from education

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<sup>16</sup> UG, 10.

<sup>17</sup> UG, 81.

for too long. Real scholars should not be afraid of their national language, especially because the more their knowledge is accessible the more there are witnesses of their greatness. A well developed language resembles to a well polished glass, raises the acuity of thought, and gives a transparent lucidity to mind. It is worth adding, by the way, that we find in this text extremely interesting observations concerning translatability of languages which would require a separate and detailed discussion.

Realisation of the programme should be supported by well-organised institutional activity. Leibniz, enthusiast of the idea of research associations, academic movement which overwhelmed the 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, led in 1700 to creation of the Berlin Academy of Science. One of the statutory goals of the Academy was consolidation of the renown, prosperity and significance of the German nation, learning and language. Despite the fact that creation of the Academy was Leibniz's personal success, his aspirations went far beyond that. General access to education according to him could be guaranteed only by scientific associations – modern centres of research and popularising activity which should be created in various cities of the Empire and the coordinator of which would be the Academy of Science.

It is difficult to overestimate Leibniz's contribution to rebirth of cultural unity of German nation the source of which became the language reflecting both its power and collapse. Paul Hazard wrote that 'the theory of racial superiority had not yet come to the fore. The profound significance of the expressions "native land" had not been fully gauged. No nation had been formed as yet of the dynamic potentialities of the idea of nationality',<sup>18</sup> but the importance of the most significant binder which for people forming a certain community is language. If the arguments about an extraordinary philosophical mission of the German language and its almost paradisiacal origins are left aside, *Unvorgreifliche Gedancken...* appears to be a universal treatise on history and culture of a nation. Leibniz, when writing about intellectual potential of his nation makes the readers aware that it is activated through language since language is a sine qua non of any knowledge.

Leibniz was not privileged to enjoy the range of influence of his thought. The treatise similarly to *New Essays*, was published posthumously but one did not have to wait a century for Kant, Goethe and Schiller to prove this wonderful force hidden in their language. Johann Gottfried Herder, one of the most prominent representatives of the German Enlightenment, argued, referring to Leibnizian legacy, that most beautiful attempt to explore the

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<sup>18</sup> P. Hazard, *The European mind 1680–1717*, trans. By J. Lewis May, Penguin books, 1964, p. 443.

history or characterise the diversity of human intellect and heart would be philosophical comparison of languages, since it reflects intellect and character of a nation. Finally, an architectonics of human concepts would emerge from that, the best logics and metaphysics of common sense. The laurel is still available and in due time it will be won by another Leibniz.<sup>19</sup>

#### S U M M A R Y

The article describes Leibnizian project of modernisation of the country based on a reform of the language and intellectual reconstruction of German society. The project results directly from Leibnizian epistemology and philosophy of language. His vision of the state is tightly connected to the concept of society based on knowledge. Knowledge is above all archived in a language and language is the best mirror of the mind for a philosopher. The subject of analysis is a short Leibniz's treatise *Unvorgreifliche Gedancken*, interpreted by the author in the context of the philosopher's political thought.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.textlog.de/herder-menschheit.html>. <http://www.odysseetheatet.comgothe/herder/idee.html>.