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Language as the Mirror of World Order.
On the 370th Anniversary of the Birth of G.W. Leibniz
and 300th Anniversary of his Death

University of Białystok Publishing House, Białystok 2016, pp. 152

The book consists of an introduction, six chapters (I. Language as a mirror of the mind; II. On the metaphysical status of language; III. Cognitive functions of language; IV. Language as a mirror of culture; V. On some of the assumptions of Leibniz's programme of enlightened society; VI. The *Leibnizian Unvorgreifliche Gedancken* as a political treatise), and Bibliography.

I. Prof. Świączkowska in her 2016 book remarkably presaged and highlighted the relevance of Leibniz's three-century old philosophy of language to the contemporary world order. It is this perspective from which this book's reviewer will seek to assess the viability of her text, which otherwise reflects in its own right on Leibniz's philosophy of language in his own century.

For the contemporary world order two departure points are important: the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 2016 United Nations Declaration "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". In these two legal instruments words like "freedom" and "peace" appear as often as they do in Leibniz's works. Consequently, instead of reviewing her book solely in strictly conceptual and methodical terms, I will rather address it considering language as the mirror of contemporary world order pursued by the United Nations. For already in the introduction to the book, H. Świączkowska emphasizes that "[f]or Leibniz, science has an internationalistic dimension...Leibniz...reveals himself as a thinker

who recognizes the importance of a national language as the most crucial carrier for all civilization issues...because only the language, on one hand, guarantees communication leading to social unity, on the other hand, contributes to proper understanding of rights ruling the society and the world by the community” (pp. 11-12).

Correct and principled as her interpretation is, she has not reflected on the fact that with the lapse of time language undergoes changes due to the changing worldview, even as to such an extreme point that – occasionally – “black” may be taken for “white”. This modification was first noted by George Lakoff, a U.S. cognitive linguist and philosopher, taught by oft mentioned by H. Świączkowska Noam Chomsky, a modern linguist, later his conceptual adversary. Lakoff argues that even within one language community the “alphabet” of words or phrases may have an opposite meaning, or receive socio-politically divisive connotations.¹ The language instead of becoming internationalistic communicates nationalistic values.

In this regard, Lakoff gives examples of conservative and liberal English-language vocabulary from the United States, but – surely – there are functional equivalents of his language examples in German or Polish. Using partly his examples, partly mine, below are a few “black/white” reversals that confuse if not almost inadvertently contrast the understanding of rights ruling the society and the world by the community *vis à vis* refugees and migration.

For the conservatives (“republicans”/“populists”/“patriarchalists”), such words and phrases matter, as here alphabetically ordered:

abuse of welfare benefits, architecture of fear, against needle exchange programmes for drug abusers, authority, barbarians, character, competition, conflict of cultures, consequences to cultural identity, corruption, crime, death penalty, decay, discipline, degenerate, deviant, earn, egoism, elite, enterprise, family, fear, fertility, freedom, get tough, hard work, heritage, honour, human nature, individual responsibility, interference, invasion, intrusion, life style, local values, loyalty to a country, meddling, nationalism, parallel societies, patriotism, punishment, quotas, race, religion, reward, rot, self-reliance, specificity, standards, strong, tough love, terrorism, tradition, safety, security, self-reliance, technical assistance, welfare dependency, virtue.

Liberals (“democrats”/“contractualists”) use the following words and phrases: abuse of migrant rights, altruism, basic human dignity, care, chauvinism, “citizenization”, commonality, concern, consensus, cooperation, critical thinking, cultural identities, deprivation, diversity, ecology, emancipation, ethnic discrimination, equal rights, evidence-based, feminization of poverty, drug abuse needle exchange programmes, free expression, health, help, human rights, migrant as a contributor to country’s welfare, multiculturalism, oppression, otherness, participation, post-mo-

1 G. Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, Third Edition, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 30.

dernism, polyvalence of cultures, safer cities, technical assistance “for” receiving countries, totalitarianism, social forces, social responsibility, tolerance, welfare benefits, victimization.

II. In chapter I, the author emphasizes that for Leibnitz language is the finest mirror of the mind that enables one to recognize the mechanisms of the process of thinking itself. In the opinion of Leibnitz and hers, this is a starting point for the understanding of why our mind occasionally takes “black” for “white”. She seconds Leibnitz’s view that our mind is occasionally unable to differentiate between “*cognito obscura*” and “*cognito clara*”. However, eventually it can arrive at the latter, if we are able to give the mind the opportunity to activate the ideas implying “certain necessary truths” that play the role in the mindful cognition (pp. 20; 23-25). Such a view must have accompanied the framers of the 2030 Declaration who emphasized in it its transforming character, and on a certain necessary truth that we all are one human-kind that has one – metaphorically speaking – “language of justice”.

III. In chapter II that appears to me the most incisive and intellectually challenging, H. Świączkowska analyses Leibnitz’s understanding of language. She quotes his view that “languages are the best mirror of the human mind and that the precise analysis of the meaning of words would tell us more than anything else about the operations of the understanding” and comparative studies of the grammars and vocabularies of different languages would be “highly useful both for understanding things, as their names often correspond with their qualities (...), as well as for understanding our mind and the marvellous diversity of its operation” (pp. 43-44).

As shown in section I of this review, this is not necessarily true but withstands Lakoff’s argument that occasionally words imply different qualities than principally meant.

What makes Leibnitz’s philosophy of language rather disconnected with the United Nations’, and surely disconnected with Lakoff’s interpretation of language, is Leibnitz’s dynamic spiritual understanding which arises from his theory of substances (pp. 44-49). In going through these very complex passages of Leibnitz’s philosophy, H. Świączkowska brings to the reader’s attention his views about the connection between the body and the soul. Understanding it, she emphasizes, opens the avenue for understanding Leibnitz’s relationship between the body and the mind that uses a natural language. She quotes his speculation that “although it is possible that a soul has a body made up of animated parts or of separate souls, the soul or the form of the whole is not, therefore, composed of souls or forms of parts” (p. 59).

This speculation comes from Leibnitz – a deeply religious person. He held that everything goes harmoniously by degrees in nature and eventually should lead to knowledge of God. God is a single source of truth (pp. 53 and 65).

The United Nations’ view of “living in harmony with nature” (Sustainable Development Goal/SDG 12.8) does not impinge on Leibnitz’s spiritual speculation. Although as a Lutheran who turned down an offer to become Vatican librarian as it

would have necessitated a conversion to Catholicism (pp. 139-140), he nevertheless held remarkably ecumenical views, very close to their secular parallels in the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Agenda, whose guardian, the Secretary-General said: "I firmly believe in the power of faith leaders to shape our world for good".²

Both authorities see no conflict between faith and reason. They seem to have taken the no-conflict approach to the limit, thus joining together what is incompatible in the minds of others. Right or wrong, what I find missing in this book is that its author did not pronounce herself on the contemporary evidence-based approach to the same issue of faith and reason explored through research conducted by the US developmental psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987), his followers and critics.³ Hard to believe, but their findings suggest that people regardless of one or another legal culture progress through the same stages of moral development, possibly up to its transcendental stage. Especially the latter stage seems to strengthen the harmonious and transcendental view of faith and reason by Leibnitz, while the worldview of the Secretary-General is not incompatible with it. Consequently, the reviewed book that dwells so much on and celebrates the German philosopher's (non)secular insights at least should have referred to Kohlberg's tested theory, thus making Leibnitz's conclusion more tenable.

IV. In the next chapter, Świączkowska starts with Leibnitz's emphasis of the existence of the fundamental national differences, but not "better" or "worse" because all nations are equal with one another (pp. 92-93). I find this Westphalian peace *credo* evergreen, even though the chapter is only about Leibnitz's fundamental work for the rebirth of German language after that peace, so as to give his country an equal standing among other European countries, in his time all dominated by France. Here, he reportedly expresses a seminal view that "[n]othing good can result from adopting a foreign language, and there is a danger of losing freedom" (p. 104).

As Very true a this Leibnitz's quote in Świączkowska's book is, in her own rather broad comments on this particular philosophical/linguistic endeavour of Leibnitz, she neglects the fact that some natural languages may not have functional equivalents of what is meant in other natural languages. The most vivid example of the absence of some civilizing ideas was delivered in the 1930s by Benjamin Lee Word, a hobby linguist. He then observed among the Hopi Indians (USA) that the word "empty drum" (a drum originally filled with petrol) for non-indigenous Americans implied the re-

2 Secretary-General's remarks on the launch of the Fez Plan of Action, 14 July 2017, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2017-07-14/secretary-generals-remarks-launch-fez-plan-action-delivered> (15.05. 2019).

3 See H. Kury, S. Redo, *Refugees and Migrants in Law and Policy. Challenges and Opportunities for Global Civic Education*, Springer, Heidelberg 2018, p. 27-28.

maining presence of a highly explosive vapour. However, for the Indians (incidentally, cigarette smokers) it meant that drum absolutely void (“empty=harmless”).⁴

Some cultures lack words for an idea: they do not have a concept of that idea. They are not a carrier for transmitting civilization issues, so translating “freedom” or other words from the United Nations or – let alone – a developed country vocabulary of words into the Hopi language, and making it work there will at the start do little to change this fact.

V. Finally, in the two last chapters the book’s author analyses Leibnitz’ secular programme of enlightened society and his patriotic ideas regarding the protection and development of the whole cultural legacy of German people. In my opinion, the sequence of the chapters should be reversed, not only because the present last chapter deals with his “pigeon-holed” project that has received little attention in Germany (p. 145), but because writing about Leibnitz’s intercultural legacy work should crown the book and orientate its international readers towards the prospects of a common *lingua franca* for the world order.

In line with the above re-prioritization, and in the spirit of *lingua franca*, I find Świączkowska’s review of Leibnitz’s public information/librarian ideas and work very revealing – in a way a proto-type for the 2030 United Nations SDG 16.10 “Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements”. The book’s author emphasizes that for Leibnitz “the key the happiness of humanity is a common action of the scholarly community which will contribute to the development of all societies and their secure future. This co-operation of people of science is possible thanks to the web of integrated libraries, learned societies and academics”. Does this sound familiar to us living in the 21st century, notwithstanding that its enlightening power is being overshadowed by populism? *Habemus cognito clara?*

I wish that everybody concerned with language and democracy could draw his/her own intellectually progressive inspiration from Prof. Świączkowska’s unusually relevant book for the world’s secure future.

4 *Ibidem.*