Preface

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Leibniz's investigations into the structures of both natural and artificial languages, and into the impact of language use on human cognition, are widely acknowledged to have achieved real breakthroughs with respect to the standard early modern assumptions about these topics. Leibniz linked his linguistic interests with his views on mental activity by expounding the idea that language plays a fundamental role not only in communication but also in human cognition, insofar as words and signs in general serve as the indispensable thread for human thought. He used this insight into the linguistic component of thought to approach semantic phenomena such as metaphorical speech and 'empty' words or phrases, as well as psychological phenomena such as cognitive errors and the weakness of the will. Furthermore, his views on psycho-physical parallelism led him to explore the hypothesis that even abstract, conceptual representations have a physical counterpart in the human brain insofar as they are necessarily verbalized in a language or expressed in any other system of perceptible symbols.

Only a small number of Leibniz's writings on these topics were published during his lifetime. Most were posthumously discovered during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, while several manuscripts remain unpublished. This state of affairs has fostered a tendency to consider Leibniz's contributions to the philosophy of language and cognition a sort of hidden treasure that can hardly have exercised any direct historical influence, given that scholars were only able to discover and appreciate it much later. However justified

in terms of the history of manuscripts, this picture has the drawback of obscuring how much Leibniz's ideas on language and cognition actually contributed to shaping our modernity by inspiring or influencing diverse – sometimes even opposite – philosophical trends. On the one hand, his universalistic assumptions – primarily concerning the possibility to discover the alphabet of human thoughts, the rational grammar, and the Universal Character – fuelled various modern attempts to unveil the genuine, logical form of propositions, to describe the deep structure of languages, and to introduce an artificial notation for the perspicuous expression of thoughts. On the other hand, his recurring emphasis on the linguistic or generally symbolic character of blind thought became a prominent source for later accounts of higher cognitive activities as dependent on language acquisition and therefore influenced by the specific language acquired. Thus, even the origins of so-called linguistic relativity could be traced back to some Leibnizian ideas.

This collection of studies aims, first, to expand our knowledge of Leibniz's views on language and its cognitive function; and, second, to reassess Leibniz's significance for the contemporary philosophy of language and mind. It includes five research articles, a commented edition of a late text by Leibniz, and the first edition of P.F. Strawson's lectures on Leibniz.

One thing that Leibniz has in common with twentieth-century philosophers of language is a long-standing interest in empty terms – linguistic expressions and phrases which appear to be perfectly meaningful even though they fail to denote anything possible. Two articles in this volume address Leibniz's reflections on such terms and related issues from the logical-metaphysical and the cognitive-epistemic point of view, respectively. Filippo Costantini considers the apparently exceptional status of 'nothing' (*nihil*) in Leibniz's logical calculi as an empty term which may nevertheless enter true propositions. According to Costantini, it is possible to make better sense of Leibniz's treatment of *nihil* by using the resources of contemporary logic, and specifically by adopting the formal system known as Positive Free Logic. This approach also provides a fresh evaluation of the vexed issue of the ontological status of Leibniz's infinitesimals, as well as of Leibniz's proof of God's existence from the *ex nihilo* principle.

Another proof of God's existence, namely the Cartesian *a priori* argument, famously led Leibniz to discover the cognitive role that linguistic (and generally symbolic) expressions play in human reasoning. Observing that Cartesian introspection fails to discriminate between descriptions like 'the most perfect being', which should express the true idea of God, and empty terms like 'the fastest motion' or 'the number of all numbers', Leibniz realized that our thought often uses signs instead of ideas. Lucia Oliveri reconstructs Leibniz's anti-Cartesian argument by focusing on what she calls 'conceivabil-

ity errors' and by highlighting how essential imagination is to the process of symbolic cognition.

A further link that makes it theoretically possible and historically justified to connect Leibniz with later philosophers of language concerns his doctrine of propositions as the bearers of truth and falsehood. Indeed, Bernard Bolzano took Leibniz's concept of 'possible thought' or 'proposition' to be the immediate precedent of his own concept of 'proposition in itself' (*Satz an sich*), which is currently assumed to have inspired Frege's concept of 'thought'.[1] Frege's distinction between propositional content and assertive force is the starting point of Jean-Baptiste Rauzy's investigation into the Leibnizian corpus. By investigating the nature of Leibniz's propositions, his reduction of propositions to terms and vice-versa, and his complex attitude toward Spinoza's view that all ideas involve some affirmation, Rauzy outlines the various facets of what could be regarded as a Leibnizian position on the Frege Point.

There is a tendency to assume that the close link between the philosophy of language and the philosophy of mind is a distinctive feature of contemporary research. Eros Corazza and Chris Genovesi suggest that the language-based approach to the mental may in fact have older roots. Leibniz's famous claim that "languages are the best mirror of the human mind" (Leibniz 1996, 333) raises the question of whether and how he took the study of languages to be relevant to the study of the mind. Although Leibniz did not have our concept of so-called pure indexicals, he considered the use of the pronoun 'I' to be relevant to his monadology. Corazza and Genovesi argue that he somehow came close to the view that the first-person indexical plays an essential function in our cognitive and behavioral economy.

From the mid-1670s, Leibniz focused on how language can be connected with both thought and reality in order to solve issues concerning the nature of truth and counter the challenge posed by Hobbesian radical nominalism. Massimo Mugnai argues that Leibniz's famous 1677 doctrine that characters and things enter a relation of mutual correspondence or proportion can be fully understood in light of his later reflections about the origin of natural languages and about the syntactic and semantic properties of linguistic particles. Prepositions, in particular, are key to Leibniz's non-relavistic account of truth, in that they express the same human perceptions of spatial relations in different languages.

Leibniz's interest in the origins and history of natural languages and in the structure of language families did not wane in the final years of his life. Stefano Gensini provides the first commented edition of a late text Leibniz composed in 1714 for John Chamberlayne's

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[1] On this Leibniz-Bolzano-Frege connection, see Favaretti Camposampiero 2018, 79-80.

1715 multilingual collection of the *oratio dominica*. Gensini's introduction sheds light on the historical circumstances of this composition and argues for its significance in the context of Leibniz's linguistic and especially methodological research, as well as in relation to early eighteenth-century debates.

The final piece in the present collection is the hitherto unpublished manuscript of P.F. Strawson's lectures on Leibniz, which date back to the very beginning of Strawson's academic career. Information about these lectures and their biographical context can be gathered from his recently published "Intellectual Autobiography" (2011, 227-56). After serving for six years in the Royal Artillery during the Second World War, in the summer of 1946 Strawson was demobilized and pursued his pre-war ambition for an academic career. Following the advice of John Mabbott (his former tutor), he applied for a post at the University College of North Wales, Bangor. Upon his appointment as Assistant Lecturer in Philosophy, he set himself "to some hard reading in subjects on which [he] was to lecture – particularly philosophy of logic [...] and Kant's moral philosophy" (Strawson 2011, 230). While at Bangor, he became "deeply concerned with the matter of singular reference and predication, and their objects – a topic which", he writes, "has remained central in my thought throughout my working life" (Strawson 2011, 231). In this period, as well as later in Oxford, he combined a special focus on "questions in the philosophy of logic and the philosophy of language" (ibid.) with a serious interest in early modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant. His Spring 1947 lectures on Leibniz belong to this early stage in his academic career:

> In the course of my year at Bangor I also lectured on the philosophy of Leibniz (studied mainly in the Gerhardt edition) and on ethics in general; and wrote two papers, one an attempt to solve the problem of the 'paradoxes of entailment', the other an attack on ethical intuitionism. (Strawson 2011, 230)

As is well known, Strawson's acquaintance with Leibniz's philosophical works was to play a prominent role in one of his most significant books. In the subsequent decade, Strawson wrote *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, whose First Part ends with a chapter (Strawson 1959, ch. 4: "Monads") examining "the brilliantly conceived and finally impossible Leibnizian ontology of monads" (Strawson 2011, 234). Strawson's reading of Leibniz and especially his criticism of the latter's account of individuation have proved to be of continuing interest not only to historians of early modern thought and early analytic philosophy, but also to scholars of analytic met-

aphysics.[2] We trust that the publication of Strawson's "Leibniz Lectures" will contribute to a better understanding of his long-standing concern with Leibnizian thought.

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2 Among recent contributions, see Poser 1986; Rossi 1986; Englebretsen 1987; Brown 1990; Pruss 1998; Ryan 1999; Carrara 2002; Martinello 2007 and Debuiche 2019.