

# PREFACE TO THE FRENCH EDITION<sup>1</sup>

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NICHOLAS GRIFFIN, *Introduction*  
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*In 1908 a French translation of Russell's book on Leibniz was published for which Russell wrote a short preface, published here for the first time in English. Russell's early philosophical work initially attracted more professional attention in France than in England. An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry (1897) was widely reviewed and commented upon in France, and a French translation appeared in 1901. In this Russell had the enthusiastic help of Louis Couturat, who had energetically promoted Russell's work on geometry and, later, on the principles of mathematics in France. But Couturat, rather surprisingly, does not seem to have played a role in having Russell's book on Leibniz translated. The person who was instrumental in that was Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939). It was he who persuaded French publisher, Félix Alcan, to publish an English translation of Russell's book and who encouraged Jean Ray (1884–1943), then a student at the Sorbonne, to translate it. He also contributed a preface of his own to the work. Although Lévy-Bruhl is now best-known for his work on the mentality of “primitive” peoples, he was at the time professor of the history of modern philosophy at the Sorbonne and had written a book on Comte and a history of philosophy in France, as well as L'Allemagne depuis Leibniz (1890). But as a historian of philosophy he fell very much on the historical side of the division between historical and philosophical histories of philosophy that Russell laid out in his preface to the English edition of the Leibniz book. Lévy-Bruhl had consistently argued that philosophical systems should not be studied in isolation from the social, political and intellectual milieu in which they arose, to some degree prefiguring his later socio-anthropological work on “primitive mentality”. All of which makes it the more surprising that he should have taken such an interest in Russell's book, which places itself firmly on the other side. Russell himself seems to have been unclear about Lévy-Bruhl's involvement for he asked Ray how he should acknowledge Lévy-Bruhl. In reply Ray provided the wording that Russell used.*

<sup>1</sup> [La Philosophie de Leibniz, exposé critique par Bertrand Russell, M.A.-F.R.S. Traduit de l'Anglais par Jean Ray and Renée Ray. Avec une Préface de l'Auteur et un Avant-Propos par L. Lévy-Bruhl, Professor à la Sorbonne. Paris: Alcan. 1908. Pp. 4, xvi, 233. Reprinted Paris, London and New York: Gordon & Breach, 1970.]

(Ray also asked Russell to acknowledge his wife as co-translator.) Russell did not take the opportunity the French edition afforded to make changes to the text, as he had done with the French translation of his *Foundations of Geometry*. His excuse, that he could not take the time away from “another task”, was legitimate enough: he was just beginning to prepare *Principia Mathematica* for the press. But, as became habitual with him when his book on Leibniz was discussed, he did mention Couturat’s two works on Leibniz which had appeared shortly after his own and which he regarded as confirming his main claim about the centrality of Leibniz’s logic to his philosophy but which, at the same time, led him to accept, what he had denied in his book, that for Leibniz all truths, including contingent ones, are analytic. This is the one substantive matter discussed in the French preface. It is explained in more detail in his review of Couturat’s *La Logique de Leibniz* (Papers 4: 24) and in the preface to the second English edition (1937) of *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz*. No manuscript of the preface is known.

The present translation does not modify the original form of the work; only references to English translations of Leibniz are omitted.<sup>2</sup> It is not that it seems impossible to improve it, but for the moment I am absorbed entirely by another task, and it would require a very considerable sacrifice of time to do justice to all that has appeared on Leibniz since the year 1900. I should like, however, to draw attention to two very important books which have been published by M. Louis Couturat: *La Logique de Leibniz* (1901), and *Opuscules et Fragments Inédits de Leibniz* (1903). In supporting the view that Leibniz’s metaphysics is based on the logic he develops in the Letters to Arnauld, I was forced to rely on a relatively restricted number of texts. M. Couturat, by examining Leibniz’s manuscripts, has discovered a very large number of extremely important documents neglected by previous editors, probably because the traditional idea of Leibniz was so firmly rooted that they did not realize their importance. The documents, in my opinion, no longer permit us to question that Leibniz’s logical studies were what determined his metaphysics, and in particular that it was by consideration of the relation of subject to predicate that he was led to his windowless monads. They also seem to show that in some respects Leibniz’s real doctrines are even more different than I had supposed from the traditional idea of them. This appears especially in connection with the principle of sufficient reason. M. Couturat interprets this law as the assertion that, in any true

<sup>2</sup> [The Appendix of Leading Passages and the indexes were also omitted.]

proposition, the predicate is contained in the subject; and faced with the texts he publishes, it is difficult to reject this strong conclusion. It is in consequence of this idea that contingency must be defined as infinite complexity.

I was particularly flattered that M. Lévy-Bruhl would take the trouble to present the translation of my book to the French public; I would like to express my appreciation to him, and to thank him for his kindness in facilitating the publication of the work.

I would also like to express my cordial thanks to the translators, Madame and Monsieur J. Ray, for the time and effort that they devoted to the translation of my work as well as for the remarkable way in which they accomplished their task.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> [The above translation was drafted by Geneva Gillis from the French text:]

La présente traduction n'apporte aucune modification à la forme première de l'ouvrage; on a seulement omis les références aux traductions anglaises de Leibniz. Ce n'est point qu'il semble impossible de l'améliorer; mais pour le moment je suis absorbé tout entier par un autre travail, et il faudrait un sacrifice très considérable de temps pour rendre justice à tout ce qui a paru sur Leibniz depuis l'année 1900. Je voudrais, toutefois, attirer l'attention sur deux livres très importants qu'a publiés M. Louis Couturat: «La logique de Leibniz» (1901), et «Opuscules et Fragments inédits de Leibniz» (1903). En soutenant l'opinion que la métaphysique de Leibniz est fondée sur la logique qu'il développe dans les Lettres à Arnauld, j'ai été obligé de m'appuyer sur un nombre de textes relativement restreint. M. Couturat, en examinant les manuscrits de Leibniz, a découvert un très grand nombre de documents fort importants, négligés par les éditeurs antérieurs, probablement parce que l'idée traditionnelle que l'on avait de Leibniz était si fermement enracinée qu'ils n'ont pas su en voir l'importance. Ces documents, à mon avis, ne permettent plus de mettre en question que les études logiques de Leibniz furent ce qui détermina sa métaphysique, et en particulier que c'est pour avoir considéré la relation de sujet à prédicat qu'il fut conduit à ses monades «sans fenêtres». Ils me semblent, d'ailleurs, montrer aussi qu'à certains égards les véritables doctrines de Leibniz sont encore plus différentes que je ne supposais de l'idée traditionnelle qu'on en a. Cela apparaît surtout à propos du principe de raison suffisante. M. Couturat interprète cette loi comme l'affirmation que, dans toute proposition vraie, le prédicat est contenu dans le sujet; et en présence des textes qu'il publie, il est difficile de rejeter cette conclusion frappante. C'est en conséquence de cette idée que la contingence doit être définie comme une complexité infinie.

J'ai été particulièrement flatté que M. Lévy-Bruhl veuille bien se charger de présenter au public français la traduction de mon livre; je tiens à lui en exprimer ici ma reconnaissance, et à le remercier de toute la complaisance qu'il a mise à faciliter la publication de l'ouvrage.

Je tiens aussi à exprimer mes remerciements cordiaux aux traducteurs, Madame et Monsieur J. Ray, pour le temps et le travail qu'ils ont consacrés à la traduction de mon ouvrage aussi bien que pour la façon remarquable dont ils se sont acquittés de leur tâche.

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