

Keywords :

Leibnizian Aesthetics, critical reflection upon the method in history of philosophy, defining the objects of the history of philosophy between fictions and historical events.

Abstract :

The paper we wish to present at the 7th international conference of the European Society of Early Modern Philosophy concerns an object of study in the history of philosophy that is of particular interest to us for the methodological reflections it enables us to have on our own practice as historians of philosophy: aesthetics in the work of Leibniz.

The aim of our discussion is to question the creative propensity of the history of philosophy, which is not an essentially descriptive discipline, but one that produces its own objects of knowledge. The case of aesthetics in Leibniz is an example of a research object constructed by the history of philosophy in two senses of the term: on the one hand, it was constructed in the course of history by the singular reception of Leibniz's work in Germany in the 18th century, but it is also constructed today by research on this object. We assert that this object of research is constructed by the history of philosophy, in the sense that there is no such thing as aesthetics in Leibniz's work. Indeed, as far as the state of publishing today allows, Leibniz never wrote an aesthetic treatise during his long life as a philosopher. So how did this object of research in the history of philosophy come about?

We would like to propose an analysis of this object, which is in fact a double object, as it is constructed with and depends on another fiction in the history of philosophy: Baumgarten's invention of aesthetics.

Baumgarten, a pre-Kantian German philosopher of the 18th century, is known as the inventor of aesthetics: the inventor of the term first and foremost, and the inventor of a new field of philosophical research. Like all inventions, this invention arouses the suspicion of the historian of philosophy, who generally rejects the idea of the ex-nihilo creation of a concept, and thinks of the generation of ideas by one another. Baumgarten's invention of aesthetics is rooted in an eminently and openly Leibnizian theoretical framework, and this avowed filiation highlights the presence of a hidden aesthetic in Leibniz's work. Leibniz's aesthetics are born of a kind of "retrograde movement of the true", to use Bergson's expression, which makes Leibniz's work appear to be full of an aesthetics that will only be truly born under Baumgarten's pen, but which is nevertheless enveloped in his philosophy.

Leibniz's aesthetics and the invention of aesthetics are therefore two fictions that function in a dependent way: on the one hand, Baumgarten's invention of aesthetics was written in a profoundly Leibnizian language, and is therefore dependent on it. On the other hand, the reconstruction of Leibniz's aesthetics is made possible by the light that Baumgarten's work has shed on Leibniz's in retrospect.

The aesthetics of Leibniz is thus an object invented by the history of philosophy around a first object, the invention of aesthetics, which precedes it methodologically, but succeeds it historically. Based on this historical situation, the historian of philosophy works on his object through a method of analytical reconstruction of the fantasized object that is Leibniz's aesthetics. From what textual and conceptual materials is it possible to derive an edifice from Leibniz's work that can be called aesthetic? To answer this question, we will show that there is a whole network of concepts in Leibniz's work that legitimize the existence of an aesthetic, but that this aesthetic comes into being primarily as a result of two philosophical gestures by Leibniz: the identification of substance with perception, and the identification of beauty with knowledge. It is on the basis of

these metaphysical gestures that Baumgarten's work was built, and that we can attempt to reconstruct a Leibnizian aesthetic.

The aim of our paper, which focuses on the possibility of a Leibnizian aesthetic, is above all an opportunity to reflect on the history of philosophy and its objects of knowledge, between fictions and historical realities; but also on its methods, between historical reconstructions and analytical reconstructions.