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Gil Morejón, *The Unconscious of Thought in Leibniz, Spinoza, and Hume*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press 2022, 202 pp.
ISBN 9781399504812

This volume aims to investigate the role of the unconscious in the early modern age. The author's goal is not to detect new terminological occurrences of the semantic network of the unconscious which may thus far have escaped research, but to show the structural importance of the unconscious in philosophical thought between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Against the overemphasis on consciousness, Morejón thus sets out to highlight the crucial role of the unconscious in the process of the formation of the mind itself. To this end, the author selects three philosophers representative of this trend: Leibniz, Spinoza, and Hume.

Since the philosophers under discussion do not speak explicitly of the “unconscious”, it is crucial to clarify the method by which Morejón approaches the topic. Genealogy is the first methodological tool the author employs, in an attempt to unearth a number of aspects that the existing literature is yet to fully develop. Indeed, the tendency of the scholars who have dealt with the history of the unconscious is to focus either on authors of the Freudian generation (such as Henry Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, 1973) or on ancient and medieval models (see John Hendrix, *Unconscious Thought in Philosophy and Psychology*, 2015), failing to focus any research on the early modern period. Alongside the genealogical method, which draws on Foucault, the author uses symptomatic reading derived from Althusser, where the crucial element is not only what the analysed texts say explicitly, but also what they do not say; in this way, the author intends to distinguish between the “real lack” of the concept of the unconscious (as in Descartes) and its apparent absence, simply due to the fact that the term does not recur as such, although the concept might well be present in the philosophical system of a certain author. It is precisely this sensitivity to the role of the concept of the unconscious in the architecture of different philosophical systems that also leads Morejón to adopt a more genuinely philosophical approach, aimed at assessing the constructive role of the unconscious itself. The history of the unconscious is thus framed as an inquiry into the metaphysics of early modern thought, looking at the unconscious in its objective positivity as well as in its constitutive role for seemingly inexplicable behaviours, such as those expressed by the paradox of Medea: “Video meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor” (I see the better, I affirm it, and then I do the worse). In this sense, the volume also has an underlying political motivation, insofar as it intends to cast a glance at the mechanisms of the subjectification of the modern subject itself.

Among the philosophers discussed, the author who is best known for his contribution to the study of the unconscious is undoubtedly Leibniz. Perception in Leibniz is a passing state which at once enfolds and represents the totality of the world in an individual mind. Since such an expression of the world does not always occur clearly, perception does not coincide with apperception or consciousness. More precisely, each soul expresses the totality of the world in its own way, so that the distinction of individual souls from one another depends upon their differing proportions of conscious perceptions and the great mass of perceptions, which themselves are not consciously perceptible, but which can cause noticeable effects when taken as a whole.

Morejón lingers, in particular, on the doctrine of tiny perceptions in relation to the dimension of freedom, starting with the studies of Seidler and Deleuze, Deleuze's name returning frequently throughout the volume: if conscious thought is the integration of the infinite small perceptions that incline one toward certain decisions rather than to others, eliminating the possibility of indifference as equipoise, the concept of freedom becomes problematic. What determines the will to a certain course of action? It cannot be the intellect, since a finite human mind cannot execute the infinite analysis of the contingent truths of the created world that would be necessary to know the best option; the most plausible candidate, according to Morejón, is precisely the differentials of perception or "petites perceptions"; however, if this is the case then the will, according to Leibniz, is determined largely unconsciously. To save freedom in Leibniz thus requires one to understand it not in the sense of indifferent choice, but in the sense of being habituated toward active thinking. Despite his efforts to avoid necessitarianism with the doctrine of spontaneity, Leibniz seems to come closer to Spinoza than he would have liked.

Morejón then turns to Spinoza's analysis. Morejón's goal is to understand the role of the unconscious in the striving that, according to Spinoza, constitutes the essence of what it is to be human. In fact, if nothing happens in the body without the mind being aware of it, as Spinoza states, then the human mind in its finiteness must necessarily entail an unconscious dimension. To better understand this dimension, Morejón divides Spinoza's position into two parts: first, he investigates inadequate ideas which, while not unconscious per se, contain determinations that are not conscious to the mind that thinks them. As modes of thought, inadequate ideas, that is, ideas that only partially express what they are an idea of, while obscurely involuting what they do not distinctly express, continue to produce effects on the mind even in the presence of adequate ideas, that is, ideas that distinctly express the causes of the object of knowledge. Moreover, since the intellect and the will are *unum et idem*, ideas are not only modes

of understanding but also of volition; in this sense, inadequate ideas, hence the unconscious dimension of the mind, are also drivers for desire – the striving of the human being to persevere in its being – as well as for particular volitions, which are nothing more than individual ideas in their affirmation. Given the striving to produce the effects that follow from the nature of the inadequate ideas, one can therefore continue to will in determinate ways that one might even consciously recognize as inadequate. Spinoza's *Ethica* appears in this sense not only as a monument to rationalism, but also as a memento of the inexpressible presence of akratic desire and the power of the unconscious in determining our ideas and volitions.

With Hume, the unconscious is investigated in the very movement of thought, in the transition from one idea to another. According to Hume, associations of ideas occur through resemblance, contiguity, and cause-and-effect. In-depth analysis of Humean criticisms of the concept of causality leads Morejón to point out that in Hume we have experiences only of distinct and separable effects or events rather than of causes. Through the repetition of sufficiently similar experiences, we thus develop a belief in certain causal connections, on which the principles of association rest. The past experiences on which our judgments of cause and effect are based therefore act insensibly on the mind, producing remarkable effects in the formation of associative habits of thought. Morejón distinguishes two aspects of the habits that lie behind the threshold of conscious awareness: their formation, depending on a series of distinct perceptions repeated as constantly conjoined; and the influence of beliefs unconsciously developed by habit from all of a person's actions. The habit is thus regarded as the principle of synthesis that constitutes the human mind by relating ideas together and producing a specific "gravity" of thought that is independent of consciousness. In this sense, the very correction of beliefs can only take place by means of habit rather than by reason, so that even the emendation of habits turns out to be a largely unconscious process.

Morejón offers in this volume an important reflection on the concept of the unconscious, taking into account authors such as Spinoza and Hume, who are not usually considered in this regard. In general, the subject line of the volume is tight and lucidly discussed; the examination of individual authors is conducted with confidence and appreciable clarity, allowing the reader to make sense of the problem of the unconscious beyond what is explicitly stated by individual authors. In this sense, Morejón's research goes beyond the mere historiographical reconstruction of the systems of the three authors presented and, as stated in the introduction, is intended to be a history of ideas.

More specifically, the author understands his research as a contribution to the study of the metaphysics of ideas in modernity. The author thus seems to

emphasize the difference between his own approach and the “logic of ideas”, a label launched by Yolton in 1950s to bring to the fore the importance of ideas as a medium of knowledge in the early modern age, as much in Locke as in Port-Royal’s *Logique*. What is it that changes in the transition from a logical approach to ideas, such as that adopted by Yolton and other more recent authors (Frederick Michael, Sylvain Auroux, etc.), and a metaphysical one such as that presented by Morejón? How is the unconscious enhanced by this second approach? One suggestion seems to be that the logical or epistemic approach tends to see the obscure and inadequate dimension of thought as something lacking, while the metaphysical approach views ideas not only as a logically significant medium of knowledge, but also in their ontological dimension, in their objective positivity, capable of producing effects even beyond our consciousness, Morejón rightly pointing out the importance of the disconnection between veracity and the power of ideas in the early modern period. Given the relevance that the expression “metaphysics of ideas” rightly acquires in Morejón’s volume, an explicit discussion of its differences from the “logic of ideas” would have helped the reader situate the volume’s methodological approach not only from a theoretical point of view (as Morejón does in great detail in the introduction), but also from a historiographical point of view.

Morejón’s most significant thesis is the link between the idea of the unconscious and the question of habit, here interpreted in its transcendental scope, insofar as it is presupposed by the very emergence of conscious thought: as Morejón well points out, habit has no outside, no Archimedean point from which we can attain an objective level of thought, unaffected by the obscurity of habit itself. The habit thus proves to have a strict connection not only with the unconscious, but also with desire, whence its greater influence on volitions compared to reason. Such a thesis is certainly wide-ranging and is proven with textual evidence. In any case, more consideration of the existing literature on habit in the early modern age (see, e.g., John Wright, *Ideas of Habit and Custom in Early Modern Philosophy*, 2011) and in Hume (see Peter Fosl, *Habit, Custom, History, and Hume’s Critical Philosophy*, as well as the entire volume in which this essay is included, *A History of Habit*, edited by Tom Sparrow and Thomas Hutchinson, 2013) would have been desirable.

Indeed, recent studies (for example, the research of Matthew Jones and that of Richard Davies) have shown that the question of *habitus* is also crucial in Descartes’ philosophy in the very discussion of method. In fact, the usefulness of method for Descartes does not consist in the mere enunciation of rules about clear and distinct thought, but in the habituation of clear and distinct thought through the repetition of exercises (e.g., geometrical) by which the mind can

accustom itself to truth. If the dimension of the unconscious is related to *habitus*, is there perhaps an implicit dimension of the unconscious in Descartes as well? This issue deserves investigation given the importance of symptomatic reading in Morejón's approach, where the presence of a concept is not necessary to affirm its structural role in the system of a certain philosopher.

In any case, while in Descartes the question of the unconscious is not obvious – in footnote 12, p. 6, Morejón, in reference to Eshleman's study, mentions that "rudiments for a concept of the unconscious" might be present in Descartes – it certainly becomes crucial in the debate among the Cartesians, the most important example being the concept of "pensées imperceptibles", discussed on several occasions by Pierre Nicole in his confrontation with Arnauld starting from the question of general grace and its power to arouse imperceptible thoughts in the human soul. In the treatment of Leibniz, however, Morejón states that "the theory of unconscious affection or *petites perceptions* has no equivalent in Leibniz's contemporaries" (p. 66). While the author's choice of focusing only on Leibniz, Spinoza, and Hume is understandable, a brief contextualization of the unconscious in the Cartesian debate would have enabled a better sketch of the whole discussion; in this sense, the classical study by Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, *Le problème de l'inconscient et le cartésianisme*, 1950, is still essential.

Similarly, it would have been interesting to consider, in the light of the outcomes of Morejón's study, the reception of unconscious perceptions in the debate among Leibnizians (e.g., in Israel Gottlieb Canz), which leads to locating small perceptions in a specific place of the inner geography, the ground or abyss of the soul, which was already a widespread concept among the French moralists. With such a move, Canz comes to discuss in a methodologically conscious way the link between habit and the unconscious as well as the indirect possibility of intervention in the correction of habits, initiating a new phase in the intellectual history of the unconscious which reaches its acme in Sulzer and Herder.

Such issues do not detract from the value of this volume, which remains an essential contribution for anyone who wishes to know more about the history of the unconscious. Morejón's greatest merit lies in clearly identifying structural similarities regarding the unconscious in thinkers who differ in terminology, background, and philosophical approach. The book, via an original and promising approach, thus casts new light on a little-studied epoch in the history of the unconscious; for this reason, it is worth reading and pondering not only for scholars interested in the three authors discussed in detail, but also for any reader interested in the intellectual history of the early modern age.

Alessandro Nannini (University of Bucharest)