After so many words spent on doctrines full of arcane and enigmatic philosophical issues, the researcher may be permitted to close on a personal note. Studying Leibniz is to expose oneself to more headaches, sore fingers, sleepless nights and waking soliloquies than one has a right to expect from a ‘familiar’ classic. Yet admiration, lukewarm at first and more akin to distant respect, has been growing in this direct confrontation with an exceptionally luminous mind. The chaotic state of his works became a challenge rather than a chore; and my sincerest hope is that the double-aspect theory which is the outcome of this research succeeds in throwing a clearer light on many of the recondite features that must often have provided occasion for mere disputation than the hoped-for insights. Accordingly these last few words shall be devoted to those items which made the most memorable impression on the mind of this one reader.

Reluctantly, it seems, and in full awareness of the unreasonableness of his enterprise in such as world as he lived in, Leibniz heeded the call of his own philosophical truth and allowed its inner impetus to find its own direction. It brought him to a recognition which he was the first thinker to penetrate: that the world is not a cosmos, but an utter chaos – an absolutely inscrutable and incomprehensible labyrinth, immensely rich in features of which we have no inkling of what they might be in themselves and in which we would be helplessly lost except for the one glimmer of light we bring with us into this world: the light of reason. Where this is seen to be efficacious, albeit in limited degree, is in its power to subjugate the stubborn impassivity of facts and impose upon them such a design as would reflect a modicum of necessity and hence predictiveness.

We should contemplate this cognitive power with the astonishment it deserves. For how does man transcend the creatureliness of his being and acclimatise intellectually to the periodicity of phenomena? How does he arrive at laws of recurrence? – an act surpassing by far the spontaneity of vegetative and biological fibres which obey those laws without knowing anything of them. To this, the ultimate question of the philosopher, Leibniz gave the answer: because man, on account of possessing such a faculty, is free to make of the universe a ‘Gestalt’ in his own image. To have discovered this, and to have unveiled in sufficient reason the law of ultimate freedom is Leibniz’s crowning achievement.

Primarily, therefore, his philosophy is a metaphysics of human freedom. We have noted Leibniz’s emphasis on the co-constructive creativity which God concedes to his creatures, the monads. The immense struggle in Leibniz’s mind between his natural inclination towards a full determinism through to the ultimate recognition that the majesty of God is diminished rather than magnified by the assumption of preordained cosmic processes must be reckoned a landmark in philosophy and, one is tempted to say, far from being received by the modern world as one its most precious intellectual gifts.

Leibniz’s theory of the monads is, assuredly, of a calibre to match. We children of the scientific age continue today to look for ultimate answers in principles of matter, still fully incognisant of the fact that sufficient reason has already spoken and dismissed the idea. Accordingly we continue to discover, as we penetrate to the edge of measurable quanta, a fineness of matter where the very term ‘material’ ceases to have
meaning. It seems that Leibniz knew this from the moment his logical scalpel detached force from matter. For his monadic principles are nothing other than a metaphysical statement of the same principle: force and material are the same thing appearing in different guises at different magnifications. And yet at each of these, it is always the knowing agent who acts and understands and sees his own spirit reflected in his discoveries.

Leibniz’s philosophy is not, as mentioned, a panpsychism. The monad is not a psychic element, a soul. For Leibniz, this was merely a façon de parler to make his contemporaries comfortable with the thought that force must be the residual criterion of existence, which leaves us with the foundational concept of force as the matrix of both materiality and spirituality. The perfection he speaks of so often is then seen to explain in the simplest possible terms what both mind and matter are – will, conatus, doing versus inertia, resistance, passivity. To exist is not only to do, for matter exists as well: but it exists by courtesy of the conscious monad.

This brings us to another major part of Leibniz’s philosophical legacy. He did not have a theory of information at his elbow; but in cracking open the deterministic universe, this unnamed flow went downhill, irreversibly. Consider that mind is an outcome of the universe’s asymmetry. So are convergences upon a limit; and so is contingency, necessarily monodirectional, conformant to its time dependency. Life itself is the outcome of an asymmetrical congeries of monadic substances: we have seen that his initial interpretation of their ‘mirroring’ promoted the idea of a closed carousel of information; but it was the wrong conception. Hence the banishment of the ‘complete concept’ doctrine to the termination point of the subject’s career as the retrospective (a posteriori) summation of the law of the series which is played out in life. Even the law of conservation, the seemingly prime candidate for symmetrical structuring, confirms the opposite. Leibniz understood that force-as-such that is being conserved; but its manner of transformation involves ‘pleating’ and the release or constriction of its expansive urges which never repeats itself.

Finally the pièce de resistance of the ontology of agency will be found in his magnificent unravelling of the aggregate of agent, time and space in the actualisation of time and space, which must surely be the most extravagant (yet utterly convincing) explanation of the three concepts time, space and motion ever committed to paper.

This is not denying that he had his (abundant!) moments of pure conventionality and double talk. They make us smile today and do not diminish his stature. For as Goethe once wrote: judge a man by his virtues, for his faults may be those of the age. And this, by a man who entertained a lot of sympathy for Leibniz and held similar polymathic inclinations, seems a fitting enough observation to close proceedings here.