

Leibniz and the Theodicy

Modern Western Philosophy
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Is this the best of *all possible* worlds?

- Leibniz asserts that it is
- His argument depends on two essential components
 - Principle of Sufficient Reason
 - A cosmological argument for God's existence

A Brief Review of the PSR

“...we consider that we can find no true or existent fact, no true assertion, without there being sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise, although most of the time these reasons cannot be known to us.”
(Monadology 32, AW 278A)

The take away? There is no effect without a cause.

To understand the Theodicy, we need God.
Let's prove Him.

A Cosmological Proof for God's Existence

CPG 1: A given event or object requires *sufficient reason* for its occurrence (I.e., every effect must have a cause)

CPG 2: The cause of that given event (its sufficient reason) must itself have a cause (sufficient reason)

CPG 3: There must be a stop to the infinite regress of causes

CPG 4: The termination of the series of sufficient reasons must necessarily exist, and exist outside the chain

CPG 5: This is God

In Leibniz's Words...

“There must be a *sufficient reason* in contingent truths, or *truths of fact*, that is, in the series of things distributed throughout the universe of creatures, where the resolution into particular reasons could proceed into unlimited detail...And since all of this *detail* involves nothing but other prior and or more detailed contingents, each of which needs a similar analysis in order to give its reason...It must be the case that the sufficient or ultimate reason is outside the the sequence or *series* of this multiplicity of contingencies, however infinite it may be...The ultimate reason of things must be in a necessary substance in which the diversity of changes is only eminent, as in its source. This is what we call *God*.” (*Monadology* 36-38, AW 278B)

A few final notes on Leibniz's God

- Criticism of Descartes' Ontological Argument
 - Ontological argument only proves that the idea of God contains within it the idea of existence
 - Fails to show that God does *in fact* exist.
- Leibniz argues that God must possess the perfections
 - Leibniz shows this is so using PSR and the existence of the world (Assuming the world is perfect. There may be a circular argument here; more on that later...)

Now that we have God, let's look at Worldly Perfection

A Proof of the Theodicy (The Best of ALL Possible Worlds)

T1: This world is not the only possible world

T2: There must be sufficient reason for this particular world's existence

T3: God chose this world specifically

T4: God has all the perfections

T5: If this were not the best of all possible worlds, T4 would be violated

T6: Therefore, this must be the best of all possible worlds

(Adapted from Prof. Marcus' schematic proof in today's lecture notes)

Notes on the Theodicy

- God creates the best possible world because of divine perfections:

“...this is the cause of the best, which wisdom makes known to God, which his goodness makes him choose, and which his power makes him produce.” (*Monadology* 55, AW 280A)

- *Note the apparent constraints on God's will - is it free?*

- What then is “goodness?” How did God know this was the best of ALL possibilities? Leibniz uses an allusion to geometry...

“...God has chosen the most perfect world, that is, the one which is at the same time the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in phenomena, as might be a line in geometry whose construction is easy and whose properties and effects are extremely remarkable and widespread.”

(*Discourse on Metaphysics* 6, AW227A-B)

Some, um, problems...

- How do we account for evil in the world? How do understand things that seem on their face imperfect or improvable? Leibniz actually has an answer for this one:
 - “Just as the same city viewed from different directions appears entirely different and, as it were, multiplied perspectively, in just the same way it happens that, because of the infinite multitude of simple substances, there are, as it were, just as many different universes, which are, nevertheless, only perspectives on a single one, corresponding to the different points of view of each monad...And this is the way of obtaining as much variety as possible, but with the greatest order possible, that is, it is the way of obtaining as much perfection as possible.”
(*Monadology* 57-8, AW280A-B)

Not Convinced?

Remember Leibniz's view of "goodness" or perfection from earlier:

"...God has chosen the most perfect world, that is, the one which is at the same time the simplest in hypotheses and the richest in phenomena, as might be a line in geometry whose construction is easy and whose properties and effects are extremely remarkable and widespread." (*Discourse on Metaphysics* 6, AW227A-B)

Compare with:

"

... And this is the way of obtaining as much variety as possible, but with the greatest order possible, that is, it is the way of obtaining as much perfection as possible." (*Monadology* 57-8, AW280A-B)

Compossibility: More than just a great SAT word

The simple possibility of an event does not guarantee that it will not conflict with other possible events. In other words, singular possibility does not imply multiple compossibility.

Consider God: The perfections ascribed to God (the omnis) might not be compossible with each other. An all powerful God might conflict with an all loving or all good God. Leibniz acknowledges as much himself in his criticism of Descartes' Ontological Argument. He formulates an argument around the idea of the perfections as simples. Simples, Leibniz argues, are always compossible.

Leibniz's argument isn't hugely compelling. The question remains: Can the divine perfections actually be attributed to God?

Leibniz's Ungodly Circle

Leibniz claims that the existence of God's perfections can be proven from the PSR and the mere existence of the universe.

The creation of the best of all possible worlds requires a perfect God to generate its existence, as we have already seen.

These two claims support each other, but only that. They, in and of themselves, *prove nothing other than their codependency*.

They do not show the truth of their *independent* claims.

The Problem of God's Free Will: A Transition

Leibniz wants to say that God's will is free, but informed by his perfections. This seems contradictory - how can God have free will and still be bound by his own perfections to create a specific universe? It seems that his will is not completely free, at least in that respect.

Some of God's choices are *necessary*, and not *contingent* on his will.

If this is the case, how can human people have free will if God himself does not?