

# Leibniz 3

## Theodicy

### *The Best of All Possible Worlds*

Presentation  
Elli Marcus  
February 22, 2011



# Review

- \* Principle of Sufficient Reason
  - \* “We can find no true or existent fact, no true assertion, without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise” (Aw 278a, M32)
- \* God is *the* sufficient reason
  - \* A necessary substance
  - \* Source of everything and contains all possible reality

# Properties of GOD

- \* “Source of existences” and “the source of that which is real in possibility”
- \* Sufficient reason and eminent cause
- \* “Unique, universal, and necessary”
- \* Absolutely perfect
- \* Omnipotent
- \* Omniscient
- \* Willful

(AW 278-9, M40-48)

# Proof of The Best of All Possible Worlds

- \* 1. God exists necessarily, and by definition is the creator of everything else.
- \* 2. God is omniscient, omnipotent, perfect and benevolent
- \* 3. God is limited only by the Principle of Contradiction, so he first conceives of all possible worlds (there is an infinity of possible universes in God's ideas)
- \* 3. God must have a sufficient reason for his choice.
- \* 4. This reason is found in the degree of perfection contained in each world, causing the existence of the best
- \* 6. God knows which one is the best and chooses it and creates it (from 2.)
- \* Therefore, this is the best of all possible worlds! (AW 280, M52-60)

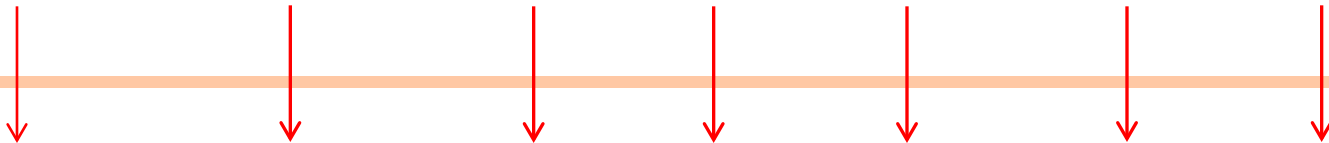
# Leibniz's Optimism in *Theodicy*

- \* *Theodicy* expresses Leibniz's view that this is the best of all possible worlds in a literary dialogue
- \* Sextus is unhappy with his fate and prays that the Gods will alter his future.
- \* Apollo replies: "Know, my poor Sextus, that the Gods make each one as he is. Jupiter made the wolf ravening, the hare timid, the ass stupid, and the lion courageous. He gave you a soul that is wicked and irreclaimable; you will act in conformity with your natural disposition, and Jupiter will treat you as your actions shall deserve" (*Theodicy* Handout, 3)
- \* "It is well to observe that one does not ask why God foresees the thing, for that is understood, it is because it will be; but one asks why he ordains thus, why he hardens such an one, why he has compassion on another. **We do not know the reasons which he may have for this; but since he is very good and very wise that is enough to make us deem that his reasons are good.** As he is just also, it follows that his decrees and his operation do not destroy our freedom" (*Theodicy* Handout, 3)

# Leibniz's Pyramid



- \* In *Theodicy*, Leibniz explains the infinite possibilities through the analogy of a baseless pyramid:
- \* “The hall rose in a pyramid, becoming even more beautiful as one mounted towards the apex, and representing more beautiful worlds... because amongst an endless number of possible worlds there is the best of all, else God would not have determined to create any; but there is not any one which also has less perfect worlds below it” (*Theodicy Handout*, 5).
- \* “If Jupiter had placed here a Sextus happy at Corinth or King in Thrace, it would be no longer this world” (5)



# Criticisms of Leibniz's Optimism

- \* 1. We can imagine other, better worlds than this one
  - \* We do not have the knowledge or goodness to know that those possible worlds are actually better. God is good and wise, and this should be enough for us to know that he made the right choice.
  - \* Also, the possibility of an event does not entail compossibility with other events (one change may lead to contradiction or major changes in the world with unforeseeable consequences)

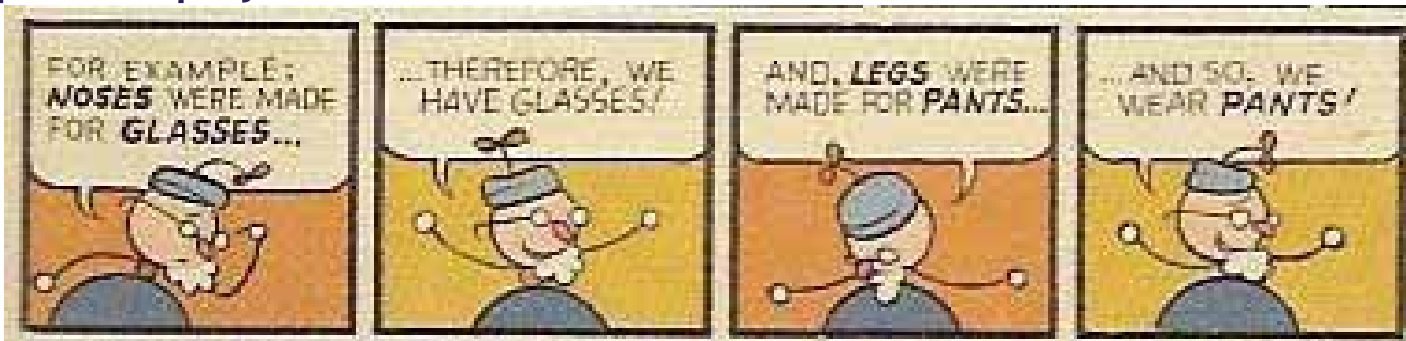
# Criticisms of Leibniz's Optimism

- \* 2. Leibniz has anthropomorphized God's goodness. What are the criteria for goodness? Are they obvious? Can two possible worlds be equally good?
  - \* We may not know what the criterion for goodness is, but we can agree on a general definition of goodness that an omniscient God could use to rank worlds.
- \* 3. Must a Perfect Being choose the best? If he does not choose the best possibility mean that God is imperfect? Do we have a right to the best possible world or the best possible life?
  - \* For Leibniz, the answer is yes. Divine benevolence means that God must choose the best possibility.



# Voltaire's Satire of Leibniz's *Theodicy*

- \* In *Candide*, Voltaire satirizes Leibniz's argument, arguing that it would eliminate personal moral responsibility
- \* Dr. Pangloss is an exaggeration of Leibniz and makes his philosophy look ridiculous:



Chris Ware, cover art for *Candide* Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition

- \* <http://www.learner.org/courses/worldlit/candide/watch/>

# Sextus and Free Will

- \* Story of Sextus explains how foreknowledge does not preclude free will
  - \* “The young man will complain: I have brought you a royal gift, O Apollo, and you proclaim for me a lot so unhappy? Apollo will say to him: Your gift is pleasing to me, and I will do that which you ask of me, I will tell you what will happen. I know the future, but I do not bring it about” (2)
  - \* God “did not make Sextus wicked; he was so from all eternity, he was so always and freely” (5)